Ecosystem Restoration: Healing Our Planet, Shaping Our Future

Learning Guide: Ages 14+

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Purpose: This module invites learners to explore the urgent need for ecosystem restoration and understand their role in shaping a more sustainable future. It includes a three-part learning journey with relevant background information, video-based contents, interactive visuals, guided research, and systems thinking activities designed to inspire reflection and action.

Learners will
- Understand the urgency and potential of ecosystem restoration
- Explore interconnected systems and stakeholders
- Reflect on global and local solutions
- Develop ideas for youth-led action

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"Restoration is positive — it is about healing our land. It's something we have to do because it's our common home."

Natalia Alekseeva
Coordinator of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

A group of young changemakers in Bangladesh nurtures new life into the earth: a small sapling, a big act of hope. Their joined hands remind us that healing our planet begins with unity and care. Each tree planted restores not only the soil, but also our shared future. For youth everywhere, it's a call to action: to restore ecosystems, protect biodiversity, and grow a greener, more resilient world together.

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How to Use This Module

This module is a flexible learning journey through three phases:

DISCOVER
Step into the topic and explore what's at stake

ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

CONNECT
Engage with global voices and shared experiences

TRANSFORM
Reflect deeply, imagine alternatives, and take steps toward change

Each component can be done in class or as homework. Time estimates are suggestions only, adaptable to diverse contexts and students' needs.

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See What's At Stake

Ecosystems – ranging from forests and farmlands to mountains, oceans, and freshwater bodies – are essential to both human well-being and the planet's health, providing critical services such as biodiversity support, climate regulation, and economic security.

However, these systems are under severe threat: we're losing forests at a rate of 10 million hectares per year, over two-thirds of ocean ecosystems are damaged, and thousands of species face extinction.

This decline jeopardises livelihoods, global food security, and up to $10 trillion in GDP by 2050. As discussed in Ages of Globalisation Class 3: The Environment as Home and Shaper of Economy, these **environmental systems are not just background conditions, they actively shape and sustain all life on earth**. Ecosystem restoration presents a powerful solution: **by restoring just 15% of converted land, we could prevent up to 60% of expected species extinctions and make meaningful progress toward climate mitigation goals** (UN Chronicle).

BAD LAND MANAGEMENT
leads to drought, soil erosion and desertification

Deforestation

Industrial agriculture

Soil erosion

Loss of biodiversity

Climate change from soil carbon

Loss of livelihoods

ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION
restores soil and water cycles and reverses desertification

Erosion control

Soil restoration

Replanting

Intact ecosystems

Revert climate change

Sustainable livelihoods

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WHAT IS ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION & WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Ecosystem restoration means assisting in the recovery of ecosystems that have been degraded or destroyed, as well as conserving the ecosystems that are still intact. It is a global priority because healthy ecosystems are the foundation of life on Earth. Forests, wetlands, oceans, and other natural systems provide us with clean water, air, food, medicine, climate regulation, and countless other benefits. However, decades of deforestation, pollution, overfishing, and other human activities have weakened these natural systems (UN Decade).
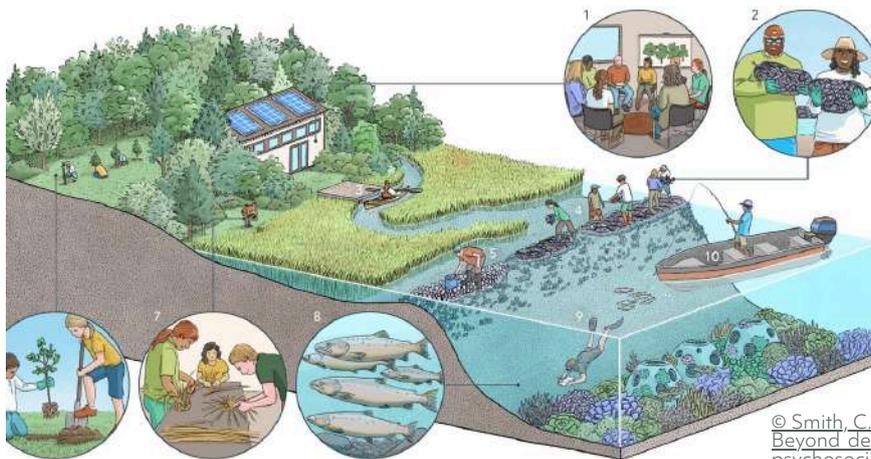
The United Nations has declared 2021–2030 the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, a rallying call to protect and revive ecosystems worldwide for the benefit of people and nature (UN Decade).

© Smith, C. S., DeMattia, E. A., Albright, E., et al. (2025). Beyond despair: Leveraging ecosystem restoration for psychosocial resilience.

The UN Decade aims to halt the degradation of ecosystems and restore them to achieve global goals, recognising that only with healthy ecosystems can we enhance people's livelihoods, counteract climate change, and stop the collapse of biodiversity.

© Forest, N. Tonelli; river, T. Allred; stormwater, J. Beall; mitigation, Montana Department of Transportation.

Today's environmental challenges are stark. Scientists estimate that around one million plant and animal species are now threatened with extinction due to habitat loss, pollution, climate change, invasive species, and over-exploitation (UNEP). We see the evidence in our daily lives – from declining pollinators that affect our crops, to increased flooding when wetlands are drained. Ecosystem restoration is healing our planet: by planting trees, cleaning up rivers and coasts, protecting coral reefs, or simply giving nature space and time to recover, we can increase the benefits these ecosystems provide to society and biodiversity (UN Decade). In fact, without reviving ecosystems, we cannot fully achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement (UN Decade), because issues like poverty, climate stability, and health are intimately linked with the health of our environment.

COMMON MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS – DEBUNKED

There are some common myths and misconceptions about conservation and restoration of nature. Let us debunk a few to clarify why ecosystem restoration is so important:

❌ MYTH **"Planting trees is always good, no matter what."**

✅ FACT Planting trees can absolutely help the environment – but only if done thoughtfully. Simply planting as many trees as possible without considering the right species, location, and ecosystem can do harm. For example, planting a single non-native tree species in an area might create a vulnerable monoculture susceptible to disease or wildfire (EarthShare). Reality: Effective restoration means planting the right trees in the right places (or allowing natural regeneration) to support biodiversity. Quality matters more than quantity (EarthShare). Restoration must work with nature, ensuring new plantings are native and suitable for the local ecosystem's health.

❌ MYTH **"Protecting nature hurts our economy and development."**

✅ FACT Some think protecting the environment harms jobs and growth, but a healthy environment is key to a sustainable economy. Ecosystem damage costs societies—like overfished oceans or pollution-related illness—while restoration creates jobs and saves money through natural services like flood control. In the long run, there's no economy on a dead planet—restoring nature is an investment in future prosperity.

❌ MYTH **"Nature will recover on its own; humans don't need to intervene."**

✅ FACT IIt's true that ecosystems can regenerate naturally, but severe damage often requires human help. Reality: Active restoration—like removing invasive species, cleaning pollutants, or replanting native vegetation—is often needed to jump-start recovery. Heavily polluted rivers or over-harvested forests may not heal on their own, so deliberate action is crucial to revive ecosystems within human timeframes.

❌ MYTH **"Only governments and experts can restore ecosystems; ordinary people can't make a difference."**

✅ FACT Everyone has a role in restoring ecosystems. While large projects involve governments and NGOs, community action matters too. Students, farmers, Indigenous groups, and businesses can all contribute—through school gardens, cleanups, tree planting, or sustainable consumption. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (#GenerationRestoration) calls on people of all ages to help heal the planet. Restoration isn't just for scientists—it's about collective action in every community (UN Decade).

Discussion:
- Have they heard of these ideas before?
- How does debunking these misconceptions change the way we think about acting for the environment?

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HOW DOES ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION POSITIVELY AFFECT US?

Ecosystem restoration is one of the most powerful and necessary tools we have to improve life on Earth. When ecosystems are restored, nature recovers—and so do the essential services that support human health, well-being, and prosperity. From ensuring food and water security to supporting biodiversity, restoration contributes directly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), addressing urgent global challenges through nature-based solutions.

Biodiversity Recovery

Restoring habitats protects and revives endangered species. Scientific studies show that restoring just 15% of converted lands could prevent up to 60% of expected species extinctions. Healthy ecosystems support diverse life forms and increase ecological resilience—foundations of a stable, functioning planet.

Improved Ecosystem Services

Restoration strengthens the natural systems that provide us with clean air, water filtration, fertile soil, pollination, and more. These ecosystem services are vital for sustainable agriculture, public health, and responsible consumption and production.

Economic Resilience

Ecosystem restoration creates green jobs and boosts local economies. For instance, restored oyster reefs in the US have increased fish stocks and seafood harvests, directly benefiting coastal communities and small businesses. Globally, restoration offers a path to inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Natural infrastructure—like mangroves, coral reefs, forests, and wetlands—reduces the damage caused by floods, storms, and erosion. Restoration helps protect vulnerable areas, building resilience and reducing the cost of disaster response.

Social and Political Stability

Large-scale restoration efforts, such as Africa's Great Green Wall, not only combat land degradation but also promote peace, improve livelihoods, and address the root causes of migration and conflict by enhancing food and water security.

Youth & Community Leadership

Natural infrastructure—like mangroves, coral reefs, forests, and wetlands—reduces the damage caused by floods, storms, and erosion. Restoration helps protect vulnerable areas, building resilience and reducing the cost of disaster response.

Climate Change Mitigation

13 CLIMATE ACTION

Forests, wetlands, and oceans are natural carbon sinks. Restoration enhances their ability to capture and store carbon—contributing to over one-third of the climate change mitigation needed by 2030. Restored ecosystems also buffer communities from extreme weather and rising temperatures.

Watch this video and discover why ecosystem restoration is the key to saving our planet's future.

CLICK HERE

Take a minute to explore how communities in South Africa are restoring their ecosystems.

CLICK HERE

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Explore Key Concepts

In this section, you'll find key concepts and definitions related to Ecosystem Restoration. You can use them as a base for discussion or activities, e.g. vocabulary flashcards.

Ecosystem: A community of living organisms (plants, animals, microbes) interacting with each other and their physical environment (soil, water, air). Ecosystems can be small (a pond) or large (a desert or ocean). A healthy ecosystem is balanced and self-sustaining, with various species playing roles in nutrient cycling, energy flow, and food webs.

Biodiversity (Biological Diversity): The variety of life on Earth across all levels from genes to species, to entire ecosystems. This includes diversity within species (genetic variation), between species (the number of different species), and of ecosystems (the range of different habitats). For example, a rainforest has extremely high biodiversity with millions of species, whereas a tree farm has low biodiversity. Biodiversity is critical because it underpins ecosystem resilience, and the services nature provides (more diverse ecosystems can better withstand stresses like disease or climate extremes).

Ecosystem Services: The benefits that humans freely gain from functioning ecosystems. These include provisioning services (like food, fresh water, wood, fibre, medicinal plants), regulating services (purification of air and water, pollination of crops, climate regulation, flood control, disease control), cultural services (recreational, spiritual, and educational benefits we get from nature), and supporting services (like soil formation and nutrient cycling that make other services possible). When ecosystems are damaged, these services diminish—for instance, the loss of pollinators can affect food production, and deforestation in watersheds can lead to water shortages or floods.

Conservation vs. Restoration: Conservation means protecting and maintaining current natural ecosystems and preventing further degradation or extinction of species. It often focuses on establishing protected areas (national parks, wildlife reserves) and sustainable management of resources. Restoration goes a step further—it involves taking action to recover ecosystems that have already been degraded. Think of conservation as "keeping what we have safe" and restoration as "bringing back what we lost." Both go hand in hand: we need to conserve intact forests and replant trees where forests have been lost.

Reforestation / Afforestation: These terms refer specifically to growing trees. Reforestation is replanting or regenerating forests in areas where forest cover was recently lost (e.g., reforesting land after a wildfire or logging). Afforestation is planting forests in areas that were not forest in the recent past (for example, turning an abandoned farm field into a new forest). Both are strategies used in ecosystem restoration to increase tree cover, improve biodiversity, and sequester carbon (capture CO_2 from the atmosphere).

Rewilding: A form of ecological restoration that involves letting ecosystems return to a more wild, natural state with minimal human intervention. Rewilding often includes reintroducing key native species (especially "keystone" species that have big impacts on their environment) that have been lost.

Nature-Based Solutions: Strategies that protect, manage, or restore ecosystems to tackle challenges like climate change, disasters, or food insecurity. For instance, restoring mangroves protects coasts from floods and stores carbon, while wetlands upstream can naturally filter water and reduce flooding. Nature-based solutions harness ecosystems to solve problems, offering multiple benefits for people and wildlife.

Bioeconomy: An economy where the basic building blocks for materials, chemicals, and energy come from renewable biological resources rather than fossil fuels. In a bioeconomy, we use innovations in biology for sustainable production—for instance, creating biodegradable plastics from plant starch, or developing biofuels from algae, or using agricultural waste to produce fibers or fertilizers. The bioeconomy ties into ecosystem restoration by promoting sustainable use of nature: it encourages valuing biodiversity and biomass in ways that can replace more harmful, non-renewable practices. It also often integrates traditional knowledge (like how Indigenous communities use plants for food and medicine) with modern science. A strong bioeconomy can support rural livelihoods and innovation while reducing waste and reliance on fossil resources.

Environmental Justice: A movement and principle promoting fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people—regardless of race, ethnicity, or income—in environmental decisions. It addresses how pollution and resource loss often harm marginalized communities most. In ecosystem restoration, environmental justice ensures that restoration benefits (clean water, green spaces, disaster protection) reach those most in need and that affected communities have a real voice in projects.

UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030): A global movement and framework proclaimed by the UN to massively scale up restoration efforts worldwide. Led by UNEP and FAO, the Decade is rallying governments, organizations, and citizens to prevent, halt, and reverse ecosystem degradation on every continent and in every ocean. It encompasses all types of ecosystems—forests, farmlands, cities, wetlands, oceans, etc.—and encourages collaboration across society. The #GenerationRestoration slogan is about making ecosystem restoration a cultural norm and a global mission of our generation. The Decade involves sharing knowledge, funding projects, and monitoring progress toward restoration goals (such as the 30% by 2030 target).

© Ecosystemrestorationcommunities

Stakeholders & Systems

Ecosystem restoration is a collective responsibility that requires action at every level of society. Individuals, community groups, organisations, and institutions each play a unique and vital role in reversing environmental degradation and promoting sustainable land use.

Whether through local volunteer efforts, educational outreach, scientific research, policy advocacy, or large-scale funding, every stakeholder contributes to the broader movement for ecological recovery.

Recognising the interconnectedness of these efforts is essential for building an inclusive, effective, and lasting restoration agenda.

Government and Policy Makers: at local, regional, and national levels set the legal and regulatory frameworks for ecosystem restoration. They can mobilise public funding, enforce environmental protection laws, and integrate restoration into development planning. Policy support is essential for scaling up initiatives and ensuring accountability.

International Organisations and Multilateral Bodies: Entities such as the United Nations, World Bank, and regional alliances play a vital role in promoting global restoration agendas. They provide technical guidance, coordinate cross-border efforts, and mobilise financial and political support through initiatives like the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

Government & Policy Makers
🏛 Set laws, fund, integrate in planning

International Orgs & Multilateral Bodies
🌐 Coordinate global efforts, mobilize funds

NGOs
Lead projects, connect science & community

Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities
⊕ Share ecological knowledge, steward land

Private Sector & Industry
🏭 Adopt sustainable practices, invest

Science & Academia
🔬 Provide data, monitor progress, guide decisions

Financial Institutions & Donors
$ Fund through grants, bonds PES programs

General Public & Youth
👤 Volunteer, advocate, build local momentum

Scientific and Academic Institutions: Researchers and universities provide critical data, tools, and monitoring frameworks for restoration. They help assess ecosystem conditions, develop restoration techniques, and measure impact. Their expertise is essential for evidence-based decision-making.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): Environmental NGOs are often at the forefront of restoration efforts, implementing projects, conducting research, and raising public awareness. They act as connectors between communities, scientists, and policymakers, ensuring that restoration is community-led, inclusive, and science-based.

Private Sector and Industry: Businesses—particularly those in agriculture, forestry, water, and extractive industries—can both contribute to and benefit from ecosystem restoration. Through sustainable practices, investment, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, the private sector plays a key role in scaling up impact and innovation.

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Financial Institutions and Donors: Banks, climate funds, development agencies, and philanthropic foundations finance restoration projects through grants, loans, and investment programs. Innovative financial mechanisms, such as green bonds and payment for ecosystem services (PES), are crucial to making restoration economically viable.

Media and Communication Professionals: The media shapes public perception and awareness of restoration. Effective storytelling and outreach campaigns can mobilise support, influence policy, and inspire behavioural change at all levels of society.
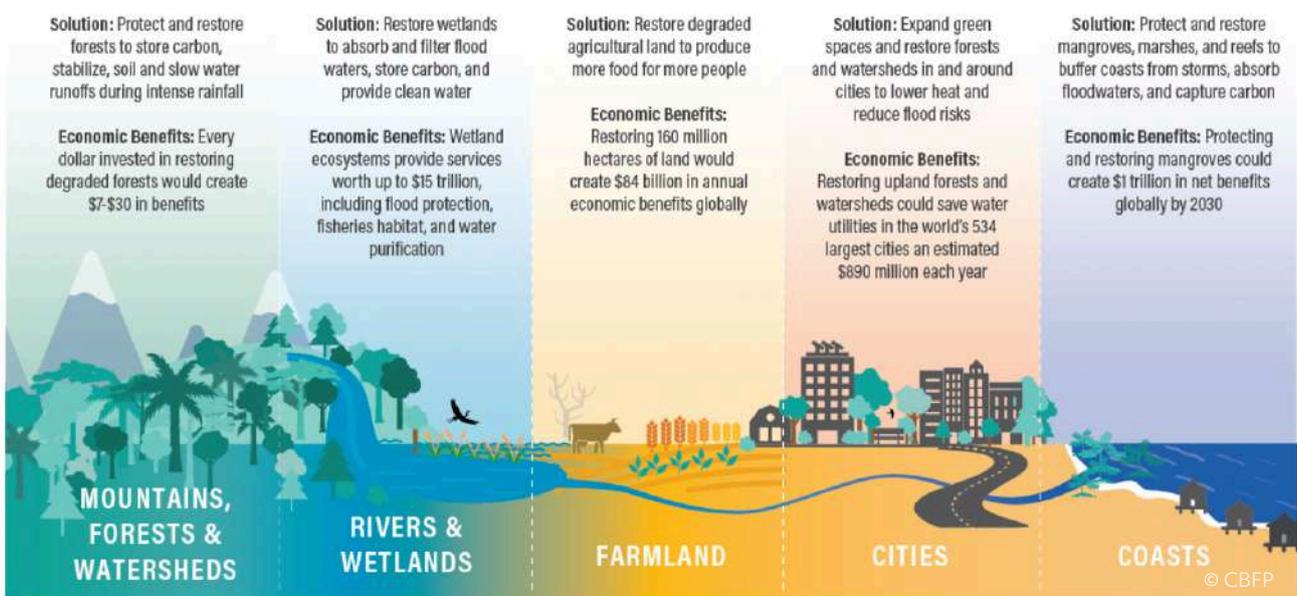
Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities: As stewards of much of the world's biodiversity, Indigenous Peoples and local communities have invaluable ecological knowledge and direct relationships with their surrounding environments. Their active involvement ensures culturally appropriate, sustainable, and equitable restoration practices.

General Public and Youth: Public engagement is key to restoration success. Citizens, particularly youth, are powerful advocates for environmental change. Through education, volunteering, and community action, they help build momentum and ownership for long-term restoration goals.

WHERE DOES ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION TAKE PLACE?

While responsibility for restoration is shared among actors, implementation takes place within specific ecosystems. Each landscape plays a unique role in regulating climate, protecting biodiversity, supporting livelihoods, and sustaining communities.

The graphic below highlights how restoration efforts across diverse ecosystems generate interconnected environmental, economic, and social benefits.

Solution: Protect and restore forests to store carbon, stabilize, soil and slow water runoffs during intense rainfall

Economic Benefits: Every dollar invested in restoring degraded forests would create $7-$30 in benefits

Solution: Restore wetlands to absorb and filter flood waters, store carbon, and provide clean water

Economic Benefits: Wetland ecosystems provide services worth up to $15 trillion, including flood protection, fisheries habitat, and water purification

Solution: Restore degraded agricultural land to produce more food for more people

Economic Benefits: Restoring 160 million hectares of land would create $84 billion in annual economic benefits globally

Solution: Expand green spaces and restore forests and watersheds in and around cities to lower heat and reduce flood risks

Economic Benefits: Restoring upland forests and watersheds could save water utilities in the world's 534 largest cities an estimated $890 million each year

Solution: Protect and restore mangroves, marshes, and reefs to buffer coasts from storms, absorb floodwaters, and capture carbon

Economic Benefits: Protecting and restoring mangroves could create $1 trillion in net benefits globally by 2030

MOUNTAINS, FORESTS & WATERSHEDS

RIVERS & WETLANDS

FARMLAND

CITIES

COASTS

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ACTIVITY

1

Dive into the Research

Learners are encouraged to partake in guided research and activities to explore the topic. Research can be completed independently in a computer lab, as a homework assignment, by talking to community members, visiting a library, or as a classroom, club or community activity.

This research worksheet will help you explore the topic in your country and community by analyzing policies, trends, and challenges. Answer each question using reliable data and sources. Reflect on the findings and connect them to global challenges. Be ready to discuss or present your research.

Learner Research Worksheet: Investigate Your Country and Community	
Name:	
Country:	
Local Community:	
Research Questions:	
1. Local Ecosystems • What types of ecosystems are near your community (e.g., forests, wetlands, coastlines, grasslands)? • What are their key functions and biodiversity features?	
2. Environmental Challenges • What are the main threats to these ecosystems (e.g., pollution, deforestation, climate change, urban expansion)? • How are these threats impacting biodiversity, livelihoods, and climate resilience?	

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3. Current Actions
• Are there any ongoing ecosystem
  restoration projects in your
  area? Who is leading them (e.g.,
  government, NGOs, community
  groups)?
• What methods are being used
  (e.g., tree planting, rewilding,
  wetland restoration)?

4. Gaps and Opportunities:
• What restoration efforts are
  already happening in our
  community, and what is still
  missing?
• How could youth, local
  communities, or schools get more
  involved?How could youth, local
  communities, or schools get more
  involved?\

5. Stakeholders & Collaboration
• Who are the key stakeholders in
  local ecosystem restoration
  (e.g., Indigenous communities,
  scientists, city planners)?
• How are partnerships helping or
  hindering progress?

ACTIVITY

2

This worksheet will help you assess how your school or community is promoting ecosystem restoration and identify areas for improvement. Use this as a guide to observe, ask questions, and take notes on practices in your school or neighbourhood.

School/Community Investigation Worksheet		
Investigate	Yes, No, Unsure	Notes and Observations
Does your school have an ecosystem restoration or biodiversity enhancement plan (e.g., native planting, habitat restoration, rewilding)?		
Are there active efforts to reduce ecosystem degradation from waste (e.g., plastic reduction, composting organic waste, or litter clean-ups)?		
Are students and staff involved in habitat restoration activities (e.g., native tree planting, invasive species removal, river/beach cleanups)?		
Are local ecosystems—like forests, rivers, or coastlines—discussed in class or integrated into school projects and fieldwork?		

DISCOVER	CONNECT	TRANSFORM
Is there collaboration with local communities, Indigenous groups, or NGOs to restore and protect ecosystems?		
Are there student-led initiatives or eco-clubs that work on local restoration or conservation efforts?		
Does your school promote sustainable food practices like native or regenerative gardening, plant-based meals, or composting leftovers?		
Is there awareness of how your school's practices (e.g., land use, landscaping, maintenance) affect surrounding ecosystems?		
Has your school or community experienced environmental degradation (e.g., deforestation, water pollution, biodiversity loss)? What has been done in response?		
Taking Action: What can you and your peers do to support ecosystem restoration at school or in your neighbourhood? List 3 concrete steps.		

ACTIVITY

3

Spotlight Youth Movements

In this activity, **learners explore how young people around the world are taking the lead in protecting nature and restoring ecosystems. They will investigate a youth-led movement or organisation focused on environmental conservation, restoration, or climate action, and consider its impact**.

Below are some examples of youth-led movements and organisations that focus on environmental issues. You can add a local youth movement or initiative to this list if applicable, or let students choose one they know about:

- **Young Reporters for the Environment:** A programme for youth-led environmental action.
- **Youth for Our Planet:** A global youth movement calling for action on the nature and climate crisis.
- **Youth4Nature:** An international youth nonprofit advocating for nature-based solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss.
- **Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN):** A worldwide network of youth organisations and individuals dedicated to biodiversity conservation and influencing policy (official youth constituency to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity).
- **Plant-for-the-Planet:** A movement started by a 9-year-old, mobilising youth to plant trees worldwide and fight the climate crisis through reforestation.
- **Earth Guardians:** A youth-led organisation (started by a teen activist) that empowers young leaders to engage in environmental activism and restoration projects in their communities.
- **Heirs To Our Oceans:** A movement of young leaders focused on saving the oceans and marine life, through education, advocacy, and direct action like beach cleanups.
- **Extinction Rebellion Youth:** The youth wing of the global Extinction Rebellion, using non-violent civil disobedience to demand action on the climate and ecological emergency (including halting biodiversity loss).
- **Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots:** A youth service program founded by Dr. Jane Goodall, where young people undertake projects to help animals, the environment, and their communities.

Research Questions for Learners
Choose one movement from the list (or another you have discussed/identified). Find information about it via its website, news articles, videos, or social media. Then answer the following:

1. What is the name of the youth-led movement or organisation and who started it (and when)?
2. What is the movement's mission or main goal?
3. What kinds of activities or campaigns does this movement do to protect or restore the environment? Give one or two specific examples of their actions or projects.
4. Which SDGs or environmental issues does this movement focus on?
5. How does the movement engage other people and raise awareness?
6. What impact have they had so far?
7. Reflection: After learning about this movement, what inspired you the most? What lessons or ideas did you take from it? Is there an action you would like to take (or join) to support ecosystem restoration or environmental protection in your community?

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Go Further

To further enhance your learners' experience and provide more depth or follow-up material, here are some curated resources related to ecosystem restoration, biodiversity, and sustainable development. These include official UN resources on the relevant SDGs, data sources, and educational toolkits. All resources are available in English; some are available in multiple languages as noted.

- Eco-Schools International: FEE's global programme for sustainability education and action in schools.
- Learning About Forests (LEAF): Educational resources and support for schools engaging with forest and biodiversity learning.
- Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE): Environmental journalism programme enabling youth to report on local challenges and restoration efforts.
- Global Schools Program: The host organisation of UN at Your Doorstep, which provides teacher training, workshops, and resources on the SDGs.
- United Nations SDG 15 Life on Land: UN's official page for SDG 15, explaining targets like halting deforestation, protecting biodiversity, and restoring ecosystems (available in EN, FR, ES, AR, ZH, RU).
- United Nations SDG 14 Life Below Water: UN's official page for SDG 14, detailing goals for protecting oceans, coasts, and marine life (available in multiple languages).
- UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030) Official Website: A hub with information, news, and ways to get involved in #GenerationRestoration, including fact sheets and stories from around the world (EN with resources in other UN languages).
- Our World in Data – Biodiversity: Interactive data and research summaries about biodiversity loss, species extinction rates, and why biodiversity matters (EN).
- Our World in Data – Deforestation and Forest Loss: Data visualisations and explanations of global deforestation trends, drivers, and impacts (EN).
- UNEP | Ecosystem Restoration Playbook: A practical 21-page guide to healing the planet, describing approaches to restore eight key ecosystem types and how everyone – from individuals to governments, can take part in restoration (available in EN, FR, ES, AR, ZH, RU and more).
- World's Largest Lesson: "Artivism for Nature": A creative education resource inviting students to make art for nature and add it to a virtual forest, blending creativity with environmental action (EN).
- FAO & Youth (YUNGA) – Biodiversity Challenge Badge: An educational badge curriculum by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Scouting, filled with activities teaching.
- UNESCO – SDG Resources for Educators – Life on Land: A compilation of ideas and lesson plans for teaching about biodiversity, ecosystems, and sustainability from multiple perspectives (EN, FR).
- UNESCO – Biodiversity Learning Kit: A toolkit for educators and youth on biodiversity conservation, including case studies and activities bridging scientific and Indigenous knowledge (EN).

Meet the Speakers

NATALIA ALEKSEEVA

Coordinator of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, UNEP

Ms Alekseeva has been a Coordinator of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration since May 2022 with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). She has over 20 years of experience in the field of environmental protection, climate change, water management and development. She started her career in academia and education, then consulted and managed projects for various multi- and bi-lateral organisations, such as with UNEP, UNDP, and GIZ. She also worked at the Global Water Partnership in Stockholm, focusing on transboundary water cooperation, and most recently served at FAO in Rome as a climate and biodiversity workstream leader. She holds a PhD in Environmental Security, along with degrees from Belarusian State University, Central European University, and the University of Manchester.

JULIA MENSA

CEO and Co-founder of Nunatak Biotech & UNCCD/G20 Global Land Initiative Youth Ecopreneur

Julia is the co-founder and CEO of Nunatak Biotech and a YECO entrepreneur (UNCCD, ITC & G20 Global Land Initiative). With experience in both the public and private sectors, she specialises in innovation and environmental solutions. She studied International Relations at UCC Argentina and Sciences Po Paris. She developed a project using open data and AI to predict wildfires in her home province. Passionate about bridging innovation, nature, science, and technology, she now leads a startup that develops microbial solutions inspired by resilient ecosystems to improve crop yields and restore soil health.

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Watch the Dialogue

In this part, learners watch a global dialogue that brings together youth leaders, scientists, policymakers, and community practitioners to explore ecosystem restoration as a lived, interconnected, and actionable reality.

Through perspectives from different regions and levels of leadership, the dialogue connects local experiences of environmental degradation and renewal with broader ecological, economic, and systemic dynamics shaping our planet today. Participants are invited to reflect on why restoration matters now, how biodiversity, climate resilience, food systems, and community wellbeing are interconnected, and where power and responsibility lie in advancing sustainable change.

As learners watch, they gain insight into how youth and local communities are already driving restoration efforts, where policies and institutions enable or constrain progress, and what must shift for restoration initiatives to be scaled and sustained. The dialogue highlights the importance of collaboration across sectors, respect for Indigenous and local knowledge, and translating ecological awareness into concrete action.

Learners are encouraged to watch together as a class or assign the dialogue as homework, and to use it as a springboard for discussion, critical reflection, and practical engagement in ecosystem restoration within their own communities.

CLICK HERE

Welcome to the UN at Your Doorstep
event on Ecosystem Restoration

1h Dialogue + (optional) 20 minutes

Key Discussion Questions:

Q1. What are the root causes of ecosystem degradation — and what roles can education, technology, and policy play in reversing them?

Q2. How can young people drive locally led restoration efforts that respect nature, culture, and community needs?

FOLLOW

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Alright, let's get started.

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Explore the Insights

During the live dialogue, participants shared powerful ideas about what ecosystem restoration means to them—using words like healing, balance, biodiversity, and hope. These words reveal how restoration is not just about repairing nature, but also about rebuilding relationships between people and the planet.

Invite your students to look closely at the word cloud and choose 2–3 key words that resonate most with them. Why do these words stand out? Do they connect to something they've experienced, learned, or care deeply about? Encourage them to write a short reflection explaining how their chosen words represent the way they understand ecosystem restoration and their role in it. Here are some exmples of what students said.

The results from the live dialogue show that most participants see forests and trees as the ecosystems most at risk, followed by rivers, lakes, and oceans. Many identified overconsumption, lack of funding, and disconnection from nature as major challenges to restoration—showing how both environmental and social issues are deeply connected. Yet, there's hope: many young people are already taking action by planting trees, reducing waste, joining clean-ups, and advocating for change. They also highlighted that what they need most to do more is funding, knowledge, and community support.

Now, reflect on your own experience:
- How do your responses compare to those shared here?
- What would you like to learn more about to help restore ecosystems in your community?

What Actions Did Youth Around the World Suggest?

Youth as Drivers of Change
During the dialogue, participants shared inspiring ways young people can lead global-scale change for Ecosystem Restoration. Here are some of the most powerful ideas — grouped by common themes:

Taking Local Action
- "Start small and connect with local environmental groups."
- "Get involved in clean-ups, tree planting, or school-based green projects."
- "Change your surroundings — small steps make a difference."

Local actions build collective momentum and show that everyone has the power to restore ecosystems right where they live.

Raising Awareness and Educating Others
- "Use social media to spread awareness and inspire sustainable habits."
- "Teach children and younger students how to care for nature."
- "Share knowledge and resources through school campaigns or clubs."

Education helps shift mindsets and empowers others to act for the planet.

Advocating for Policy and Global Change
- "Be the advocate for environmental policies that protect ecosystems."
- "Participate in youth conferences and use your voice in global discussions."

Youth voices can influence policies and push for long-term structural change.

Collaboration and Innovation
- "Work together with peers and teachers to brainstorm creative sustainability projects."
- "Use innovative technology and creative ideas to design new restoration solutions."

Collaboration brings energy, creativity, and real-world impact to restoration work. Reflect.

Discussion Question for Learners:

Which of these ideas could work best in your school or community?
Think about your available resources, local environmental challenges, and who you could partner with to make your idea happen.

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Reflect on the Dialogue

ACTIVITY

1

Engage your students in reflecting on the dialogue on Ecosystem Restoration with Natalia Alekseeva and Julia Mensa through a **See Think Wonder - Project Zero Thinking Routine** using one of the two activities below.

See Think Wonder routine engages learners in asking questions to challenge their assumptions and deepen their understanding through observation, reflection, and harnessing their curiosity. It sees learning and reasoning as an ongoing process rather than something that ends.

Goal: To help learners reflect critically on dialogue shared.

Activity Instructions:
1. Explain that the **SEE-THINK-WONDER** routine will help learners carefully observe and interpret information while fostering curiosity.
2. Provide these guiding prompts:
   a. SEE: What did you see or hear during the dialogue? (e.g., facts, stories, data, visuals, or quotes the speaker shared). Help steer them away from what they think they saw or heard.
   b. THINK: What do you think about what you saw or heard? What ideas or interpretations come to mind?
   c. WONDER: What questions do you have about what you saw or heard? What are you curious to explore further?
3. Individual reflection: Ask learners to take 5-10 minutes to independently write their responses to the SEE-THINK-WONDER prompts based on the dialogue highlights.
4. Pair-Share Discussion: In pairs, learners share their response, discussing:
   a. Similarities and differences in what they observed and thought.
   b. Question they found most intriguing or important.
5. Whole-Class Discussion: Facilitate a class discussion where the learners share their observations, interpretations, and questions.

Extension: Create a Curiosity Wall where learners can post their 'wonder' questions. Use the 'Same, same, but different' routine to group similar questions and identify themes for further exploration in follow-up activities.

Teaching Tips:
- Use visuals or quotes from the live dialogue to prompt learners' observations.
- Encourage learners to connect their reflections to local examples of ecosystem restoration.
- Highlight key questions from the Curiosity Wall to revisit in future lessons or projects.

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ACTIVITY

(2)

Apply See Think Wonder to Your Local Community

Activity Purpose: To help learners analyse a local space through observation, critical thinking, and questioning, while considering its potential for ecosystem restoration.

Choose a Local Space:
- Teachers should identify a local space for this activity. This could be a section of the school grounds, a nearby park, or any outdoor area that might benefit from restoration efforts.
- If possible, take the students to this location for direct observation. If visiting the space is impractical, provide clear photos or videos of the area.

Activity Instructions:
Introduce the SEE-THINK-WONDER Routine:
- a. Explain to learners that this routine helps them carefully observe their environment, interpret their observations, and reflect on what they could do to improve it.
- b. Emphasise the importance of using evidence to support their thoughts and questions.

Guided Observation:
Using the following SEE-THINK-WONDER prompts, guide learners through the routine:
- SEE: Ask learners to describe precisely what they see (or hear) in the space.
  - Encourage them to focus on facts (e.g., "There are five trees," "The ground is covered in trash," etc.) and avoid assumptions about what they think they see.
  - Use follow-up prompts: "What do you notice about the plants, animals, or objects in this space?" "What stands out to you?"
- THINK: Ask learners to interpret their observations.
  - Use prompts to encourage deeper thinking: "What do you think is happening here?" "What do you see that makes you say that?" "What ideas or interpretations come to mind?"
  - Help them move away from unsupported opinions by asking for evidence to explain their thoughts (e.g., "Why do you think this area looks unhealthy?").
- WONDER: Ask learners to reflect on their curiosity and next steps.
  - Use questions like: "What are you curious to explore further about this space?" "What questions do you have about what you observed?" "What could be done to restore or improve this ecosystem?"

Individual Reflection:
- After the discussion, give learners 5–10 minutes to write their responses to the SEE-THINK-WONDER prompts independently. Encourage them to include specific observations, evidence to support their thoughts, and actionable ideas for ecosystem restoration.

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Teaching Tips:

Prepare the Space in Advance
- Visit the chosen space beforehand to identify features or challenges learners might observe (e.g., trash, invasive species, erosion). This will help you anticipate questions or guide discussions.

Encourage Group Interaction
- If possible, have learners work in pairs or small groups during the SEE-THINK-WONDER activity. This can spark richer discussions and help them learn from each other's observations.

Provide Observation Tools
- Provide learners with clipboards, worksheets, or journals to take notes. You could also offer tools like magnifying glasses or cameras to help them explore the space in more detail.

Model the Routine
- Start the activity by modelling the SEE-THINK-WONDER routine with one or two observations of your own. This helps set expectations and gives learners a clear example of describing, interpreting, and questioning effectively.

Adapt to Indoor Settings if Needed
- If visiting a space is not feasible, bring the environment into the classroom through videos, photos, or even virtual reality tools.

Discuss Restoration Examples
- After learners have shared their reflections, discuss real-world examples of ecosystem restoration related to their observations (e.g., reforestation efforts, wildlife habitat creation).

Scaffold Questions for Younger or Struggling Learners
- Provide prompts or examples to help learners generate SEE, THINK, and WONDER responses if they seem unsure where to start.

Connect to Action
- Encourage learners to brainstorm actionable steps to restore the space, such as organising a cleanup, planting native plants, or raising awareness.
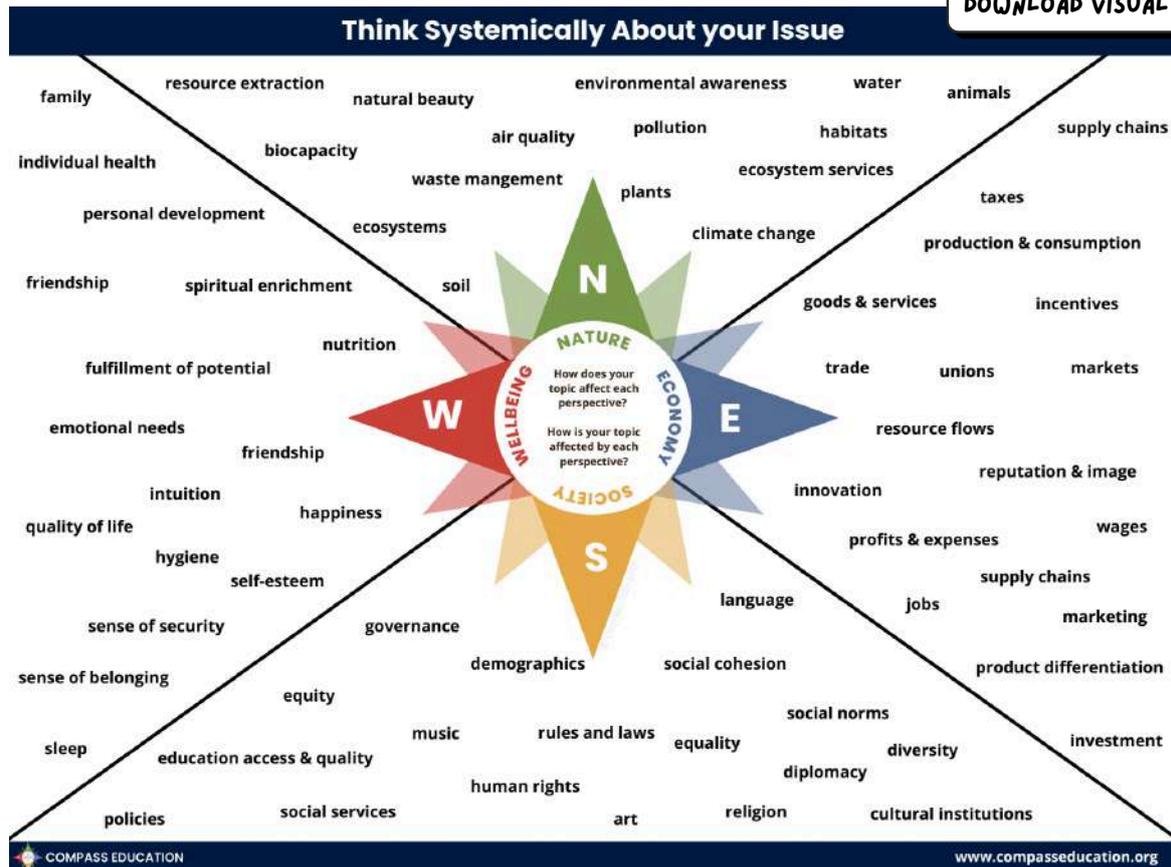
ACTIVITY

Trace the Patterns

EXPLORING ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION WITH THE SUSTAINABILITY COMPASS

This activity uses The Sustainability Compass as a guiding framework. This tool helps us explore any issue or topic through the lens of systems thinking to identify ways to make a systemic, sustainable impact.

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Think Systemically About your Issue

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Purpose:
This activity helps learners build on insights from the live dialogue by using the Sustainability Compass (Nature, Economy, Society, and Wellbeing) to analyse the systemic impacts of ecosystem restoration. It deepens their understanding of the connections between ecosystem restoration and global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and social equity while encouraging them to apply these ideas to their local context.

Materials Needed:
- Large Sustainability Compass diagram (printed or digital).
- Markers, sticky notes, or digital tools for brainstorming.
- Resources from the live dialogue (e.g., notes, quotes, visuals).
- Additional age-appropriate resources about ecosystem restoration.

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Activity Instructions:

1. Begin by facilitating either a Questcussion Eco-Restoration.pdf or Yes_and_Ecosystem Restoration.pdf to encourage reflection and curiosity.
   a. Note: This is also something you can do as a follow-up lesson or, in the end, to use 'spare time' productively.

2. Introduce the Sustainability Compass:
   a. Briefly explain the four Compass points:
      i. Nature (N): The environment, biodiversity, and natural ecosystems.
      ii. Economy (E): Jobs, industries, and financial systems connected to restoration.
      iii. Society (S): Communities, equity, and cultural practices.
      iv. Wellbeing (W): Human health, happiness, and quality of life.
   b. Emphasise that the Compass helps us think about how the four systems' conditions for sustainability are interconnected and how ecosystem restoration can create positive change in all these areas.
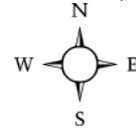
3. Provide each group with guiding questions to connect the dialogue to their Compass point:
   a. **Nature**:
      i. How does restoration protect plants, animals, and ecosystems?
      ii. What examples from the dialogue show the importance of restoring natural habitats (e.g., coral reefs, mangroves)?
   b. **Economy**:
      i. How does restoration support local jobs, industries, or businesses?
      ii. What examples from the dialogue highlight the economic benefits of restoration (e.g., fisheries, tourism)?
   c. **Society**:
      i. How can restoration strengthen communities or promote social equity?
      ii. What examples from the dialogue show how restoration addresses issues like environmental justice or cultural preservation?
   d. **Wellbeing**:
      i. How does restoring ecosystems improve human health and safety?
      ii. What examples from the dialogue show how restoration reduces disaster risks or improves quality of life?

For further discussion, encourage groups to use examples from their local community or region, insights from the dialogue, and other online resources.

4. **Group Work – Brainstorming with the Compass:**
   a. Before you start: Choose one restoration effort you would like your learners to reflect on and research as they complete the Sustainability Compass OR provide examples of restoration efforts from the live dialogue and have your class vote on which one they would like to engage with.
   b. Next, divide the class into four groups, each representing one Compass point (Nature, Economy, Society, and Wellbeing).
   c. Instruct each group to analyse the impacts of ecosystem restoration through the lens of their assigned Compass point.

5. **Create a Compass Map:**
   a. Provide a large Sustainability Compass diagram (on a poster, whiteboard, or digital platform). Each group adds ideas to the Sustainability Compass diagram by writing or drawing their responses under their assigned point.

Identify Interconnections:

1. As they work, encourage them to consider connections between the Compass points. For example:
2. How does restoring degraded lands (Nature) empower youth-led initiatives (Society) and improve food security (Wellbeing)?
3. How do global restoration partnerships (Society) create green jobs (Economy) and protect biodiversity (Nature)?
4. How does reforesting grasslands (Nature) help mitigate climate change (Wellbeing) and support sustainable agriculture (Economy)?
5. How does involving young people in restoration projects (Society) strengthen community resilience (Wellbeing) and inspire long-term environmental stewardship (Nature)?

Facilitate a Whole-Class Discussion:

1. Once groups have completed their Compass maps, bring the class together to share and discuss their findings. Use these prompts:
   - What were the most surprising or significant impacts you discovered in your Compass Point?
   - What connections did you notice between the Compass points?
   - How do examples from the live dialogue inspire action in our own community?
2. Highlight how systemic thinking (seeing connections between different points) can lead to more effective and meaningful solutions.

Extension Activity:

Opening Reflection (optional if needed to review):

1. Begin by reviewing key takeaways from the live dialogue. Highlight examples shared by the speakers, such as:
   - Natalia Alekseeva emphasises global collaboration under the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration and how diverse partnerships are key to addressing large-scale environmental challenges.
   - Julia Mensa's youth-led restoration efforts in Argentina, focusing on restoring degraded lands and empowering young people to take action for their communities.
2. Ask learners:
   - What examples of ecosystem restoration did you hear about in the dialogue?
   - How did the speakers show that restoration can address global and local challenges?
3. Gather key thoughts from the learner on a whiteboard or smart board to refer back to and clarify any misconceptions at the end of the lessons. Important: This is not the time to correct or judge the learners' contributions; rather, encourage them to share or ask them to expand on their thinking if they are uncertain.
4. Local Ecosystem Restoration Action Plan: Ask learners to choose one example from their Compass Map and brainstorm an action plan to address it in their community (e.g., organising a tree-planting project, advocating for wetland protection - poster campaign).

Teaching tips:

- Use Dialogue Highlights: Provide learners with quotes or visuals from the live dialogue to inspire their brainstorming (e.g., Natalia Alekseeva discussing the importance of global partnerships for large-scale restoration efforts or Julia Mensa sharing her experiences leading youth-driven restoration projects in Argentina).
- Make it Visual: Use sticky notes or colour-coded markers for each Compass point to create a dynamic and engaging map.
- Relate to Local Issues: Encourage learners to think about how the dialogue examples relate to their own local ecosystems and communities.
- Simplify for Younger Learners: If needed, reduce the number of guiding questions or focus on just two Compass points (e.g., Nature and Wellbeing).
- Provide Scaffolding: Offer sentence starters to guide brainstorming. For example:
    - Restoring forests helps Nature by…
    - Restoring wetlands supports Wellbeing by…
    - Youth-led restoration projects benefit Society because…
    - Global partnerships for ecosystem restoration improve the Economy by…
    - Reviving degraded lands helps Nature by…
    - Collaborating on restoration efforts strengthens Society by…
    - Restoring grasslands improves well-being by…
   - The UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration supports the Economy by…

ACTIVITY
1

Go Below the Surface

The Systems Iceberg is a systems thinking tool that allows us to think systematically about the underlying causes of the problems we see in our communities by exploring behaviour patterns, systems, structures, and mental models that shape how we interact with the world. This video explains the Systems Iceberg in more detail.

Activity Purpose: This activity will help students apply the Systems Iceberg Model to analyse and solve ecosystem challenges. They will identify visible problems, patterns, structures, and mental models driving environmental issues, reflect upward on designing solutions, and identify leverage points for sustainable change. They will then connect their insights to real-world restoration efforts, such as global collaborations and youth-led initiatives**.**
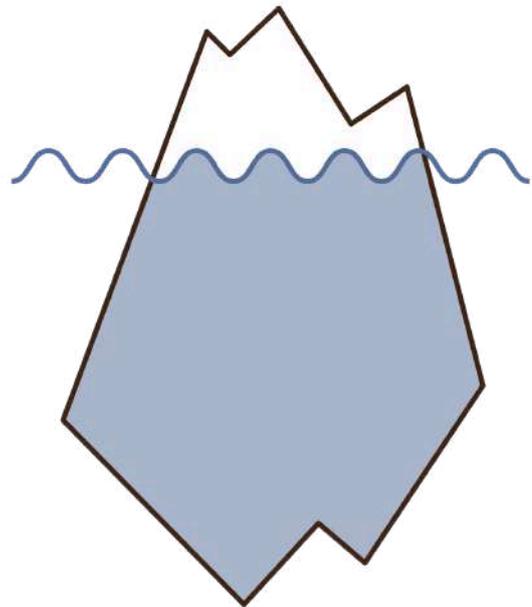
Materials Needed
- Whiteboard/Smartboard
- Iceberg Model template (digital or printed)
- Copies of the "Lonely Songbird" story (or digital access)
- Copy of the Teacher Resource of the Lonely Songbird story (or digital access)
- Markers, pens, or pencils
- Optional: Multimedia tools for creative presentations.

Set-Up:
- Familiarise yourself with the Systems Iceberg Model and its four levels:
  - Events (visible problems)
  - Patterns (trends over time)
  - Structures (systems causing patterns)
  - Mental Models (beliefs driving structures)
- Review the "Lonely Songbird" story and practice reading it aloud.
- Watch or reference examples from the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration Dialogue, including:
  - Natalia Alekseeva's insights on global partnerships.
  - Julia Mensa's youth-led restoration projects in Argentina.

Activity Instructions

1. **Introduce the Iceberg Model**

Draw an iceberg on a whiteboard/smartboard and divide it into four layers:
   a. Events (the tip of the iceberg, visible above water)
   b. Patterns (below the surface)
   c. Structures (deeper systems and rules)
   d. Mental Models (the deepest, hidden beliefs and assumptions)

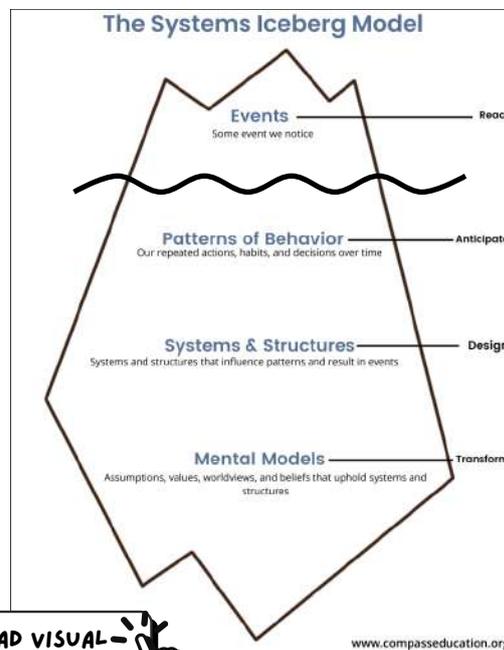**Explain Each Level with Examples:**
   a. Events: What is happening right now? These are the visible, immediate outcomes (e.g., polluted rivers, declining biodiversity).
   b. Patterns: What trends or repeated behaviours have been happening over time? (e.g., increased deforestation, loss of pollinators).
   c. Structures: What systems, rules, or policies are causing these patterns? (e.g., agricultural practices, urban expansion, lack of regulations).
   d. Mental Models: What beliefs, values, or assumptions drive these systems? (e.g., Nature is an unlimited resource, or Economic growth is more important than environmental health.)

Teacher Script: "Think of an iceberg. The part above water is what we see happening now — the events. But like a real iceberg, most of the structure lies hidden beneath the surface. To truly understand a problem, we need to dive deeper and uncover the patterns, structures, and beliefs driving it."
   a. Tip: Use a simple, relatable example to clarify the model going down the Systems Iceberg to uncover the mental model. For example:
   b. Event: The parking lot floods every time it rains heavily.
   c. Pattern: Flooding has been getting worse each year.
   d. Structure: The city replaced the park with pavement, with no drainage systems.
   e. Mental Model: Green spaces are less important than new parking areas.

2. **Read the story of the lonely songbird**

   a. Set the context: "This story is about a songbird who has seen her home transform. As I read, think about what is happening in the forest and why. We'll analyse the story using the Iceberg Model to uncover the root causes."
   b. Ask learners to imagine themselves as the songbird: "How would you feel if your home changed like this? What would you notice about your surroundings?"

The Systems Iceberg Model

Events — React
Some event we notice

Patterns of Behavior — Anticipate
Our repeated actions, habits, and decisions over time

Systems & Structures — Design
Systems and structures that influence patterns and result in events

Mental Models — Transform
Assumptions, values, worldviews, and beliefs that uphold systems and structures

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3. **Analyze the Story Down the Iceberg Model**

   a. Divide learners into small groups and provide each group with an Iceberg Model template.
   b. Guide them to analyse the story using these prompts:
   c. Events (What is happening now?):
- What does the songbird see, hear, and experience in the forest?
- Example: The forest is barren and quiet, and the songbird is alone.

   d. Patterns (What trends have been happening over time?):
- What changes has the songbird noticed in the forest?
- Example: Fewer birds return each season, trees are felled, and insects disappear.

   e. Structures (What systems are causing these patterns?):
- What human systems or practices are harming the forest?
- Example: Farming practices, road construction, and lack of replanting.

   f. Mental Models (What beliefs or assumptions are driving these systems?):
- What do humans believe about the forest?
- Example: They see the forest as empty land for farming and roads.

4. **Analyzing Up the Iceberg Model**

   a. Have learners work in the same groups, but now they should analyse how changes at each level could lead to positive outcomes.
   b. Prompts for Each Level
- <u>Mental Models:</u>
  1. What beliefs could drive positive change?
  2. Example: Forests are valuable ecosystems that sustain life.
- <u>Structures:</u>
  3. What systems or policies could support restoration?
  4. Example: Replanting programs, sustainable farming practices, and deforestation limits.
- <u>Patterns:</u>
  5. What positive trends could emerge from these new systems?
  6. Example: More birds and insects return, and the forest thrives.
- <u>Events:</u>
  7. What visible changes would occur in the forest? Example: The forest becomes lively again, with birds singing and trees standing tall.

5. **Reflect and Identify Leverage Points (10–15 minutes)**

   a. Facilitate a class discussion to identify the key leverage points — small but impactful changes that could transform the system.
   b. Discussion Questions:
- What mental model shift could create the biggest positive change?
- What structural changes would have the greatest impact?
- How would these changes affect patterns and events in the forest?
- How can global collaborations (like those highlighted by Natalia Alekseeva) or youth-led efforts (like Julia Mensa's) support these changes?

6. **Creative Solutions: Designing Interventions (Optional Extension)**

   a. Have learners design creative interventions based on the leverage points they identified.
   b. Examples:
      - A reforestation campaign led by the songbird's "flock."
      - A youth awareness program to teach sustainable farming practices.
      - A community plan to balance human needs and forest restoration.
   c. Presentation Options:
   d. Groups can present their solutions through:
      - A visual diagram of the Iceberg Model with solutions.
      - A skit imagining the forest after the changes.
      - A multimedia presentation showing the ripple effects of their ideas.

7. **Closing Reflection**

"The Iceberg Model helps us see how small changes, like shifting beliefs or introducing new policies, can create big impacts for ecosystems. Whether replanting trees, protecting pollinators, or raising awareness, every effort counts. Let's think about how we can contribute to restoration efforts — just like the global and local examples we discussed today/over the past 2-lesson periods."

Teaching Tips:

- **Simplify the Iceberg Model for Beginners**
  - For learners new to systems thinking, focus on the Events and Patterns levels first. Once they are comfortable, gradually introduce Structures and Mental Models.
  - Use a simple, relatable example (e.g., flooding in a parking lot or litter in a park) to model how to analyse a problem using the Iceberg.
- **Make the Story Relatable**
  - Before reading "The Lonely Songbird", ask learners if they've noticed changes in their local environment (e.g., fewer trees, less wildlife, more construction).
  - Connect the story to something they care about, such as a nearby park, forest, or green space. This makes the lesson more meaningful and engaging.
- **Use Visual Aids**
  - Print or display a large version of the Iceberg Model so learners can see how the levels are connected visually.
  - Provide blank templates for learners to fill in during group activities.
- **Encourage Collaboration**
  - Assign roles within groups (e.g., recorder, presenter, timekeeper) to ensure all learners participate.
  - Allow groups to compare their analysis to see different perspectives on the story.
- **Connect to the Dialogue: Highlight specific examples from the live dialogue to inspire learners. For example:**
  - Natalia Alekseeva's focus on the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration shows how global efforts and partnerships can drive impactful change.
  - Julia Mensa's work highlights how young people can lead community-driven restoration projects to protect and rejuvenate degraded ecosystems.
  - Support Group Work: Check in with groups regularly to ensure they understand the Iceberg Model and are using it effectively.

Take Action

Ecosystem restoration is not just about healing nature—it's about changing how we live, produce, consume, and care for our planet.

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration outlines three powerful pathways for all of us to contribute: acting on the ground, making smart choices, and raising our voices. Whether through hands-on restoration projects, policy advocacy, or everyday decisions, everyone—especially young people—can be part of #GenerationRestoration

Plant Native Trees and Restore Local Vegetation

Planting indigenous trees and restoring natural plant life helps rebuild biodiversity, prevent soil erosion, and enhance carbon capture. Community tree-planting initiatives and reforestation projects are some of the most common and impactful ways to contribute to ecosystem restoration (UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration).

Youth actions:
- Organise or participate in school/community tree-planting days.
- Launch campaigns to raise funds or awareness for native plant restoration.
- Collaborate with local parks or nurseries to grow indigenous seedlings.

Protect Existing Natural Ecosystems

Preserving intact ecosystems like wetlands, forests, grasslands, and coral reefs is often more effective than trying to rebuild them after degradation. Advocacy for stronger conservation policies and supporting protected areas is critical (UNEP Ecosystem Restoration Playbook).

Youth actions:
- Join clean-up or patrolling activities in local protected areas.
- Write to local representatives advocating for stronger environmental protections.
- Support ecotourism or conservation programs that help fund preservation efforts.

Invest in Ecosystem Restoration Initiatives

Supporting organisations financially—whether through donations, partnerships, or impact investing—enables larger-scale restoration projects around the world to take root and thrive (UNEP Financing Ecosystem Restoration).

Youth actions:
- Fundraise for trusted environmental organisations through creative events.
- Support ethical brands or products that invest in nature restoration.
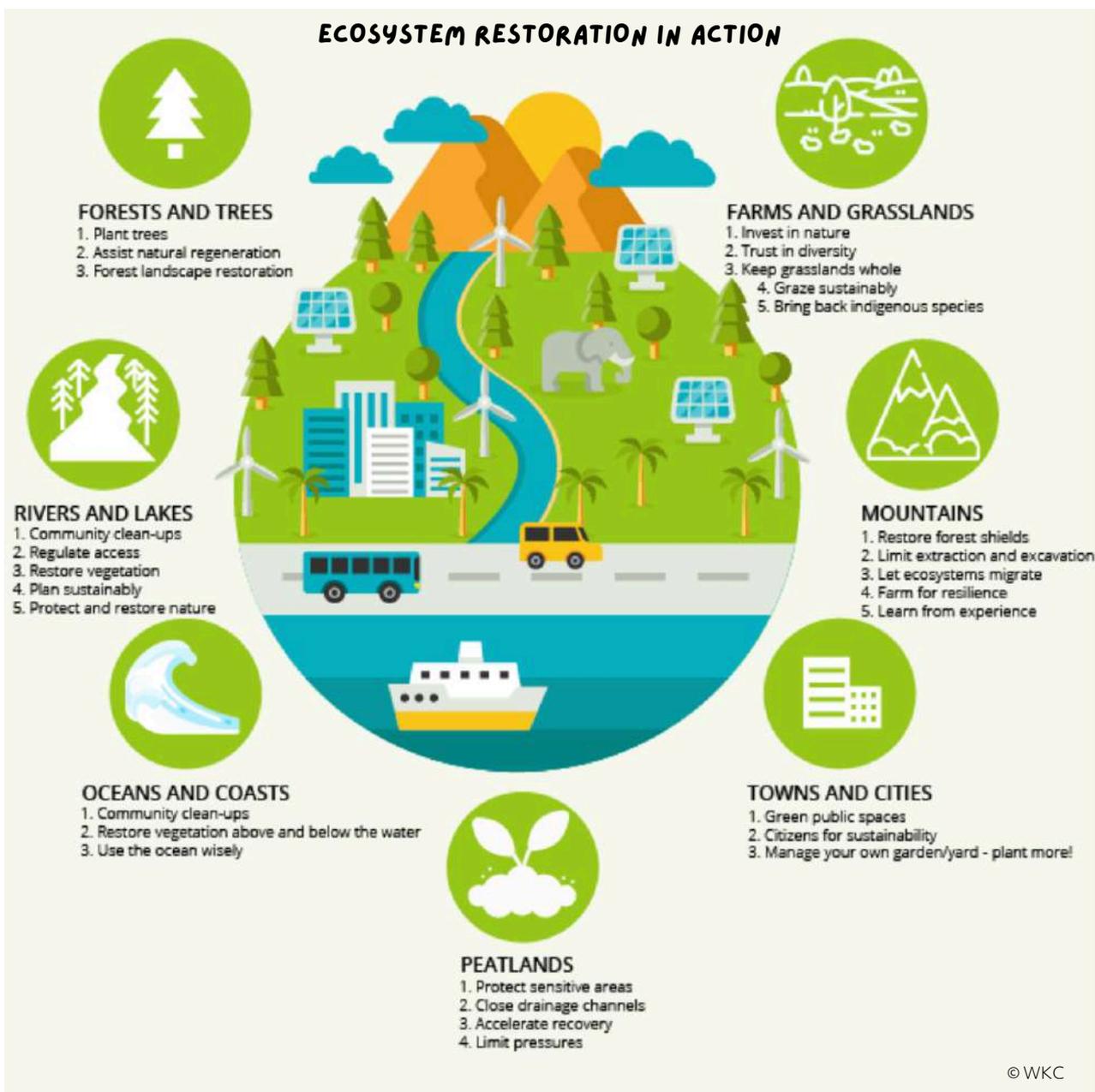- Advocate for school or community funds to support green initiatives.

Raise Awareness and Educate Others

Spreading knowledge about the importance of ecosystems and how individuals and communities can help fosters a culture of care and collective responsibility. Campaigns, workshops, and digital advocacy all contribute to this goal (UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration Communication Strategy).

> **Youth actions:**
> - Host talks, workshops, or exhibitions about ecosystem restoration.
> - Create educational content—videos, zines, infographics—for youth audiences.
> - Celebrate global days (e.g., World Environment Day) through awareness events.

ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION IN ACTION

FORESTS AND TREES
1. Plant trees
2. Assist natural regeneration
3. Forest landscape restoration

FARMS AND GRASSLANDS
1. Invest in nature
2. Trust in diversity
3. Keep grasslands whole
4. Graze sustainably
5. Bring back indigenous species

RIVERS AND LAKES
1. Community clean-ups
2. Regulate access
3. Restore vegetation
4. Plan sustainably
5. Protect and restore nature

MOUNTAINS
1. Restore forest shields
2. Limit extraction and excavation
3. Let ecosystems migrate
4. Farm for resilience
5. Learn from experience

OCEANS AND COASTS
1. Community clean-ups
2. Restore vegetation above and below the water
3. Use the ocean wisely

TOWNS AND CITIES
1. Green public spaces
2. Citizens for sustainability
3. Manage your own garden/yard - plant more!

PEATLANDS
1. Protect sensitive areas
2. Close drainage channels
3. Accelerate recovery
4. Limit pressures

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WHY ARE YOUNG PEOPLE SO EFFECTIVE?

They often bring fresh perspectives and are not afraid to challenge the status quo. Many youth movements use social media brilliantly to raise awareness and organise, connecting hundreds of thousands of peers with hashtags like #GenerationRestoration to share success stories and rally support. Youth also often insist on the connection between environmental health and social justice. They speak out about how environmental destruction impacts their communities, whether it is a child with asthma due to pollution or a fishing village losing income due to dying coral reefs and push leaders to address these inequities.

© UNICEF/Pun | Young climate activists in Maldives highlight key messages, urging climate action.

Importantly, youth are not just advocating; they are also **collaborating with decision-makers.** Programs like the UN's youth forums for the SDGs, or youth advisory councils to city governments, give young people a seat at the table to influence policies on conservation, land use, and climate action. In schools and universities, students have successfully lobbied for their institutions to operate more sustainably (for example, to stop using single-use plastics or to manage campuses as wildlife-friendly spaces).

Finally, young people inspire each other and adults by showing that age is no barrier to making an impact. When students see peers their own age leading a climate strike or regenerating a mangrove swamp, it creates a powerful sense of possibility. As part of the UN at Your Doorstep session on Ecosystem Restoration, learners can feel connected to a global community of young environmental leaders. The message is clear: you are never too young to care for nature, and your actions, questions, and ideas matter.

GLOBAL PROGRAMS YOU CAN JOIN TO TAKE ACTION

The **Global Schools Program** works through a network of 1,850 pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools in 100 countries. **Our mission is to support schools, educators, and students with the training and curriculum to integrate sustainability into education.**

- The Global Schools Advocates Program is a 6-month-long cohort-style training program for educators and school leaders working in primary and secondary schools to learn about Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and how to integrate ESD into their pedagogy, operations, and curricula. Advocates receive free online training; toolkits and lesson plans; monthly online workshops; and become part of an international network of like-minded educators working to implement activities and lessons on global issues within their classrooms.
- Schools for Goal 7 is a project by Global Schools in partnership with Siemens Energy, aimed at training teachers and students on renewable energy, climate change, and sustainable development through gamified curricula via the Planet Rescuers Minecraft Education game. These resources provide students with practical, hands-on learning experiences, promoting active learning to accelerate local sustainable development efforts and equipping the next generation with enhanced STEM and green skills.

The **Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE)** is one of the world's largest environmental education organisations, operating in over 100 countries. Through its flagship programmes—Eco-Schools, Learning about Ecosystems and Forests (LEAF), and Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE)—FEE empowers millions of young people to take informed action for sustainability and ecosystem restoration.

- Eco-Schools inspires students to lead change in their schools and communities through structured action on sustainability. Participating schools assess environmental practices, implement improvement projects (such as waste reduction, biodiversity gardens, or water conservation), and earn internationally recognised Eco-Schools Green Flag award as recognition.
- LEAF (Learning About Ecosystems and Forests) connects students with nature, encouraging hands-on learning about the value of ecosystems and biodiversity. LEAF promotes outdoor education, nature-based investigations, and stewardship projects that restore and protect local ecosystems.
- YRE (Young Reporters for the Environment) enables youth to investigate local environmental issues and report through articles, photography, videos, or podcasts. It develops media literacy and critical thinking while spotlighting environmental challenges and solutions from a youth perspective.

WKC

ACTIVITY

THE MOST-LIKED POSTS WILL BE AMPLIFIED

Ages of Globalization:

Global Schools Program:

Social Media Challenge #OurVoiceOurPower

Task: In small groups, create a simple social media campaign on a global issue linked to the SDGs.

Goal: Decide what your post aims to do, e.g. raise awareness, share a solution, or showcase an action.

Platform & Permissions: Post from a school/club/NGO account if possible (or a dedicated class account). Choose an age-appropriate platform and follow school/parent consent rules.

Tagging: Tag "Ages of Globalization" and "Global Schools Program". Use #UNatYourDoorstep and #OurVoiceOurPower.

Quality & Safety: Be respectful, fact-based, and visually clear.

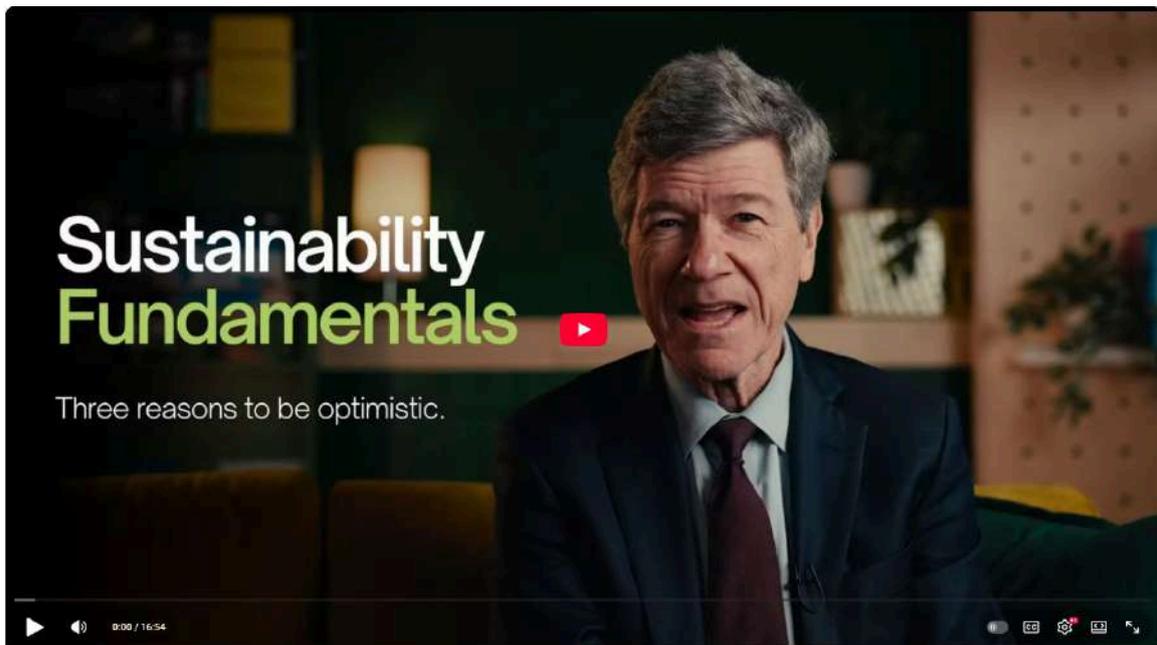**Timeline**: The campaign runs until February 2026.

No social media? Share internally via your class blog, posters, video reels shown in class, or exchange with a partner classroom.

Sustainability Fundamentals

Three reasons to be optimistic.

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Watch this video by Professor Jeffrey Sachs to understand the importance of the SDGs, why they offer hope for the future, and how we can all take action to achieve them.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS NETWORK
A GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

Ages OF GLOBALIZATION

Global Schools Program

COMPASS EDUCATION

Social Media Challenge Planning Template

Form a Team & Choose Your Topic

Working in small groups is ideal for brainstorming and building on each other's ideas. Take a look at the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), pick an issue/SDG(s) you are passionate about, propose a solution or share information, solutions and actions. Research and discuss it with your peers, educator(s), and families. Understand different perspectives and think about what message(s) you want to share using research, facts, and statistics.

Set Your Goals

Think about what you want to accomplish with your post(s). Do you aim to:
- Raise awareness about an issue?
- Share your thoughts or solutions?
- Encourage others to take action or share their own perspectives?

Choose Your Platform

Ask your instructor if you can use your school's/club/community/NGO social media account(s) or if you can create a dedicated account for your post(s). Will you be using Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, or Facebook? Make sure you know how to navigate the platforms effectively and safely.

Creating Your Content

Length & Format: What type of content are you creating (e.g., a short video, a photo series, a written post)? Keep your message positive, respectful, and impactful. Aim to inspire and connect with others.

Visuals: Create eye-catching visuals, e.g. by creating a free https://www.canva.com/ account. Whether it's a photo, a graphic, or a video, make sure it supports your message.

Hashtags & Tags: Use the campaign's official hashtags: #OurVoiceOurPower for the #SDGs and your unique hashtag(s). Don't forget to tag the official accounts @Ages of Globalisation (LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram) and @Global Schools Program (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter).

Posting Your Content

Are you posting from your school/club/community/NGO account or your personal account? Make sure your post's privacy settings are appropriate. Discuss with your teacher or parents if you're unsure.

Engage with Others

Engage with other posts in the campaign by liking, commenting, or re-sharing them. Show support, ask questions, and start conversations!

Keep track of how your post is doing. Respond to comments and thank people for their support.

Reflect on Your Experience

After posting, think about the impact of your contribution. How did it make you feel? What did you learn? Share your experience with others. What worked well? What could you improve next time?

Reflect & Review

In this section, we provide educators with some suggestions to review and assess learners' understanding and engagement with the topic and the different suggested activities. The focus is on evaluating grasp of background information, participation in activities, and ability to propose actionable solutions. We also strongly encourage educators to celebrate learners' accomplishments and achievements!

Guiding Questions

- **Background Understanding:** Did learners demonstrate a clear understanding of key ecosystem restoration concepts (e.g., biodiversity, deforestation, SDG 15)?

- **Research Accuracy:** Are the responses in the Learner Research Worksheet accurate and reflective of a deep understanding of local and global restoration efforts? Did students use credible sources such as the UN Decade, UNEP, or FAO?

- **Community Insight:** Did learners effectively investigate how their school or community is impacting or protecting local ecosystems? Assess the quality of their observations and their proposals for restoration projects or improvements.

- **Discussion Participation:** How actively did students participate in discussions and debates on ecosystem restoration? Look for engagement, critical thinking, and an ability to connect ecological issues to human well-being and justice.

- **Activity Engagement:** Did students effectively use tools like the Sustainability Compass or Systems Iceberg to analyse causes of ecosystem degradation and propose restoration strategies? Evaluate how well they linked ecological health to sustainable development goals and justice.

- **Social Media Challenge:** Evaluate the creativity, relevance, and impact of students' ecosystem restoration social media posts. Did they raise awareness, suggest practical restoration actions, and use campaign hashtags appropriately?

Ideas for Assessment Methods

📝 Quizzes
- What is ecosystem restoration, and why is it important?
- What are some of the stakeholders involved in ecosystem restoration?
- What is rewilding, and how does it contribute to restoration?
- Why is biodiversity important for human survival?
- How do wetlands support climate regulation?
- Name three actions that help restore degraded ecosystems.
- What is the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration?
- How can youth participate in ecosystem restoration?
- How is your country supporting ecosystem restoration efforts?

🗣 Presentations & Group Discussion
Have learners present their research findings and community investigations, and facilitate a discussion on their insights. Example Topics:
- Ecosystem restoration should be a national priority.
- Reforestation alone cannot solve biodiversity loss.
- Industrial agriculture is incompatible with ecosystem restoration.
- Indigenous knowledge is essential to successful restoration efforts.
- Urban spaces should include more green infrastructure and native species.

🧭 Activity Reports
- Review reports or presentations from the Sustainability Compass and Systems Iceberg activities, focusing on their analysis and proposed actions.

✍ Reflection Essays
Have learners write a reflective essay summarising their key takeaways from the dialogue and how they plan to apply these insights. Example Questions for Exams, Essays, and Projects:
- What are three main causes of ecosystem degradation, and how can they be reversed?
- How does ecosystem destruction affect vulnerable communities?
- What is the role of youth in promoting ecosystem restoration?
- If you could design a local restoration project, what would it be and why?
- Explain how ecosystem restoration contributes to climate resilience.
- How does the loss of biodiversity impact food systems and economies?

🤝 Self-Assessment
- Encourage learners to assess their own learning and reflect on their contributions. Use self-assessment tools or journals for this purpose.

📱 Social Media Impact
- Track the engagement and impact of learners' social media posts. Consider the quality of the content, adherence to guidelines, and the effectiveness in raising awareness or inspiring action.

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