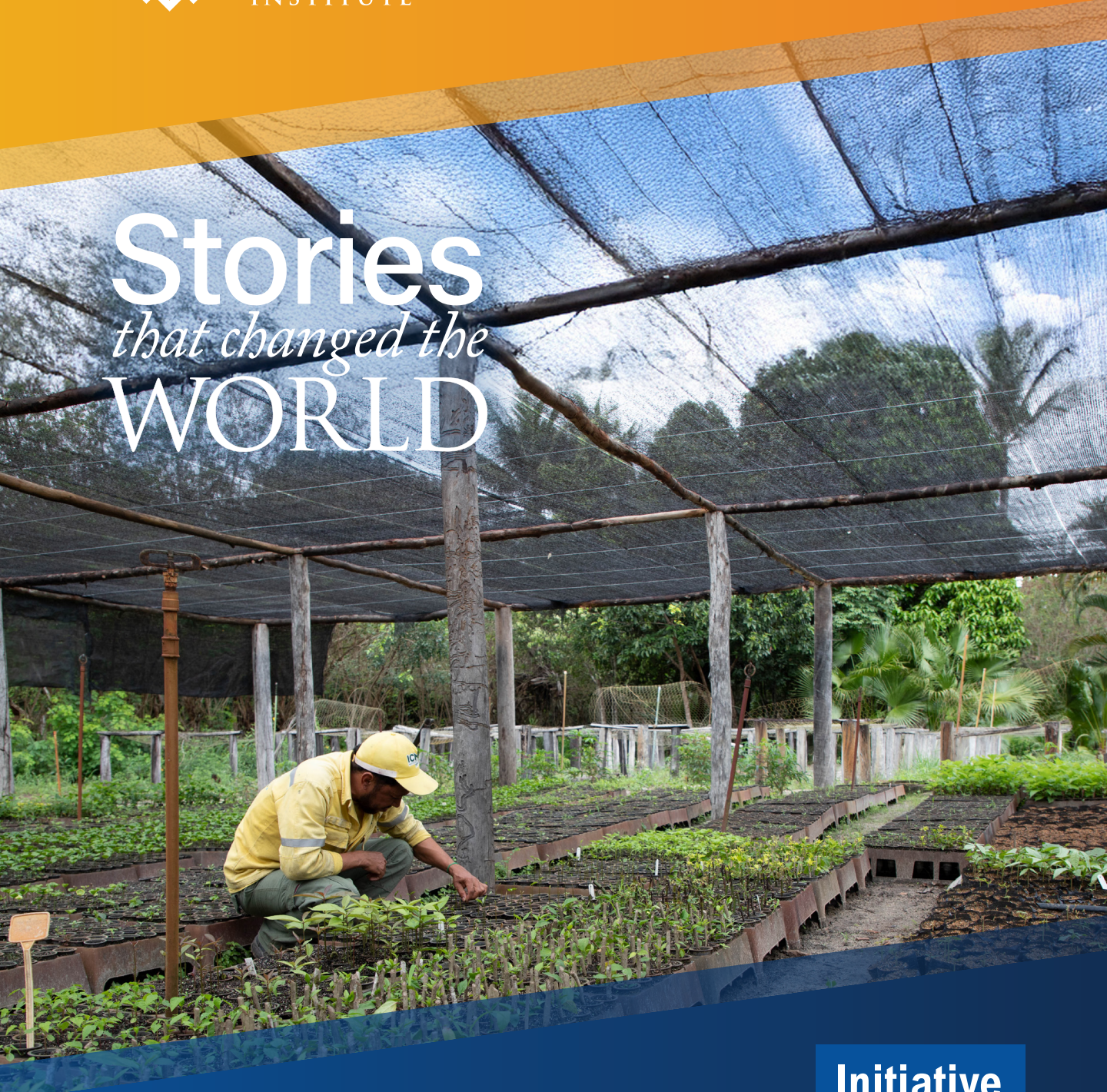




WORLD
RESOURCES
INSTITUTE

Stories *that changed the* WORLD



Creating a network to restore 50 million
hectares in Latin America by 2030

Initiative
20x20

“Restoration is hard,” says Sean de Witt,

the Director of WRI’s Global Restoration Initiative. “It takes a long time to restore degraded land, and it’s hard to explain to people. Initiative 20x20 is for people who take the harder path. We need to support them and connect them with each other.”

Taking the harder path is not just about the work of restoring landscapes; it’s also about ambition. Initiative 20x20 has that ambition. It’s a network that connects restoration organizations across Latin America and the Caribbean with governments, investors and each other with the aim of restoring millions upon millions of hectares of land. In some places that means reforestation and planting trees, but elsewhere it involves restoring wetlands, mangroves or pastures.

“This work is not only important; it’s imperative,” says Sean. Although the region is home to 40% of the world’s biodiversity, more than half of its land is degraded. He says this affects its ability to continue as a “food producing superpower” for the world. And, as 40% of Latin America’s greenhouse gas emissions are derived from land use, restoring those millions of hectares is critical for the climate. “A lot of the world fights climate change with smoke stacks. But in Latin America the front line is on farms and in forests.”



Ministers, representatives and experts meet at the 2019 Initiative 20x20 Partners meeting in Buenos Aires



The story of Initiative 20x20 begins in a meeting room in 2014. Walter Vergara, a Senior Associate at WRI, and a group of colleagues began talking about what restoration and conservation could achieve in Latin America. The world already had a bold global target for restoration, through the Bonn Challenge, but there was huge potential for an initiative that was rooted in the region’s landscapes and cultures.

The first step for the group was to talk to governments, asking them to make pledges of how much land they would commit to restore. “The moment I realised Initiative 20x20 could be successful,” recalls Alejandra Laina, now Director of Initiative 20x20, “was when 18 different Latin American governments joined us voluntarily, and 130 technical partners joined us as well.” Bit by bit the numbers ticked steadily upwards.

At the COP20 UN Climate Conference in Lima, Peru, Initiative 20x20 was launched. Ministers from across Latin America stood up and announced their pledges, millions of hectares at a time. “It was about ambition,” says Rene Zamora, former Senior Manager for Restoration Policy at WRI. “The real challenge was then how to convert that number into action, into national plans and strategies and get the funding.”

Alongside the governments was a network of technical partners—NGOs, research institutes, grassroots groups—who brought practical knowledge of how restoration could be done. “20x20 is a platform,” says Alejandra. “Partners and people connect, exchange ideas and expertise, and learn from each other how they can scale up and turn their ambitions into reality.”

The Economic Case for Landscape Restoration in Latin America, a WRI Report published in 2016



The Initiative had momentum, and countries continued to sign on. Today, Initiative 20x20 counts pledges from Bolivia, Belize, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

From the very start the Initiative recognized the need to involve the private sector. “Scale can only be achieved with the support of the private sector,” says Alejandra. “But of course for that to happen we have to capture the economic case.”

The payoffs from restoration are enormous, and include resilient ecosystems, reliable water supplies, productive soils and reduced climate risk. “Every hectare restored adds \$1,140 in economic value and job creation to rural communities,” says Sean de Witt. But as he also notes, restoration takes time, sometimes counting in decades. “The time horizon of investors does not always match the time horizon of restoration practices,” says Alejandra.

To get around this, 20x20 began connecting investors to projects that promised more tangible economic outcomes. These included agroforestry ventures, sustainable cattle ranching, and reforestation projects that used native tree species. It was slow at first, but over time such projects began to attract investment interest. The Initiative helped demonstrate that restoration could generate economic as well as ecological

value, and bring in private sector investment as well as government money.

“Another major challenge in Latin America has been that sometimes the agricultural community has felt they were more the villain in the story than the hero,” says Sean. “But we always felt that this climate battle is being fought in the farms as well as the forests. And what’s most impressive to me has been the incredible engagement of the ministries of agriculture and

the farmers, who have been able to see themselves as part of the solution.”

Even in its early years Initiative 20x20 began to produce concrete examples of restoration across Latin America and the Caribbean that have benefited people, nature and climate.

In Costa Rica’s Hojancha municipality, for example, communities used the restoration of degraded land to tackle the challenge of water security. Dry hillsides were transformed into productive agricultural land. Instead of running off and eroding slopes, rainwater was captured and used to grow crops.

In Peru’s Madre de Dios region, where illegal goldmining has devastated forests, 20x20 partners have introduced agroforestry systems that provide communities with sustainable livelihoods, buffering against further deforestation.

In Tamaulipas in northern Mexico partners worked to create a biological corridor for monarch butterflies to migrate through. “We

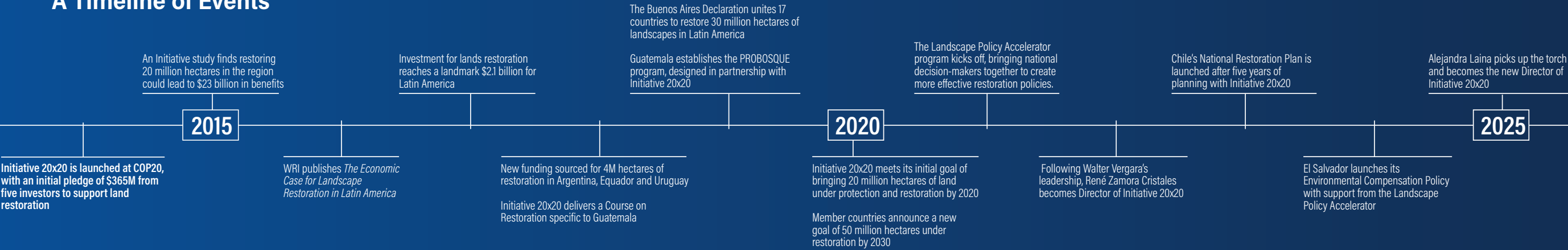


The Initiative 20x20 team at the Initiative 20x20 Annual Partners Meeting, 2018



Walter Vergara speaks at the 2017 Initiative 20x20 Partners Meeting in Colombia

A Timeline of Events





Sean DeWitt speaks at the launch event for *The Economic Case for Landscape Restoration in Latin America* in 2016



Initiative 20x20 Annual Partners Meeting in Colombia, 2017

connected our partners with a foundation that focuses on ecosystem conservation, so they could create the corridor,” says Luciana Gallardo Lomeli, a Research Associate with WRI. The protected area covers more than half a million hectares and helps the iconic butterfly species complete their awe-inspiring migration between Mexico and Canada.

“The Initiative has not just been about planting trees in every hectare,” says Rene Zamora. “Different countries have had different objectives, ecosystems, social dynamics, and institutions. People live and work in these landscapes, and they all have different needs. Restoration needs to be pragmatic, and cost effective not only in financial terms but in terms of people’s values.”

The Initiative has also allowed governments and NGOs to plan more effectively for the future. In Chile, it supported the development of a national restoration plan, aligning different sectors behind shared goals. In Colombia, ministries, NGOs and communities have been brought together to set priorities. The Guatemalan government has been able to use ecological connectivity maps to guide their restoration efforts.

Initiative 20x20’s international network has also led to more effective diplomacy between governments.

**“When we work together
we are more powerful.
We can achieve more.
When we share a common
goal, economic, political,
technical and territorial
differences don’t matter.”**

—Alejandra Laina, Director, Initiative 20x20

“El Salvador came to us and said they wanted to create a UN decade for restoration, but they were a small country,” says Rene. “So we started connecting them with different ministries in different countries. They built up support and could present their ideas as a group. It was approved and now everybody’s benefiting from the UN Decade for Restoration.”

In Africa, a sister initiative – AFR100 – was launched using 20x20 as a model. “We learned from 20x20,” says Bernadette Arakwiye, who leads WRI’s restoration work in Africa. “They have regular webinars and other events

that strengthened the partnership, so we learned from that and tried to find ways to keep our community in Africa connected. “We learned from 20x20 about engaging institutions. You can talk to technical people but if the director general doesn’t see it as a priority they will shift the technicians to a different priority. We learned to get buy-in at the top so that relationship cascades to the rest of the institution.” The exchange has been two-way. Latin American and African experts have traveled across the Atlantic to share lessons with each other on issues such as monetizing ecosystem services.

For the World Resources Institute, Initiative 20x20 has been transformative. “WRI is an organization that aims to be driven by science. But to accomplish the level of impact that it has through 20x20 needs people,” says Luciana Gallardo Lomeli. “The science gave us credibility, but the passion and commitment of our team made the impact possible.”

“Initiative 20x20 has taught me that when we work together we are more powerful,” says Alejandra Laina, who agrees with Luciana’s emphasis on people. “We can achieve more. When we share a common goal, economic, political, technical and territorial differences don’t matter.”

“It has been a great experience for me personally because I’m Latin American, Guatemalan,” says Rene Zamora. “My country was part of the initiative from the very beginning, and the Initiative has been a way for me to give something back.”



International Course on Landscape Restoration, Costa Rica 2016

The work of Initiative 20x20 is far from over. “Unfortunately there’s continuous pressure of degradation and deforestation in Latin America’s ecosystems,” warns Luciana. “This is from agriculture, from climate change, from wildfires. And with these pressures there’s always a need to expand the scale of Initiative 20x20. If we as a society do not learn how to live with nature in a way that preserves the functioning of ecosystems, then we stand to lose our livelihoods, our connection to nature, and our very resilience,” she warns.



The WRI Restoration and Initiative 20x20 team the Initiative 20x20 Annual Partners Meeting, 2018

Stories That Changed the World is a look back at some of World Resources Institute’s most challenging, impactful and inspiring initiatives of our 40+ year history.

You can learn more at wri.org/stories-changed-world



WORLD
RESOURCES
INSTITUTE

10 G STREET NE
SUITE 800
WASHINGTON, DC 20002, USA
+1 (202) 729-7600

Africa | Brazil | China | Colombia | Europe | India | Indonesia | Mexico | United States

WRI.org