

BOTANIC GARDENS JOIN FORCES TO RESTORE ECOSYSTEMS

A global research initiative aimed at restoring damaged or destroyed ecosystems, the Ecological Restoration Alliance, was launched last month (23 May).

The alliance brings together ten botanic gardens from across the world, and will be coordinated by Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), based in the United Kingdom.

The research initiative will draw on the rich expertise within the alliance, said Joan Walmsley, BGCI's chair, during the launch ceremony in London, United Kingdom.

Over the next 20 years, 100 restoration projects will be implemented on six continents, in ecosystems including wetlands, tropical forests, and wild places within cities.

BGCI records key activities undertaken by botanic gardens, particularly those engaged in ecological restoration work. BGCI's global database, GardenSearch, includes information on over 2,000 botanic gardens.

We are using this information to plan [conservation initiatives] in the 100 sites.

The projects must involve local communities, have secure land tenure, be based on sound science and use appropriate local species, Sara Oldfield, BGCI's secretary general, told *SciDev.Net*. Some projects have been selected and we will finalise the list in the next few months.

Andrew Vovides, manager of the Francisco Javier Clavijero Botanic Garden (an inaugural alliance member) at the Mexican Ecology Institute (INECOL) in Veracruz, Mexico, said the key priority for ecosystem restoration in Mexico was the cloud forest which is one of the world's most threatened habitats, and one of the alliance's 100 projects.

Vovides told *SciDev.Net* that the main aims of the cloud forest restoration project run by the initiative were to stop forest felling; to invest in ecosystem restoration projects of damaged but not completely devastated areas; to create alliances among renowned ecologists and botanic gardens within the country; and to create a horticulture training project to develop human resources.

Restoration experts would develop practices for germinating and growing wild species in nurseries, so that eventually disturbed forests could recover, Vovides said.

Other alliance members include botanic gardens in Kenya and Brazil, and it is likely that gardens in China, Venezuela and South Africa may soon join.

Developing countries are rich in biodiversity and there is still time to stop the destruction of the environment in the name of harmful 'development' for short-term gains, said Vovides.

BGCI's Sara Oldfield said: We have to acknowledge that restoring natural capital will involve social, economic and ecological factors.

Core funding will come from the gardens' funds, said Oldfield, but the initiative is also seeking new funding from the private sector, government sources and foundations.

The alliance was launched in response to a UN goal to restore at least 15 per cent of the world's damaged ecosystem, by 2020. Oldfield said: The UN has set a clear target for ecological restoration and we need to act now.

Source: <http://www.scidev.net/global/biodiversity/news/botanic-gardens-join-forces-to-restore-ecosystems.html>