Our oceans cover three quarters of the world’s surface area, we depend on them to sustain our economies, regulate our climate, and they are a habitat for diverse marine biodiversity.

Coastal and marine ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reefs, tidal flats and sea grass meadows sustain coastal communities, providing food, shelter and livelihoods. They support a dazzling array of biodiversity and they play a critical role in the context of climate change: they mitigate disasters, as they protect coasts from flooding and extreme weather events; and they serve as highly efficient storage of carbon. This is why they are known as blue carbon ecosystems.

Mangroves, for example, store 3 to 5 times more carbon per unit area than other tropical forests. Seagrass meadows, which are found in nearly all coastal waters around the globe, occupy less than 0.2% of the world's ocean but bury around 10% of the total estimated organic carbon sequestered in the ocean.

Coral reefs, “rainforests of the sea”, are home to a quarter of all marine species. A huge variety of fish, birds, invertebrates, and other species use coastal wetlands such as mangroves as nurseries, for shelter, and to feed, breed, and rest during migrations. These areas often stimulate economic benefits through fisheries and tourism.

Despite all these invaluable services that coral reefs, mangroves and other coastal wetlands provide, 75% of the world’s coral reefs are at risk, and 10% are already damaged beyond repair. Mangroves covers have declined 20% in last 25 years due mainly to conversion and coastal development and 67% of global mangroves have been lost in the past century.

To reverse this damage and loss we need to take decisive measures to conserve their biodiversity and to reflect the role of ecosystem conservation and restoration as part of nature based solutions to climate change and disaster risk reduction. There are more and more countries making strides in understanding the value of coastal wetlands and integrating that worth into climate change mitigation and adaptation policies—important steps toward protecting the natural and economic services these ecosystems provide for biodiversity and human well-being.
Several governments are already including coastal wetlands as part of their climate commitments to the Paris Agreement, that is, their Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs. For example, in Belize and Costa Rica, efforts are ongoing to estimate the carbon stocks in the nation’s extensive mangroves. This information will help inform both Belize’s and Costa Rica’s next NDCs so coastal wetlands can be protected for their mitigation value.

Spain is leading an ambitious and innovative initiative to quantify blue carbon seagrass meadows and marshes in Andalusia and conserve and restore these coastal habitats to mitigate climate change.

The mangrove reforestation project in southern Senegal has become one of the largest of its kind in the world. 152 million mangrove buds were planted in the Casamance region, in the Sine Saloum Delta over the past decade.

This year Seychelles committed to increasing its marine protection from just 0.04 percent of to a full 30 percent by 2020. Now, 410,000 square kilometres, an area larger than Germany — will be fully or significantly safeguarded to conserve their biodiversity, encourage sustainable development and to adapt to the effects of climate change.

As more countries recognize the value of coastal ecosystems and commit to their protection and conservation, it is critical to use existing instruments for their management and restoration more effectively avoiding duplication and joining efforts for multiple benefits. This includes the biodiversity-related conventions such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. 170 Contracting Parties are working for the conservation of coastal and marine ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reefs, tidal flats and sea grasses. So far, Contracting Parties have designated over 2,391 Wetlands of International Importance worldwide, including 953 that contain coastal or marine areas, covering over 68 million hectares.

We all must recognize how nature solutions can help us to rebuild a healthy home. Let’s keep the momentum and step up the level of action to reach the ambition of protecting 30% of our blue planet for the extraordinary values they bring to our lives. Let’s reconnect to nature today and build back better - green and blue.

Source URL: