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المؤتمر العربي الثالث للأراضي  
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## Reimagining Sustainable Returns on Investments

Investment pathways for ecosystem restoration in the Near East and North Africa region

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# Business as usual: Snapshot of the regional “poly-crisis”

### 01 Sustainable Development Goals

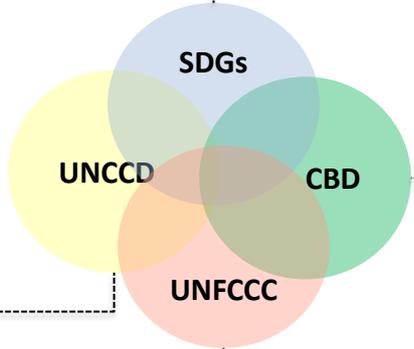


- **Food Security and Trade:** 76% rise in undernourishment since 2000; regional trade integration at only 15%.
- **Water Scarcity:** Per capita water availability is 10% of global average; 66% decline over 40 years.
- **Conflict and Displacement:** The region accounts for 41% of global internally displaced persons; in 2023, 1/3 of displacements were climate-related.
- **Unemployment:** Highest global youth unemployment, 75% for women, limited land and water access.

### 02 Land degradation



- > **90% of NENA’s total land area** affected by degradation and desertification
- > **45% of agricultural land severely degraded**, projected to reach 70% by 2025
- > **Land degradation impacts over 400 million people**, causing USD 13 billion in annual GDP losses
- > **Drivers of land degradation are exacerbated by biodiversity loss and climate change impacts**, creating a vicious cycle.



### 03 Biodiversity loss



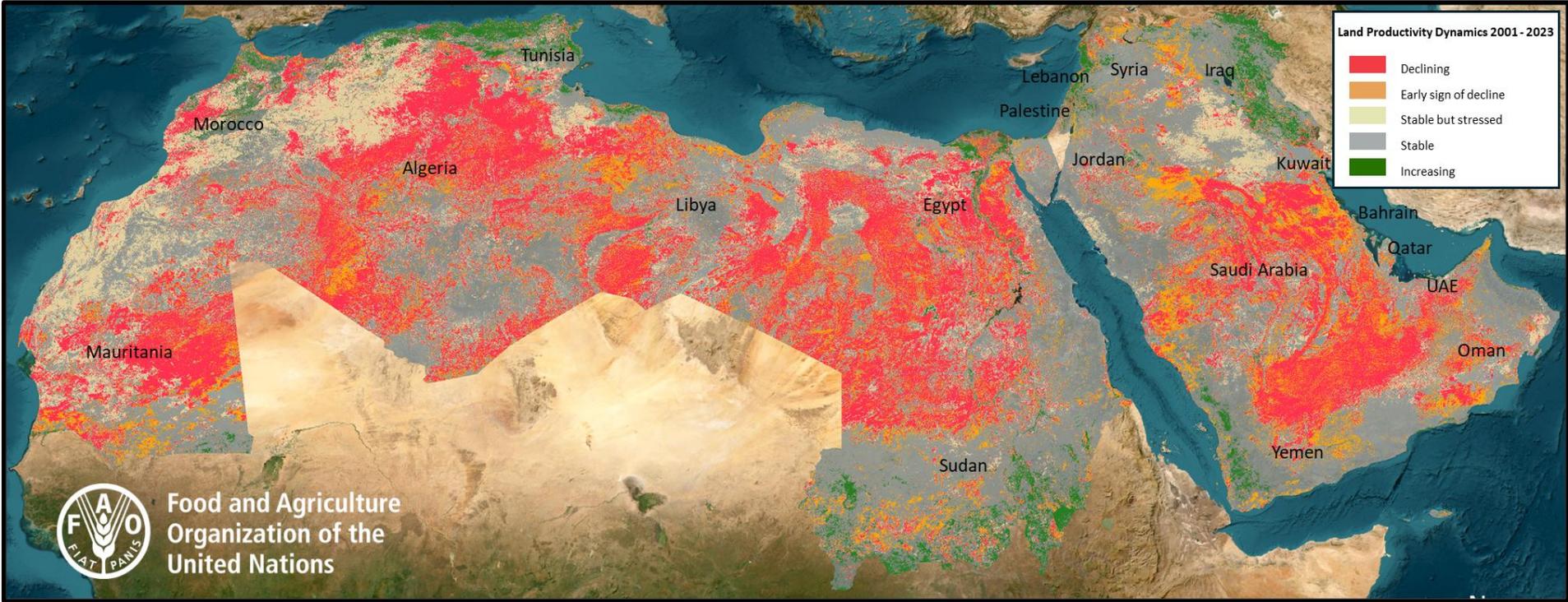
- > **12.5% loss of forest cover and 16.9% decrease in wooded areas** since 1990, leading to a decline in biodiversity
- > **69% global decline in animal populations** since 1970; 46,000 species at risk, including nearly 3,000 in NENA
- > **Biodiversity loss linked to declining agricultural productivity** and increased susceptibility to land degradation and desertification

### 04 Climate change impacts



- > **Prolonged droughts and wildfire risks** creating a self-reinforcing cycle of land degradation and vulnerability
- > **Rainfall expected to drop by 20%** by 2050 in agricultural areas, worsening water scarcity and land degradation

# Dynamics of land productivity in the region



## The Good News - Opportunities

Promoting sustainable development requires an **ecosystem-friendly approach**.

**Collaboration across thematic silos** is essential to transform "business as usual."

**Ecosystem restoration offers high returns**, with up to \$20 gained for every \$1 invested.

**Best practices are emerging globally**, involving public and private partners aligned with the Rio Conventions and SDGs.



## And The Bad - Challenges

**Only 4% of land in the region is designated for restoration**—the lowest globally.

**Lack of incentives** for adopting a common language and shared metrics.

**This limits efforts to address the root causes** driving the interconnected challenges.

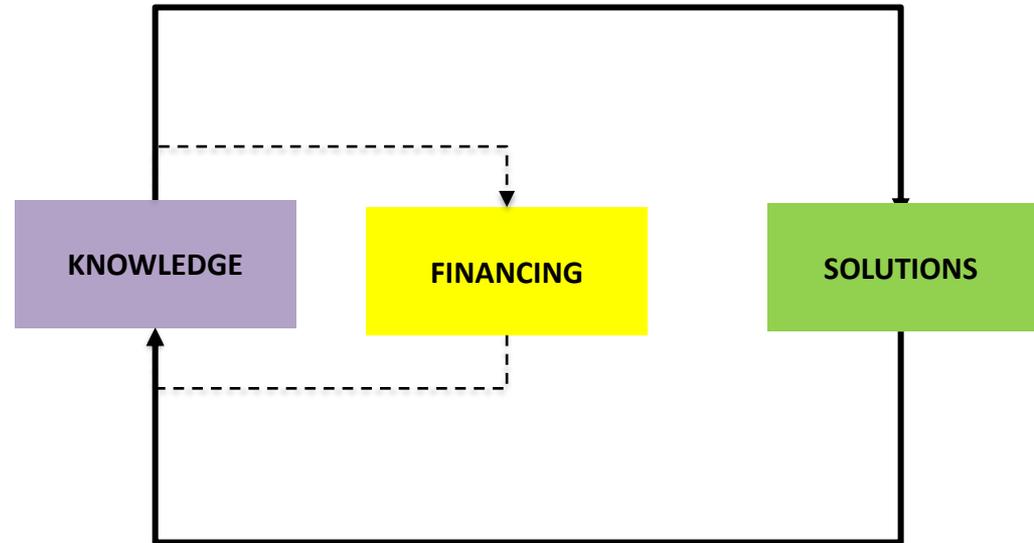


# Snapshot of the rationale and objectives of the Regional Investment Framework for development and ecosystem restoration solutions

**Partners:** FAO, UNCCD, UNEP, ESCWA, the League of Arab States (LAS)

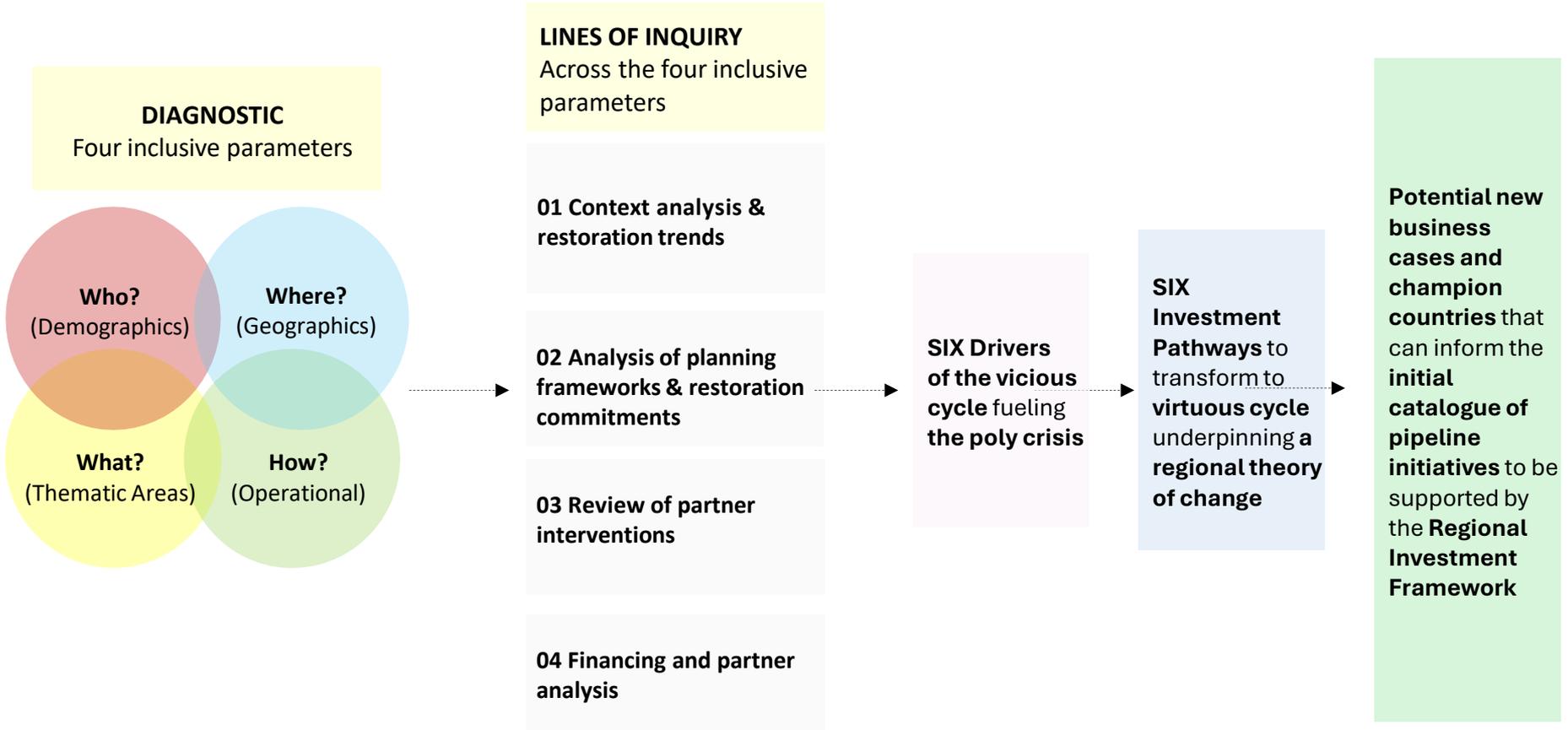
**Objective 1:** Promote ecosystem restoration models with socio-economic benefits, aligned with the Rio Conventions and key SDGs (13, 15 and 17).

**Objective 2:** Build partnerships to innovate financing, knowledge-sharing, pilot integrated solutions, and develop a regional framework for supporting national priorities in development and restoration.

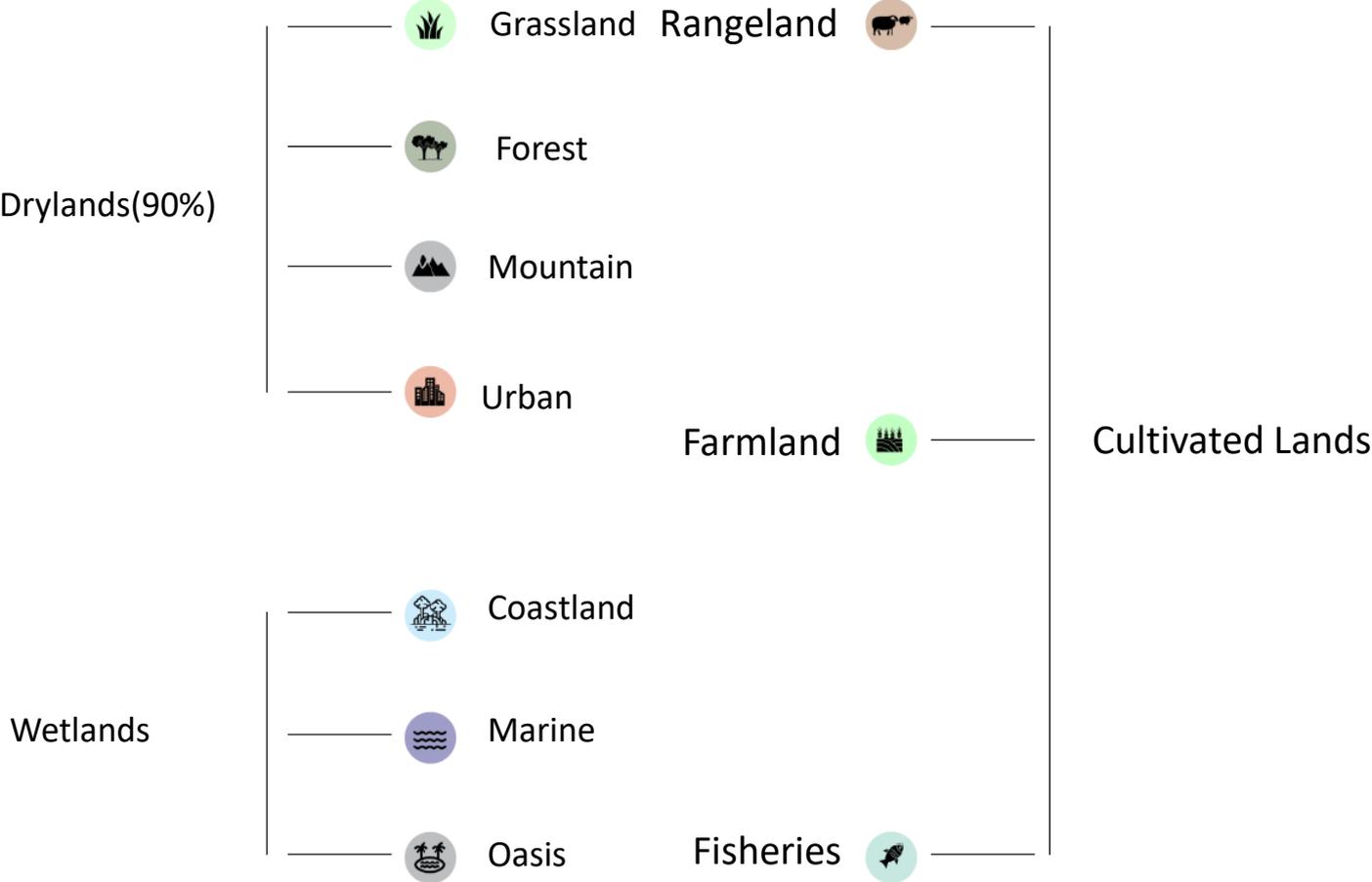


**Figure 1:** The Innovative Business Case: **The Virtuous Cycle** of Knowledge & Financing Flows in the Regional Ecosystem & Development Portfolio

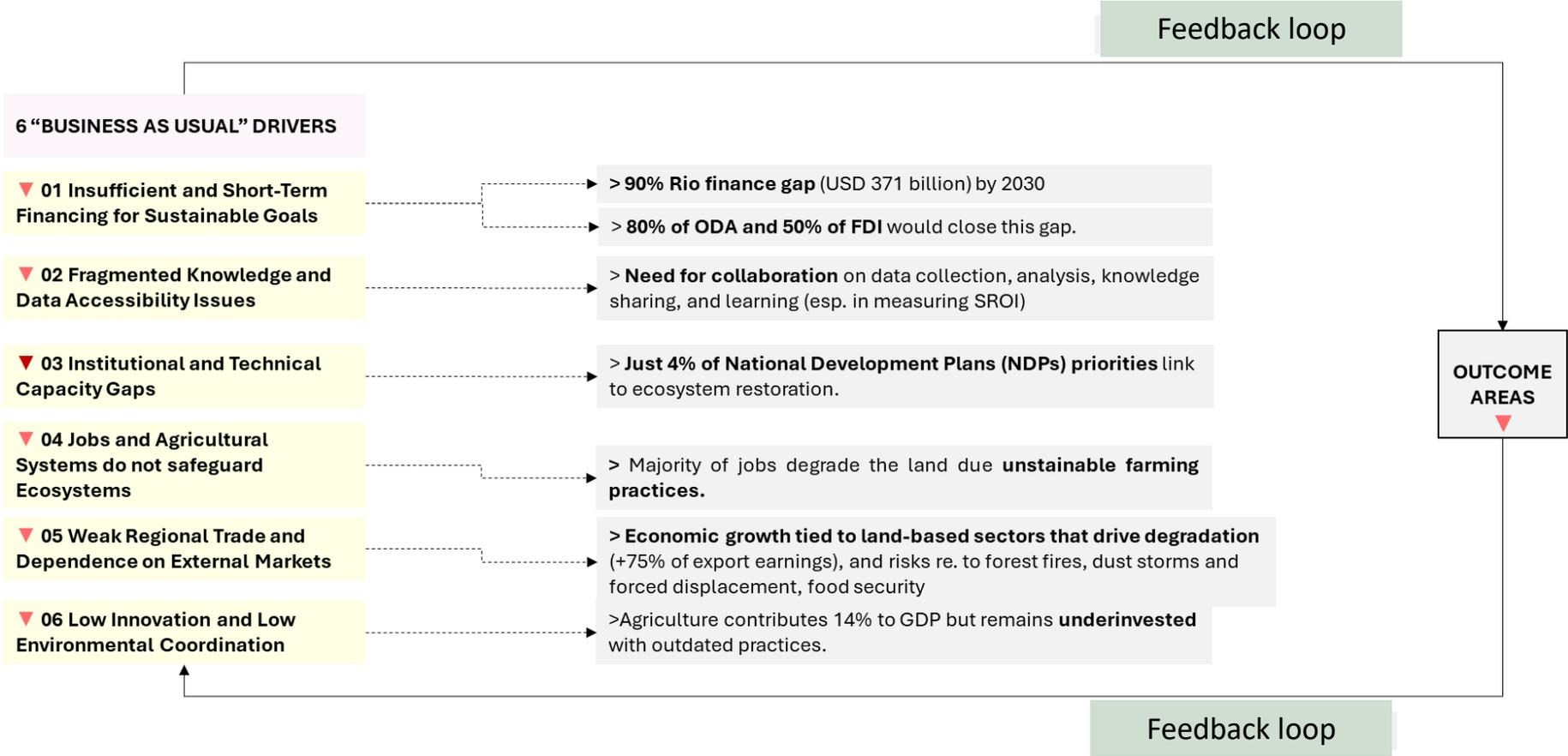
# Methodology: 4 inclusive parameters, 4 lines of inquiry, 6 investment pathways



# The Main Regional Ecosystems

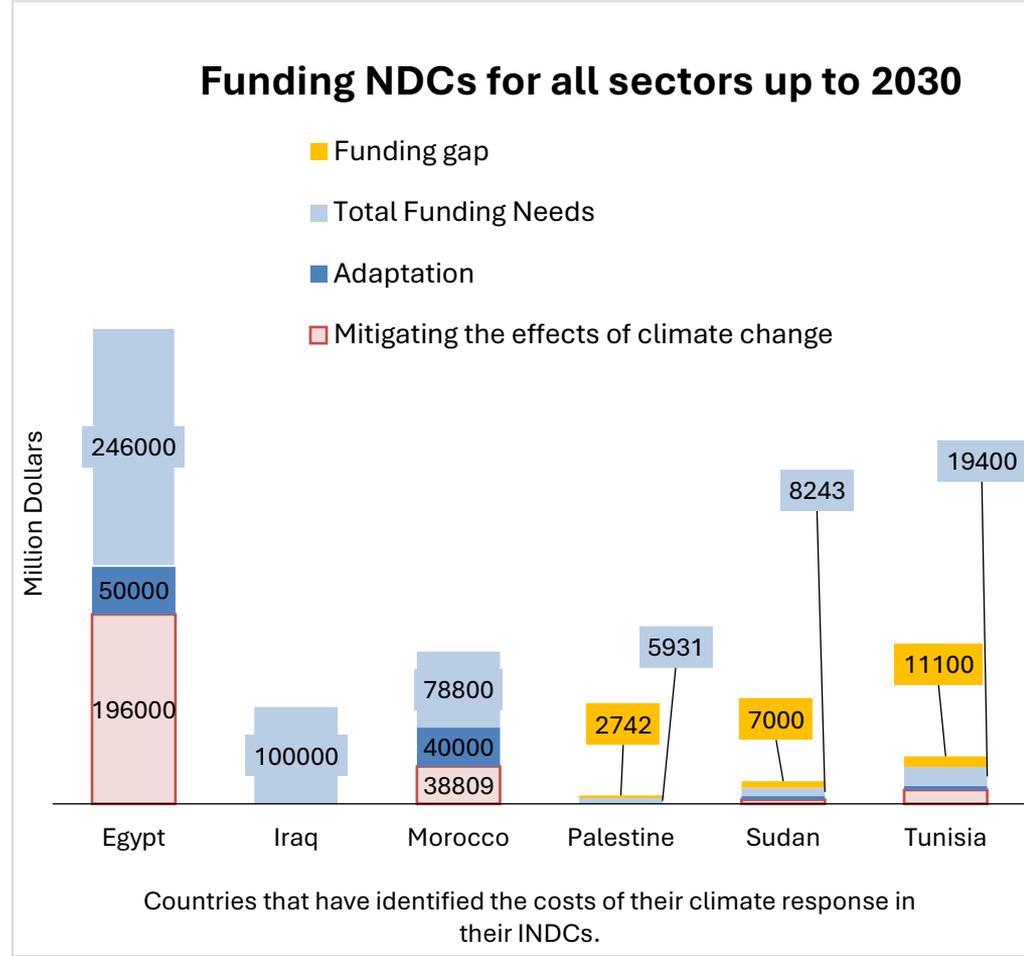


# The 6 Drivers of The Vicious Cycle

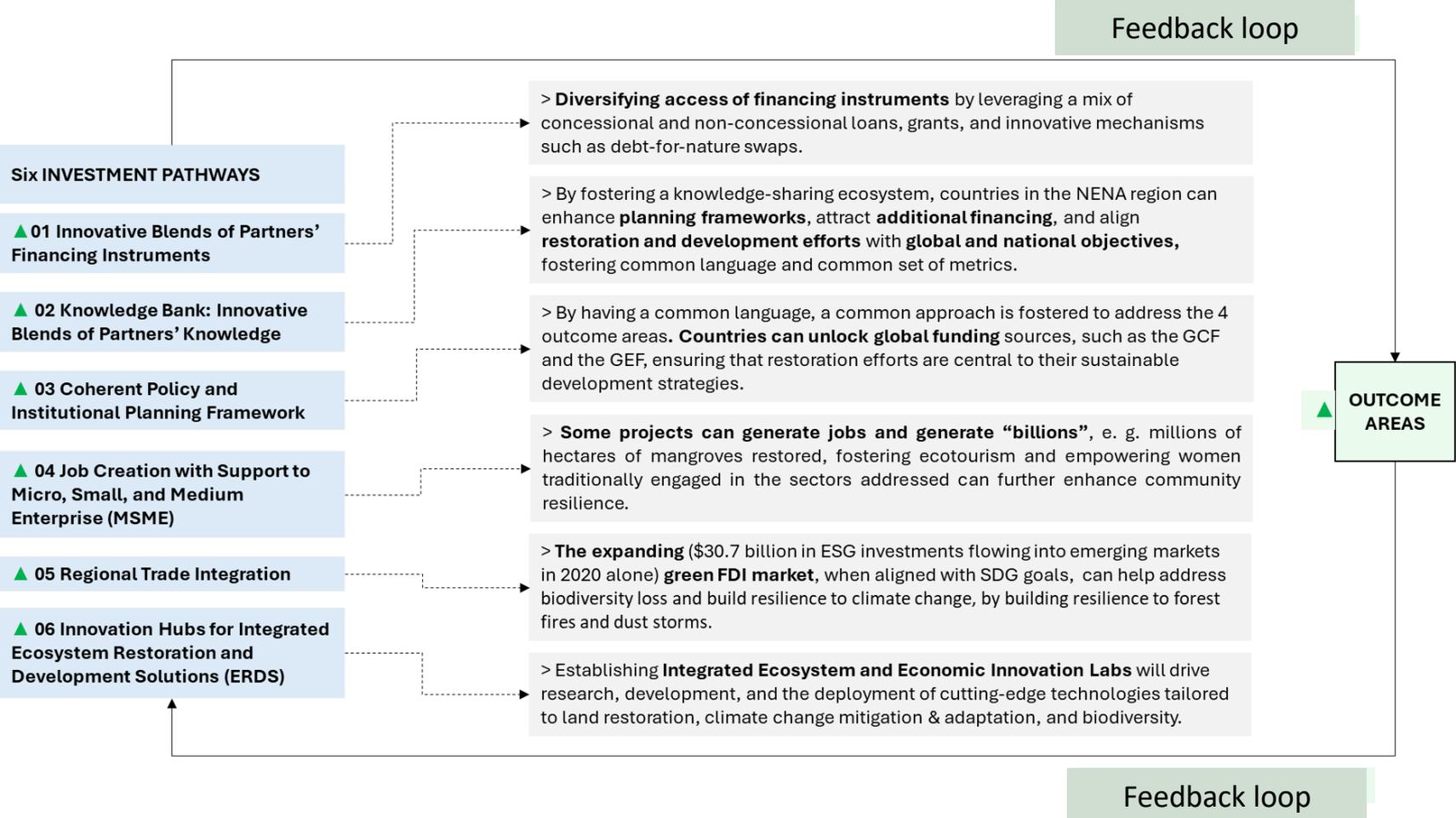


# The Climate Finance Gap in the Middle East and North Africa

- MENA receives only 6.6% of global climate finance
- \$24.4 billion received (1992–2023), among the lowest globally
- Climate finance is 20x below the region's NDC-identified needs
- Just 10% of ODA; while the region needs \$22 billion annually in Rio funding, with a current gap of 90%



# The 6 investment Pathways of the Virtuous Cycle



# Selection Criteria for the Business Cases

7 parameters used to identify these business cases

## Outcome Area

Alignment with key areas such as land degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change mitigation/adaptation, and sustainable development goals

## Ecosystem Restoration Type

Focus on NENA specific ecosystems, within the larger groupings of drylands and wetlands

## SROI

Assessment of sustainable returns on investment that show the co-benefits between the 3 Rios and SDG goals

## Budget/Financing Envelope

Total budget and funding breakdown

## Partners

national governments, regional organizations, bilateral donors, development financing institutions, UN agencies, private sector, philanthropies, media, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, academia, research, training institutions

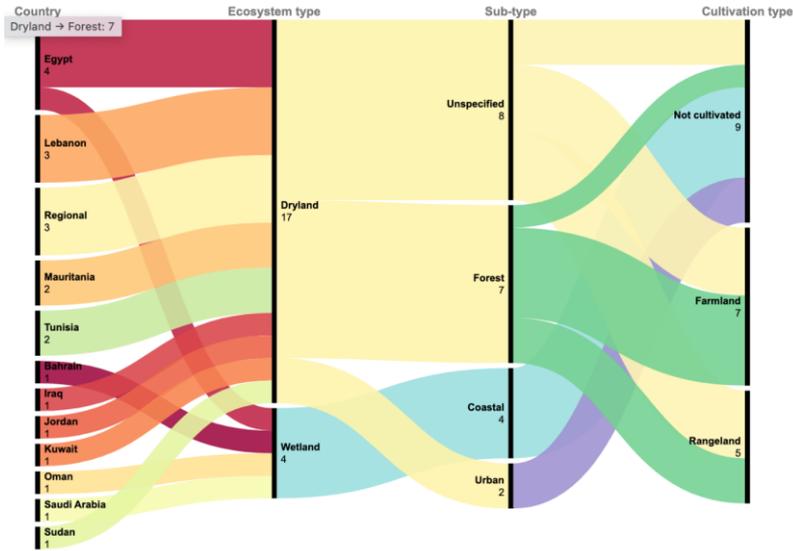
## Type of Financing Combination

Grants, concessional and non-concessional loans, private sector investments, blended finance, government contribution, debt-for-nature swaps, blue/green bonds, carbon credits

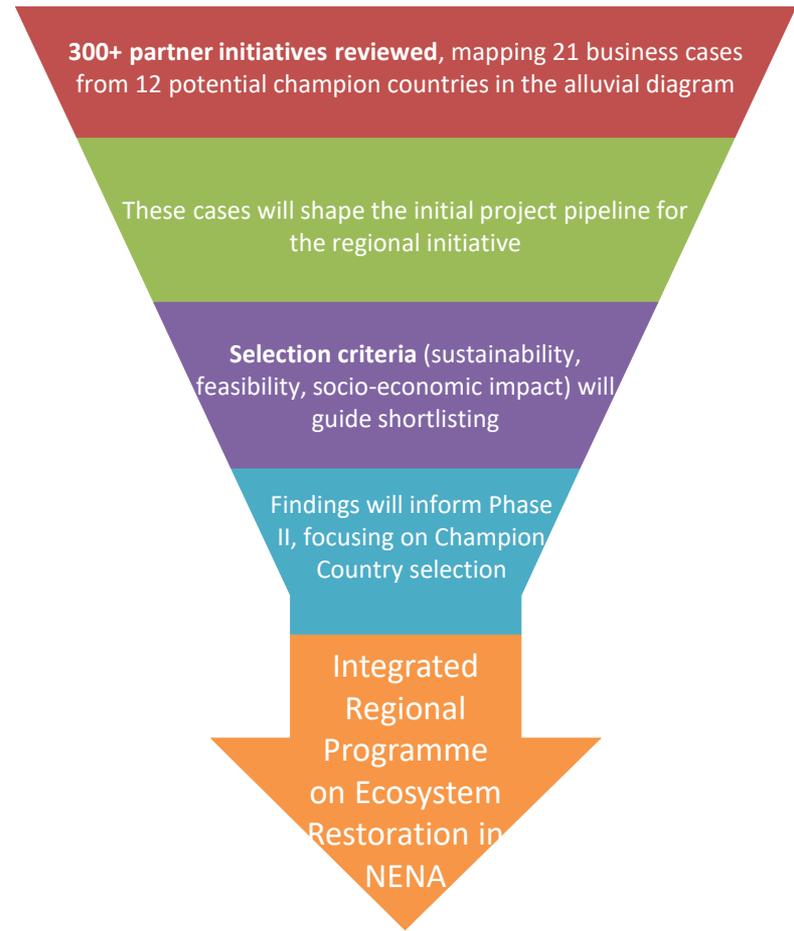
## Investment Pathway Combination

Integration of one or more of the six investment pathways to achieve sustainable returns on investment across the four interdependent outcome areas

# Business Cases Overview



**Figure:** Selected business cases promoting integrated ecosystem restoration and economic solutions, mapped against types of ecosystems targeted



# Spotlight of Selected Business Cases

## Egypt

**Project:** [SEKEM Wahat Greening the Desert Project](#)

**Timeline:** 2012 - ongoing

**Sustainable Returns on Investment (SROI):** The project restored 315 ha of desert land, aims to reclaim 1,000ha for carbon-negative status using biodynamic techniques, creating substantial local employment in land reclamation, compost production, and sustainable agriculture.

**Ecosystem restoration type:** dryland, farmland, directly targets restoration

**Financing Partners:** SEKEM, specific financial contributions are not disclosed

**Implementing Partners:** SEKEM, local communities, technical experts, and international supporters

**Financing Instruments:** (e) Blended Finance = crowdfunding and carbon credit initiatives

## Tunisia

**Project:** [Tunisia Oases Ecosystems and Livelihoods Project \(TOELP\)](#)

**Timeline:** 2014-2019

**Sustainable Returns on Investment (SROI):**

- Aimed to implement the Oasis Participatory Development Plan across 6 oases.
- Created approximately 550 jobs, including 170 permanent positions, with 80% of beneficiaries being youth.
- Implemented SLM on 700 ha, directly benefiting 23,257 people.
- Reintroduced 83% of 30 local species into the oases.
- Links to the "MENA Desert Ecosystems and Livelihoods Program", a World Bank/GEF partnership, also "establishing collaboration" with the "Water Sector Investment Project".

**Ecosystem Restoration type:** dryland, farmland, directly targets restoration

**Financing Envelope:** USD 6.34M

**Financing Partners:** Global Environment Facility (GEF), Government of Tunisia

**Implementing Partners:** General Directorate for Environment and Quality of Life (DGEQV) under the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture, the World Bank (supervising partner)

**Financing Instruments:** Blended Finance = Grants + National Government Contributions

## Iraq

**Project:** [Sustainable Land Management \(SLM\) and Conservation Agriculture \(CA\) for Improved Livelihoods in Degraded Marshland Ecosystems of Iraq](#)

**Timeline:** Jan 2020 – Jan 2026

**Sustainable Returns of Investment (SROI):** 6,000 hectares of degraded agricultural lands to be restored and 4,000 hectares of wetlands to be restored. It is anticipated that more than 2,500 smallholders (1,250 men/1,250 women) will directly benefit from the GEF investment.

**Ecosystem restoration type:** dryland, farmland, directly targets restoration; wetland (marshland)

**Financing Envelope:** USD 21,200,000

**Financing Partners:** GEF Grant and various co-financing partners

**Implementing Partners:** FAO, Ministry of Environment, Iraq, Local Project Implementation Units (LPIUs) in Dhi Qar and Muthanna Governorates, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Water Resources

**Financing Instruments:** (e) Blended Finance + (b) Grants + (d) National Government Contributions

## Saudi Arabia

**Project:** [Blue Forest and NetZero Mangrove Reforestation Project in Saudi Arabia](#)

**Timeframe:** 2021 – Ongoing

**Ecosystem Restoration Type:** wetland (coastal), directly targets restoration

**Sustainable Returns on Investment (SROI):**

- To restore 5,000 ha of mangroves and plant 50 million trees over three years, supporting carbon reduction through blue carbon credits and aiding global climate efforts.
- To provide emission offset opportunities for companies, integrating environmental restoration with business sustainability.

**Financing Partners:** Blue Forest and NetZero

**Implementing Partners:** Blue Forest (UAE-based) and NetZero (Saudi Arabia-based subsidiary Nabatik)

**Type of Financing Combination:** (c) Private Sector Finance

# Integrated Regional Programme on Ecosystem Restoration in NENA

The project will aim to:

- Promote effective implementation of restoration initiatives at country level by **adopting best practices and fostering participatory approaches**
- **Build national capacities** on implementation of restoration activities and normative tools
- Enhance **knowledge sharing** and support **awareness initiatives** on ecosystem degradation issues



WORKING DRAFT

## Regional Ecosystem Restoration and Development Solutions Explainer

Reimagining sustainable returns on investment for planet and people outcomes – the business case for an integrated approach to ecosystem restoration and development solutions.

Partners: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESWCA), League of Arab States



**Regional call: The Investment Framework for Integrated Development and Ecosystem Restoration Solutions**

**RESTORATION: BEYOND FINANCING**

- Increasing funding alone cannot resolve the challenge of ecosystem restoration. Fine-tuning financing regimes needs to go in tandem with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the UN Decade on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) to ensure that investments are effective, resilient, and sustainable. This challenge is particularly acute in the MENA region, where land cover is highly degraded and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the UN Decade on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) are critical to addressing the region's environmental and economic challenges.
- Restoring 60 percent of UNCCD Development Assistance (UNCCD-DA) and 50 percent of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) – UNCCD-DA and FDI – would increase the region's resilience and sustainable economic growth. This challenge is particularly acute in the MENA region, where land cover is highly degraded and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the UN Decade on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) are critical to addressing the region's environmental and economic challenges.
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# Proposal Regional Initiative on Ecosystem Restoration in NENA (TBC with Countries)

**IMPACT** :Reversing Ecosystem Degradation and Enhancing Resilience and Livelihoods through Restoration Actions

## OUTCOME

1. Ecosystem degradation reversed

2. Strengthened institutional and policy and frameworks for ecosystem restoration

3. Strengthened regional collaboration for ecosystem restoration

4. Enhanced knowledge and awareness on Ecosystem Restoration

## OUTPUT

1.1 Degraded ecosystems restored following participatory approaches

1.2 Enhanced participation of local communities through participatory approaches

2.1 National institutional and policy framework pertaining to ecosystem restoration strengthened

2.2 Technical capacities of staff from key institutions on tools and methodologies related to ecosystem restoration strengthened

3.1 Regional cooperation mechanisms established for knowledge exchange

4.1 Knowledge-sharing initiatives and awareness campaigns on the importance of restoration implemented

## ACTIVITIES

1.1.1 Conduct **baseline assessments** on land degradation and SLM

1.2.1 Conduct **gender and youth** focused trainings on restoration practices

1.2.2 Organize **community-based consultations** and awareness campaigns

2.1.1 Conduct **policy review and gap analysis**

2.1.2 **National policy dialogues** organized to translate strategies into tangible work

2.2.1 Implement **technical training sessions** for documenting best practices (FERM)

3.1.1 **Regional experience sharing** through events and workshops

3.1.2 **Leverage existing regional south-south platforms** (e.g KHEBRA) to facilitate regional collaboration

4.1.1 **Awareness-raising campaigns** on the significance of ecosystem restoration implemented at national level

# THANK YOU!

For more information contact:  
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