San salvador climate change

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The updated NDC presents climate change adaptation measures for the Agriculture, ...

Coffee farmer Hector Velasquez, whose land sits on the exposed slopes of San Salvador Volcano, overlooking the city, was among those in the storm"s path. Over three days, the storm dumped 2m of rain on his farm, sparking a landslide that wiped out an area of around 3,000m2.

When Velasquez was a child, rainfall in San Salvador was mostly a continuous-but-light drizzle spread across eight months. The soil had time to absorb the water. But, in recent years, climate change has made extreme storms more common in El Salvador.

They are especially devastating around the capital, where rampant construction and road paving have created a concrete barrier that prevents rainfall from being absorbed into the ground.

But a movement is underway to change that. City officials and coffee farmers, with support from UNEP, havelaunched a projectto restore 1,150 hectares of forests and coffee plantations. The goal: revive San Salvador"s ability to absorb rainfall.

In San Salvador, floods and landslides are washing away valuable topsoil, and with it the fertility of the coffee plantations. "The soil, forus farmers,is the wealth of our farm," says Velasquez. "If we don"t have it, we don"t produce."

Before a decline in production over the last 10 years, coffee had been vital for El Salvador"s economy, employing around 150,000 people in 2012. Areportby the International Food Policy Research Institute estimates that by 2050, climate change could hit El Salvador"s coffee sector more than any other country in the world.

Enter the forest and coffee farm restoration project. Known asCityAdapt, it is premised on a simple fact. When vegetation is replaced with concrete, the ground loses its permeability. But trees and other vegetation can be used as sponges, drawing enormous quantities of water into the earth, preventing erosion, limiting floods and recharging groundwater supplies for times of drought.

The term "sponge city" is used to describe an urban area that is creating green spaces to tackle flooding. Cities around the world, fromBerlintoWuhan,are now pursuing this innovative strategy. The use of nature-based solutions for adapting to climate change is known asecosystem-based adaptation.

"Ecosystem-based adaptation is a proven strategy in both cities and rural areas," says Jessica Troni, Head of the Climate Change Adaptation Unit at UNEP. "UNEP is helping governments around the world to build

climate resilience with over 45 ecosystem-based adaptation projects, and in the process, over 113,000 hectares of ecosystems are being restored."

CityAdapt, which is funded by theGlobal Environment Facility, has helped around 16,000 people in San Salvador to reduce their risk of flooding. By the project"s completion in 2022, this number was expected to rise to 115,000.

Leyla Zelaya, CityAdapt"s National Coordinator for El Salvador, says 3,514fruit trees have been planted during the reforestation process to provide extra resources to local communities. The project is also active inXalapa,Mexico, andKingston,Jamaica.

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