

40 years of the climate and biodiversity conventions



Dr. José Romero

IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) | Head of Synthesis Report Technical Support Unit | Villars-sur-Glâne | Switzerland | stoxos@bluewin.ch

We are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the adoption of two global conventions, the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* and the *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*. Their goal, namely, to minimise the anthropogenic influence on climate and on biodiversity, is more current than ever: the global average temperature continues to rise and biodiversity continues to decline.

Since the Rio *Earth Summit*, a new global economic, social and political situation has developed. In addition to the historic debt of the industrialised countries regarding greenhouse gas emissions and resource consumption, the emerging countries are now also responsible for relevant shares of these. And greater coherence is expected between the political and environmental sectors, particularly concerning climate and biodiversity, thanks to the adoption of the *Sustainable Development Goals* in 2015.

The general objectives of the two conventions have been specified in protocols such as the *Paris Agreement* for climate and the *Cartagena Protocol* for biodiversity. Their implementation, as well as the scientific research that accompanies them, has led to collective progress in understanding natural, social, economic and political mechanisms. For example, today we know more about the interactions between climate change and biodiversity loss, and also about the role of consumers in environmental protection.

Science-policy interface platforms have facilitated progress in the transmission of scientific knowledge to decision-makers. Examples include the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which assesses scientific knowledge on climate change, and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for biodiversity. Both bodies provide politically relevant questions but non-prescriptive answers. The final word goes to policymakers who decide on the basis of the scientific information.

Science plays a major role in these processes. It detects problems, identifies causes (including anthropogenic ones) and evaluates options for policy action. I believe that the current model of a productive dialogue between politics and science has proved its worth and can still be improved. Efficiency and respect for democratic principles require everyone to play their part in the science-policy dialogue to find solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss.

There are scientists who feel that politics is not doing enough, or acting fast enough, and they are right. Some of them are getting desperate and taking civil disobedience action. It is, however, not certain that society would be better off if a techno-scientific oligarchy replaced the current democratic governance. Strengthening democracy and taking science into account will contribute to sustainable development. The IPCC and IPBES demonstrate the value of science-policy interface platforms. They need to be further developed and the model extended to other sectors such as health, as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic when a reliable assessment of scientific information was often lacking.

José Romero

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