



**Infinity War or a just transition?  
Joining forces for achieving Sustainable Development Goals  
(SDGs) climate change and biodiversity targets**

**21 June 2018 – European Parliament, Brussels**

This event was hosted by **MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos**, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development”, and brought together representatives from policy, industry and civil society, to engage in an informed debate on the topic of land degradation and restoration, following the presentation of the IPBES assessment by **Professor Bob Scholes**, IPCC and IPBES author.

The panel also included:

- **MEP Jytte Guteland**
- **Gary Lewis, UN Environment Director a.i., Programme and Policy Division**
- **Patrick Child, DG RTD – Research & Innovation Deputy Director-General for Resources, Energy, Climate Action and Resource Efficiency, European Commission**
- **Humberto Delgado Rosa, DG ENV Natural Capital Director, European Commission**
- **Alain-Dominique Quintart, Syngenta Head of Government & Public Affairs EAME**
- **Luc Bas, IUCN European Regional Office Director**



**MEP Serrão Santos** opened the conference, reminding the key challenges of the Anthropocene era we are currently living in. “The human species has a significant force; it has changed ecosystems and crossed many boundaries. Global warming is nowadays not only affecting the ecosystems, it also has a huge impact on the livelihoods of people”. Specifically, human-induced climate change causes migration. In addition to the above, people are suffering from the degradation of our planet, which is the reason why this subject needs to be urgently addressed, according to Mr. Serrão Santos.

After that, **MEP Jytte Guteland** mentioned the importance of tackling climate change and protecting not only the environment and ecosystems, but also people. Although climate and energy targets have been well-addressed since the Paris Agreement, they are still not ambitious enough. While the member states and Council of the EU tend to be more conservative than the European Parliament, aiming higher should be a shared responsibility. Moreover, from Ms. Guteland's point of view, forests are of significant importance, as "sustainable forest management is one of the key tools to deliver on global challenges such as climate, energy and societal needs".

In his introduction, **Gary Lewis** from UN Environment reminded the audience that the environmental status of the Earth is a result of choices made. "The defining story of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the race between the cumulative impact of our carbon emissions and our belated but accelerating efforts to replace fossil fuels with clean renewable energy". According to Mr. Lewis, environmental challenges will increase and induce migration. Stressing out the importance of common efforts, Mr. Lewis, underlined that "this can be made with good leadership and innovative ideas". Communication has also a major role to play, considering the co-operation needed between international, national, and local levels. "We have only achieved 30% of the Paris Agreement goals to stay below the 2°C limit. We also need to concentrate on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) considering the important role biodiversity has on ecosystems", Mr. Lewis mentioned.



During his intervention, **Professor Bob Scholes** presented the findings of the world's first [comprehensive evidence-based assessment of land degradation and restoration](#), adopted by 129 Member countries at the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). According to Professor Scholes, land degradation occurs in every ecosystem

all over the planet, but it can take different forms; consequently needing several indicators. "Land degradation is an on-going, accelerating problem". The report shows that restoration is possible, even if rehabilitation is still not easily feasible. "The impact on climate is already visible, as reversing this situation should be a priority". While the cost of land degradation represents 10% of annual global gross product, it has a link with biodiversity loss, as the major drivers of the latter are degradation and fragmentation of habitat. Land degradation is one of the key drivers of climate change and addressing this issue could help achieve more than a third of all SDGs, many of which are highly dependent on land degradation, according to Professor Scholes. Land degradation is also linked with a persistent loss of productivity,

services and biodiversity. To improve this situation, we need to promote land restoration and increase the monitoring efforts. All in all, we are facing a multi-scale problem that is in need of multi-scale interventions, while investing in restoration can be economically promising.

The first reaction from the panel was by DG RTD, European Commission. Welcoming the IPBES assessment, Mr. **Patrick Child** pointed out the importance of research and innovation in supporting an interdisciplinary way to address these issues. “Land degradation is undermining the well-being of 3.2 billion people and has a profound impact on migration. It induces high economic costs and a loss of GDP. We have to keep in mind the potential solutions, and don’t lose hope”. Achieving the SDGs is at the heart of the EU core goals, while research and innovation are vital in making progress in this area. This is also an opportunity where Horizon Europe can play a key role. For Mr. Child, addressing land degradation is finally linked with several SDGs and needs interdisciplinary cooperation, alongside a long-term commitment from the side of the EU.



**Humberto Delgado Rosa** from **DG ENV, European Commission**, reminded the audience that we are now the major driving force of climate change in the Anthropocene era. “SDGs must be approached as one, as the shifting to sustainability needs disruptive transformations. We cannot forget the issue of biodiversity loss, because it is linked to climate change and land degradation, which influence one another. We can not be sustainable if we keep disregarding nature”. The basis of land management was forgotten along the way, but has an impact on all species - not only human - as we can see with the disappearance of pollinators, according to Mr. Delgado Rosa. “Meaningful targets are very much needed, in order for EU to lead by example. The upcoming update of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, as well as the new EU Pollinators Initiative could be an opportunity for that”, as Mr. Delgado Rosa highlighted.

Representing Syngenta, Mr. **Alain-Dominique Quintart** pointed out the importance of agriculture in land degradation. “It is not logical to destroy the environment to provide food. The restoration concepts are very useful; we need to move towards multifunctional land management to preserve the environment, therefore protecting both land and agriculture”. From Mr. Quintart’s point of view, local knowledge is very important to better understand and resolve this challenge, while partnerships, like those developed through Syngenta’s public and measured contribution to the SDGs ([the Good Growth Plan](#)), remain the key to success, alongside the willingness to start tackling those issues at industry level.

Last but not least, IUCN European Regional Office Director **Luc Bas** underlined EU’s high responsibility. Land restoration can be an excellent starting action point, and can include

both climate change and biodiversity loss. “We also need to remember the over-consumption issue, being as important as the demographic growth issue“. Furthermore, Mr. Bas mentioned the need to also inspire politicians. The new CAP offers a great opportunity, however the European Commission’s proposal needs to be strengthened. All in all, the main message of IUCN was that we need to be more ambitious, and prioritize nature-based solutions. “Restoring degraded land will strengthen the ecosystems, increase biodiversity and simultaneously help to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Europe can bring ambitious restoration pledges to the Bonn Challenge to restore 350 million hectares globally by 2030“.

During the discussion with the audience, **Professor Scholes** replied that EU plays an important role on IPBES reports. “It is the translation of science that is the challenge“, as trans-disciplinary action is also needed. Moreover, the discussion with the audience raised the issue of a lack of communication and multi-scale treatment, reminding that the latter is an investment towards a healthy and safe environment. As land degradation has direct and indirect effects on conflicts and migration, the key word now is co-operation.

After summing up the discussions, **MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos** closed the meeting, thanking the speakers and the participants for their attendance, reminding that these discussions are excellent opportunities to start new, action-oriented debates.

[The presentations and meeting documents are available here.](#)