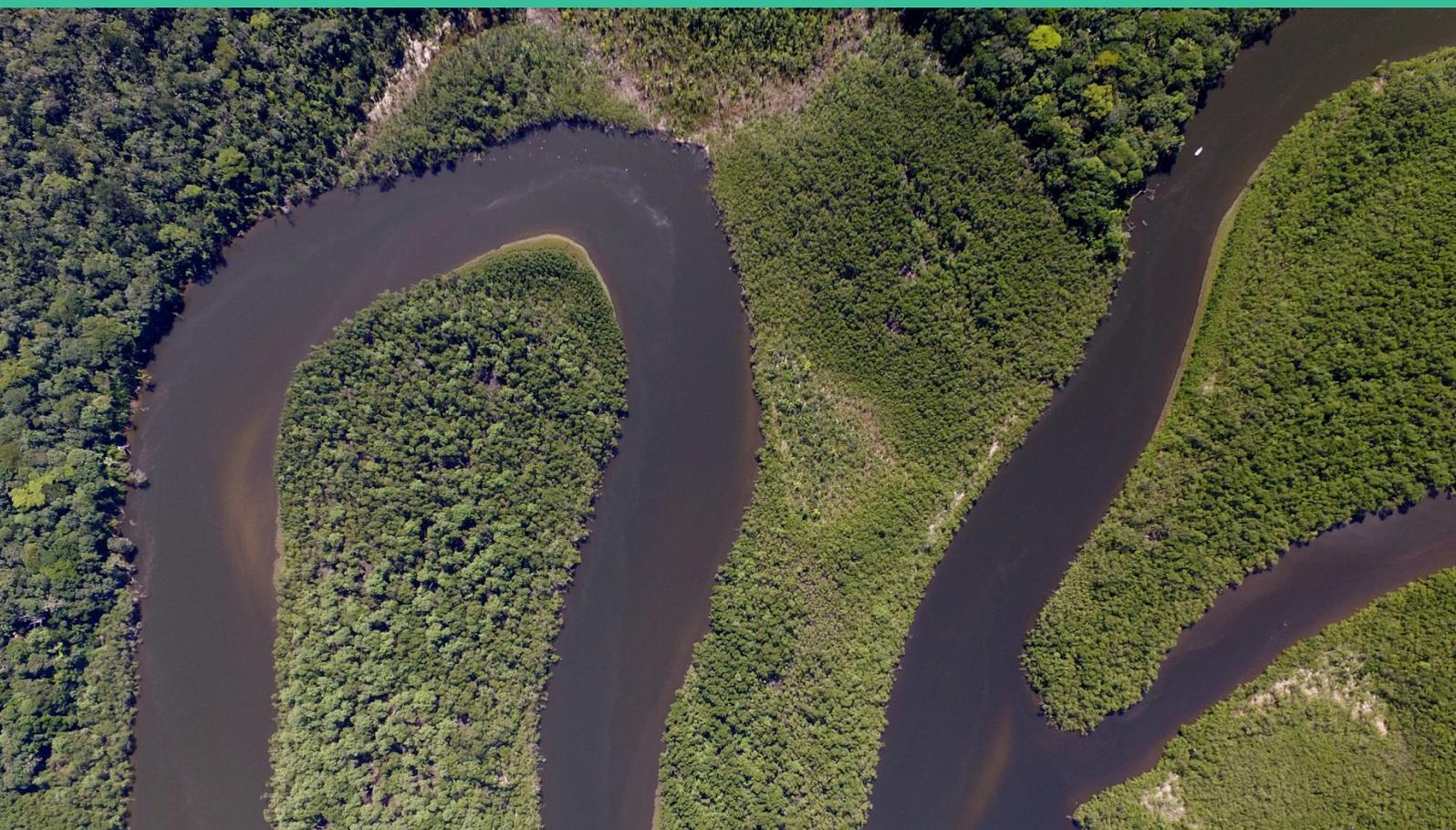


SUMMER 2019

Transforming unsustainable land management

EVENT REPORT



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Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union

Co-organised with



Development Policy Forum



Introduction

Immediate action is essential to halt the continuing degradation of land, desertification, startling disappearance of forests and wetlands, a sharp rise in forest fires, particularly in the Amazon, and unprecedented species loss, panellists told a 25 September Friends of Europe 'Café Crossfire' debate in Brussels.

Today, agricultural expansion is the most widespread form of land-use change, the conference heard. More than a third of land surface is used for cropping or animal husbandry. Better land management must therefore be a key priority of Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen's promised 'new European Green Deal' and 'Biodiversity Strategy for 2030' which should address deforestation, land degradation, protected species and habitats.

The new college of Commissioners, taking office on 1 November, will be central in providing solutions, said **Koko Warner**, lead author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s latest Special Report on 'Climate Change and Land'.

"A large decision-making body like the EU is incredibly powerful. A lot can be achieved with policy," Warner, also the UNFCCC's Manager for Impacts, Vulnerabilities and Risks, made clear. "This next five years is the decision-making period that will determine the trajectory into the future."

“Protecting and restoring ecosystems must guide all of our work

Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director for Natural Capital at the European Commission's Directorate-General for the Environment

For **Humberto Delgado Rosa**, Director for Natural Capital at the Commission's Directorate-General for the Environment, new standards and more measurability on biodiversity are essential. Calling on all parties to bring commitments to the table, he emphasised: "Protecting and restoring ecosystems must guide all of our work."

A greener Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) must also be part of a new green deal, protecting nature and farmers instead of just agri-business, Luc Bas, European Regional Director, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), argued.

Commissioner-designate for Trade, Phil Hogan, with his recent experience as Agriculture Commissioner, could achieve this goal, he added: "He has a huge opportunity to get this right."

Finance is key to achieve land management and biodiversity goals, Bas continued. He told the meeting "There is enough money but we need to see it gets in the right place, it's about getting the taxation right".

Friends of Europe's Director of Insights **Dharmendra Kanani** agreed that if funds were redirected, there should be enough. But, there was a catch, the event moderator

said: “One would think that science, data, knowledge and learning should lead to sustainable social progress. But we find ourselves in a situation where politics and profit trump the need for urgent action.”

Challenges

The climate and land crisis has reached unprecedented proportions, panellists said. Every week, school children around the world cut classes to protest. Young Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg, who urged leaders at the September United Nations Summit on Climate Action to move quickly to stop mass extinction and dying ecosystems, is now a household name.

“The challenges are huge,” the IUCN’s Bas told the meeting, and not even Thunberg is telling the whole story. “Here in the West, after 100 years of uncontrolled consumption, our time is up. If we really listen to science, we need to stop consumption in the West and let others have their fair share.”

Indeed, the latest IPPC report demonstrates we are reaching planetary boundaries. “Crop yields are decreasing everywhere,” its author Warner said. In the last 150 years alone, 50% of the planet’s topsoil has been lost. Projections suggest this percentage will only increase due to large-scale industrial farming, climate change, deforestation and urbanisation.

The situation is urgent, Kanani agreed. Citing the European Commission’s 2019 Communication on Forests, he highlighted that tropical forests are disappearing at an annual rate of 13mn hectares a year – the equivalent of 4.25 times the size of Belgium.

“ To keep global warming below 1.5 degrees you would need land the size of China planted only with trees and no competing uses

Koko Warner, lead author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)’s latest Special Report on ‘Climate Change and Land’

Global environmental problems have been around for a long time, the Commission’s Rosa said. But now, climate change, biodiversity and land degradation have come to the fore. “You can’t look at one without looking at the other,” he argued. “Nature delivers a lot for climate change.”

The biodiversity strategy would be key in a green deal, he said. This was essential as without sectoral commitments and targets, at today’s rate [according to the May 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - IPBES report], “One million out of eight billion species will be gone.”

Solutions

Focusing on land management is essential to redress environmental damage, Warner said. “When we look at the link between land and climate change, land holds one of the keys. It cannot do it all, but land is really important.”

Offsetting climate change by simply planting trees – afforestation – is not the answer, she explained. “To keep global warming below 1.5 degrees you would need land the size of China planted only with trees and no competing uses.” Other ways to maintain soils, for example being less wasteful, more efficient and producing food better, are essential.

Funding is one answer, panellists agreed. It is certainly required. According to the Secretariat of the UN Forum on Forest, sustainable forest management alone needs €60-€140bn a year worldwide.

“ If we want to make an investment case for restoring nature, we need to see how the investor has a return on his investment

Luc Bas, European Regional Director of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

“The sustainable investment plan will have up to €1tn so it will be difficult not to get billions for nature restoration,” Rosa said. He added that while “nice birds” are important – referring to concentrated biodiversity targets – finance should also tackle climate mitigation, soil erosion and general restoration.

Taxes, particularly on carbon – such as a carbon border tax to avoid carbon leakage – and a return on natural capital [renewable and non-renewable resources] are also important. “If we want to make an investment case for restoring nature, we need to see how the investor has a return on his investment,” Bas maintained. “The CAP can push this momentum by rewarding farmers better for ecosystem services they deliver.”

Regulation on investment is inevitable, “to get an incentive to invest in nature”, he added. “We need the Commission to get governments to do proper natural capital accounting [the integration of ecosystem services value into accounting and reporting systems at EU and national level]. This will not happen just with a voluntary effort.”

For its part, the private sector must understand the value of ecosystem services. And, as the IPCC report showed, there is a clear economic case, Kanani explained: “Every one dollar invested in sustainable land management yields from three to six dollars in terms of ecosystem services.”

Private sector initiatives

Some businesses are already on the right track, Rosa said: “I would highlight that not all, but some, companies are pioneers on addressing most of the impacts of their activity,” joining for example the Natural Capital Coalition – an international collaboration to conserve natural capital.



1. **Luc Bas**, European Regional Director of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN); **Hans van der Loo**, Chairman of the Advisory Board for Institute for Integrated Economic Research
2. **Koko Warner**, lead author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
3. **Renato De Filippo**, Manager for Climate Policy and Market Mechanisms for Eni
4. **Humberto Delgado Rosa**, Director for Natural Capital at the European Commission's Directorate-General for the Environment für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)



Renato de Filippo, Manager for Climate Policy and Market Mechanisms at multinational oil and gas company Eni (Italy), highlighted the company's support for carbon pricing. Taxes are no longer a dirty word, Renato emphasised.

The Eni manager highlighted the company's three-stage strategy on operational activities. The aim is to bring output to net zero emissions from its upstream activities through massive afforestation among other solutions. One ambitious scheme is to plant 81,000 km² of forest in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

“ We are looking at incentives that can help local communities to develop through REDD+ projects

Renato de Filippo, Manager for Climate Policy and Market Mechanisms for Eni (Italy)

“We are looking at incentives that can help local communities to develop through REDD+ projects,” de Filippo said. And, he added, the company did not only target countries in which Eni already operated but also where forests are viable and could have potential as carbon sinks.

Conclusion

Nature is a key ally to mitigate the impact of climate change, panellists agreed. Instead of falling prey to pessimism, action must be taken to improve the future. “You cannot build a political programme under doomsaying,” Rosa said. “While things are not extinct, we can have goals on [nature] restoration, and I'm glad the last COP [14 on Biodiversity, November 2018, Sharm El Sheikh] linked these things together.”

Cities are also a potential ally and should not merely be framed as ‘not nature’, he added.

Bas agreed, noting that despite rising populations and emissions, “Cities are still the best and most efficient way to live if they are well organised. Urbanisation is not only a problem, it can also be part of the solution.”

Similarly, while calling to “debunk the myth of how great our forests are doing in Europe,” when their quality was “deplorable”, we must praise national and regional governments' efforts to fight climate change and land degradation, noted the IUCN director: “It is better to create a race to the top instead of a race to the bottom.”

Even the United States have shown a good example, he said. Unlike the EU, it has pledged US\$50mn to the ‘Bonn Challenge’. The goal of this German-led initiative is to restore 350mn hectares of degraded and deforested land by 2030.

Money is not everything, however. “Some things you cannot restore once they are gone and we need to think about that,” Warner cautioned. Investment in soil is essential or there will be neither plants nor “healthy biodiversity”.

Notwithstanding, like Bas, she called for optimism and hope in what the new Commission could achieve. “Encourage the good. Where on earth do you have the potential for cooperation, stability, shared values, wealth and technology, if not in Europe?”

“The world is changing and will change dramatically,” Warner continued. “We used to know what summer and winter look like and that’s changing. What is at stake in the world and Europe is stability. The next five-year period is very important and we are choosing the future that we will build.”

Indeed, this debate took place at a key time, not only as the new European Commission was being appointed, but also only months before the June 2020 IUCN World Congress in Marseille and the October 2020 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Beijing, China.

Von der Leyen has already promised a new European Climate Law. She should take heed of the surge in green power and action to green the economy, Kanani concluded. “Let’s hope the new Commission President stands up tall and makes difficult but positive decisions for our natural environment.”



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1. **Fabrizio D'Angelo**, Project Officer for European Economic and Social Committee; **Meghan Tibelius**, Second Secretary (Environment & Fisheries) for Mission of Canada to the EU; **Caitlin Wardrop**, Junior Officer for the Mission of Canada to the EU
2. **Renato De Filippo**, Manager for Climate Policy and Market Mechanisms for Eni; **Raphaël Danglede**, Programme Manager for Friends of Europe
3. **Dharmendra Kanani**, Director of Insights for Friends of Europe
4. **Koko Warner**, Manager for Sub-Programme on Impacts, Vulnerability and Risks for the UNFCCC; **Humberto Delgado Rosa**, Director of Mainstreaming Adaptation & Low Carbon Technology for DG CLIMA, European Commission



