

IF THERE IS A WAY OUT, TAKING CARE OF NATURE IS THE DOOR



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The natural systems that make Life on Earth possible, which obviously includes human existence, are in danger. Our relentless demand for resources accelerates species extinction rates and devastates entire ecosystems. This jeopardizes most of nature's contributions to people; some of them irreplaceable. A million plant and animal species could disappear in the coming decades, and the current scenario is no better: we have already significantly altered 75% of the land-based environment and 66% of the marine environment (IPBES, 2019).

The main causes, direct and indirect, of biodiversity loss have a name and surname: they are land and sea use change, and our production and consumption patterns, respectively (IPBES, 2019). In these times of the COVID-19 pandemic, it should be noted that nature is essential to guarantee the human right to health. Biodiversity sustains food, fresh water and medicine, while providing us with recreation and enjoyment. Mandatory quarantines have made evident the importance of green areas in cities, which is where more than 50% of the world population already lives.

COVID-19, a coronavirus of zoonotic origin, has renewed public attention on wildlife use and conservation. In this sense, it is necessary that the efforts focus on carrying out conservation initiatives that promote resilient livelihoods, with governance systems that ensure a responsible, regulated and sustainable use of natural assets, in order to facilitate their long-term preservation (Roe, D. 2020); with respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and local, peasant and traditional communities, with a gender perspective, and protection of nature defenders.

The COVID-19 crisis, the human suffering it means, is a sad and clear example of how ignoring the biodiversity loss crisis can have severe, even irreparable, socioeconomic consequences. The more ecosystems we destroy, the more in danger we are. It is time to listen to science, which for years has been warning about the seriousness of the situation and its implications.

When the world still could not even suspect the health emergency that would soon follow, for the United Nations this 2020 was the "super year of nature" due to the process that takes place within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) -of almost universal adherence and ratified by my home country, Argentina-, aimed at adopting a new 10-year action plan to reverse the ecological crisis. And this May 22, International Biodiversity Day, is one of the communications and awareness-raising milestones, on the road to the next Biodiversity Summit in China.

Although the process is logically delayed by COVID-19, this pandemic must ultimately lead us to a reflection that is as obvious as it is substantial: it is time to accept, once and for all, that we are not a separate entity from nature. The way out of this human-health crisis cannot exacerbate the prevailing ecological and climate crisis; neither inequality, or injustice. It needs to be an opportunity to overcome the limited visions that a good quality of life is only achieved through economic growth and limitless accumulation. The chance for the international community to set a post-2020 global biodiversity framework and financial resources rise to the challenge, as to rebuild our societies from hope, solidarity and collective work at all levels. If there is a possible way out, establishing a world that lives in harmony with nature is our door.

IPBES (2019): [Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services](#). E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. XXX pages.

Roe, D (2020) [Despite COVID-19, using wild species may still be the best way to save them](#). IIED.