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FROM IDEA TO PRACTICE:

“Building back better” post COVID-19

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I. Acronyms

ACTO	Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization
CCAD	Central American Commission for Environment and Development
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEPAL	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
CAN	Andean Community
COVID	SARS-CoV-2 virus
EKLA	Regional Program on Energy Security and Climate Change in Latina America
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
NBS	Nature-based solutions
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SICA	Central American Integration System
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

II. Introduction

This document offers a synthesis of three dialogues sponsored by the Regional Program on Energy Security and Climate Change in Latin America (EKLA) of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung during 2020, addressing how to adequately streamline and manage efforts and enthusiasm for a conservation and sustainable development agenda post COVID-19.

The first debate was titled Strengthening Sustainable Development, Conservation and the Climate Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean, regarding the COVID-19 Crisis; the second was An Opportunity for Nature Based Solutions and the New Green, Blue and Circular Economy and, finally, From Idea to Practice: Elements for “Building Back Better” post COVID-19 in the Light of Discussions on Development, Environment and the Economy.

Over the last few months, there have been growing and justified calls to use the COVID-19 crisis to “build back better” in terms of a path towards sustainable development as well as multiple declarations and expressions by important institutions and personalities. However, a dose of reality and reckoning is essential to prepare for this aspiration and ambition. The enormous difficulties countries presently face to visualize and begin “building back better” requires understanding the problems and challenges and also requires to know what some of the minimum conditions and enabling factors –at the institutional, social and economic levels- are in order to have a better chance to success in this endeavor.

This report offers a synthesis of the main presentations made during each debate, a summary of discussions among the participants and a series of reflections and recommendations moving forward. A summary is offered on critical issues, converging opinions, primary concerns and common elements expressed and highlighted during the discussions.

III.A review of keynote presentations¹

Latin America is undergoing an extremely complex social, economic and environmental process. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) have described a somber scenario concerning climate change and biodiversity loss, which countries in the region will not be able to confront in isolation nor even partially. Bold actions are required.

Adding to this, the region is in the middle of a very unstable political context, increasingly in denial about science and facts, trending towards populism and oblivious to the need to inform decisions with good reliable science, facts and data. Furthermore, widespread corruption and a systemic crisis produced by COVID-19, which resists disappearing and will probably persist for a long time, contribute to the somber environmental scenario referred to before.² Ideally, as the pandemic dissipates in the future, countries will have realized that there cannot be a relaxation of environmental frameworks as an excuse to accelerate economic growth and “progress.”³ On the contrary, actions need to be strengthened and environmental protection measures encouraged.

Often, uncoordinated international agendas and processes help little to create complementarity and mutual supportiveness. This is particularly the case of the biodiversity agenda and the climate action agenda driven by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change respectively, which often move on parallel tracks.

In these complex circumstances, what approach should Latin America have regarding sustainable development towards the future? While countries face uncertain political and economic times, there does not seem to be a clear vision of the future or even how to predict it. However, it is also true that among many sectors of society, especially young people, there is a sense of the inevitability of transformative change which they

- 1 Each dialogue had a main, keynote speaker: Manuel Pulgar Vidal (WWF), Nicolas Lucas (Alliance for Rural Climate Resilience of Latin America and the Caribbean) and Manuel Ruiz (Consultant KAS/SPDA).
- 2 A growing informal economy and an inverse migratory process -from the cities to rural areas- in Latin America have been two very evident effects of the COVID-19 crisis. This will surely exacerbate social and economic problems as well as exert pressure on ecosystems. CEPAL for example, estimates that COVID-19, lockdowns and contracting national and international economies, will make national gross domestic product to fall 1.8% and more than 30 million people will become poor in the region. See, CEPAL. Comunicado de Prensa. Pandemia del COVID-19 nos llama a Construir un Nuevo Modelo de Desarrollo y Reforzar la Integración Regional para enfrentar la Crisis. 7 de abril, 2020. Disponible en <https://www.cepal.org/es/comunicados/pandemia-covid-19-llama-construir-un-nuevo-modelo-desarrollo-reforzar-la-integracion>
- 3 Peru offers a real and timely example: Congress is not ratifying the Escazu Agreement and informal alluvial gold mining in Amazon rivers is being incentivized in draft law proposals. The excuse of a crisis is giving way to flexibilization of environmental standards.

see as imminent. This includes dramatic impulse to the conservation agenda and climate action. These actors are moving away from bucolic environmentalism towards more realistic pillars to support biodiversity and climate action, for example, applying sound economic reasoning, through creation of B-type companies, small sustainable undertakings and enterprises, implementing fair trade and certification schemes, exploring Nature-based Solutions (NBS), reflecting on the Circular Economy, among others.

In general terms, there are four large transitions being promoted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that should serve Latin America to build a vision for the future and streamline the path towards sustainable development. These transitions include achieving the goal of stabilizing the global temperature by + 1.5 degrees C or less, supporting substantial changes in the energy matrix, generating improvements in land use and the transformation of cities, and creating and promoting environmentally friendly infrastructure. Some of these transitions are already being integrated, in different manners, into development plans and actions in countries such as Costa Rica, Chile and Colombia, among others.

But the urgency of systemic problems concerning biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, including due to the effects of climate change, requires immediate responses. The region needs changes in its approach to public policies. Internationally, countries need to take seriously the common but differentiated responsibilities principles as enshrined in the Rio Declaration (1992). Industrialized countries must act immediately as well. For example, Nature-based-Solutions offer concrete and interesting opportunities as a starting point to promote these environmental and social/economic transitions and transformations.⁴

Nature-based-Solution approaches are part of a broader reflection. At a conceptual level, they are a utilitarian, pragmatic and anthropocentric approach that should be recognized as positive but not be seen as a replacement for more classic and other innovative conservation measures. A question arises: “solutions” to what? Nature-based-Solutions do not have a particular prominence neither in the context of the IPCC Report on Land nor IPBES nor in the general international negotiation processes. In that sense, they still contribute marginally in the context of broader conservation strategies. To begin with, Nature-based-Solutions are not associated, for example, to agriculture nor export oriented agroindustry – key drivers of biodiversity loss and climate change.

⁴ Frequently, concepts such as “Nature-based-Solutions” compete or are a more elegant term to “ecosystem approaches” or “nature positive” approaches. This often causes distractions and unnecessary wavering in international negotiations, including within the Convention on Biological Diversity. See, WWF. Nature Positive by 2030. For Us and for Nature. Gland, Switzerland.

It is also important to recognize that Nature-based-Solutions in Latin America may have different features and implications than in the United States or Europe. On the other hand, Nature-based-Solutions compete with a series of technocentric solutions that, at least initially, seem “easier” to implement. These include, for example, geoengineering, mirrors to reflect heat, environmentally intelligent crops, artificial trees, cloud creation, genetic engineering, etc.⁵

There is also an inherent tension between Nature-based-Solutions that result more complex but offer more widespread wellbeing and technocentric solutions with high environmental risks and being promoted with limited regard to the “precautionary principle.” A dilemma arises among both of these approaches. Finally, the recognition and implementation of Nature-based-Solutions poses major challenges, both politically and institutionally and may take longer to put into practice considering the need for social consultation, consent, information dissemination, dialogue, participation of actors, etc.

To improve environmental conditions and construct a path towards sustainable development important social, economic and institutional changes are required. However, individual day to day attitudes are equally critical. Sound waste disposal practices, conscious energy use, alternative transport methods (i.e. walking, cycling, shared cars), etc. can gradually but surely lead to dramatic transformations. Latin America requires this transformation and look at a comprehensive strategy to positively influence development based on sustainability principles.

5 World Economic Forum. Harnessing the Fourth Industrial Revolution for Life and Land. Towards an Inclusive Bioeconomy. January, 2018, Geneva. Available at, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Harnessing_4IR_Life_on_Land.pdf

IV. Synthesis of the dialogue and exchanges

In recent times, many governments seem to embrace a rejection to an environmental agenda that is seen as an “accessory” and non-essential in the current times of economic crisis and recovery. This can be explained by factors that include denialism, populism and the fragmentation of environmental governance at multiple levels.

In addition, there is very evident questioning to all policy models and an inherent social/political instability that complicates collective action and a long-term vision of country sustainability. However, there is also a powerful social movement and commitment by international institutions and some countries, to strongly support a post COVID-19 recovery which ensures and strengthens the necessary environmental changes to effectively realize the Paris Agreement objectives, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the future Post-2020 Biodiversity Agenda.

Paradoxically, the economy itself offers mechanisms to promote both equitable recovery and sustainable development. For example, Latin America has a very marginal participation in the Blue Economy, estimated at nearly 2.5 trillion dollars at a global level.⁶ With some attention and the implementation of measures such as the elimination of fisheries subsidies, ocean economy planning and the development of novel sectors –bioprospecting, marine sport activities, biotechnology, etc.– Latin America may find viable options for effective sustainability.

On the other hand, although Nature-based-Solutions are one of several tools in the arsenal of conservation and sustainable development, it is valid to question whether this might be a simple trend which will dissipate over time, or whether this approach can effectively have long lasting standing and impact. Some fear large companies and transnational corporations will “capture” the discussion as it has happened with, for example, carbon credit markets. At the same time, there is abundant evidence of substantial changes in attitudes by large companies and their commitment to sustainability (i.e. DANONE, TESLA, etc.) which is highly encouraging.

The conceptual and policy debate is important to understand the final beneficiaries and the effects on well-being and conservation in general, especially at the local level. Nature-based-Solutions offer an additional opportunity to preserve widely shared

⁶ Vivas, D. How to Craft a Strong WTO Deal on Fishing Subsidies. UNCTAD. 19 November, 2020. Available at <https://unctad.org/news/how-craft-strong-wto-deal-fishing-subsidies>

vulnerable and fragile ecosystems in Latin America (i.e. in the Amazon or shared water basins) through concerted, regional actions and collaboration. Finally, important aspects that must be considered and worked on are the status quo forces that often believe change a threat to their own convictions and question models that are viable for the health of a single and shared planet. Likewise, it is also necessary to raise awareness among those who hold on to unjustified positions.

V. Future considerations and final reflections

1. The existence of multiple spaces and often autonomous forums (i.e. Paris Agreement, CBD, Andean Community, Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, etc.) partly explains the disarticulation in international and regional agendas. There is the need to search for mechanisms to integrate and articulate them efficiently to enhance environmental governance and the promotion of sustainable development, including in Latin America.
2. Despite political circumstances, denial, extended corruption and many resistances in Latin America, it is necessary to take advantage of circumstances such as the climate agenda and its vision to understand unavoidable changes taking place. This includes decarbonization ("zero emissions") commitments, the growing presence and influence of companies with "positive environment" policies and the growing importance of economic/corporate spaces (i.e. the World Economic Forum), that are countering denialism and offer concrete examples of a parallel world of change and transformations with major implications for societies, including in Latin America.
3. In the early 1990's (post Rio 92), Latin America advanced enthusiastically and effectively regarding the environmental agenda. Over time, multiple social/economic problems have overwhelmed countries. This left the environmental agenda somewhat adrift and in the need of renewed enthusiasm. With all its limitations, there are some institutions, resilient economies, spaces and political leaderships that, if properly coordinated and supported, can rapidly take on and fulfill long-term commitments and ambitions such as deforestation and decarbonization by 2050 and beyond.
4. This is in addition to increasing actions in relation to reforestation efforts, exploring Nature-based-Solutions and taking care of the seas and oceans, essential in the fight against climate change.
5. It is critical and a pending task to find ways to penetrate political spaces with robust and convincing messages which become impossible to ignore. Political leaders in the region should subscribe to this major conservation and development effort, regardless of ideologies, trends, regimes and sectors.
6. It is also important to know and understand the advances from the private business sector in order to promote sustainability in a concrete and visible manner. The

debate is not only “environmental”, but also economic and linked to inclusive and equitable *social* development.

7. It is clear that Nature-based-Solutions cannot be seen or understood as a magic bullet that will solve many of the challenges associated to conservation and climate change. In fact, they are only tools which have been marginally incorporated in the arsenal of options and underutilized in international debates, even in options of important reports on the state of the environment such as IPBES and IPCC. It is important to emphasize that Nature-based-Solutions should be promoted not as an alternative to other measures but as a complement and support to strategies and actions already underway, in order to give a dose of realism to the possibilities they really have to mitigate biodiversity loss and add to conservation in general.
8. Nature-based-solutions must also adapt to regional and national realities and not be understood as a unique “standard” serving all contexts at all times. It is also particularly important to pay attention to shared ecosystems and see the possibility of shared regional solutions. Spaces such as the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Andean Community (CAN) or the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) are, in this regard, particularly relevant for future and urgent actions.
9. It is also critical to carefully and accurately explore and document the “trade-offs” between Nature-based-Solutions and technocentric solutions that also have an important space within options promoted to mitigate the effects of climate change and promote greater and better conservation, mainly led by industrialized countries.
10. For Latin American countries, highly dependent on the sea but with less participation in the global Blue Economy, there are very interesting options to explore and to enable participation in this bioeconomy. These include biotechnology, bioprospecting, marine sports activities, artisanal fishing and aquiculture. Forward-looking development plans must incorporate Blue Economy ideas for its strengthening and consolidation at the regional level.
11. Educating and increasing awareness among the political class is presented as an imperative need. There is still a lack of knowledge on how to face these challenges and therefore educational programs and interventions with different methodologies and at different levels are first steps to alleviate this gap and impact conservation and sustainable development efforts.

VI. List of expert participants in the debates

- Nicole Stopfer (Director of the Regional Program Energy Security and Climate Change in Latin America of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation).
- Giovanni Burga (Project Coordinator of the Regional Program Energy Security and Climate Change in Latin America of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation).
- Manuel Ruiz (KAS Consultant and Advisor/Researcher for SPDA, Peru).
- Manuel Glave (Economist. Principal Researcher for GRADE (Peru) .
- Grethel Aguilar (Executive Director of the IUCN Regional Office for Mesoamerica (Costa Rica).
- Isabel Calle (Executive Director, SPDA) .
- Marco Regis da Silva (Executive Director of the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research, Brazil).
- Pablo Necochea (Sustainability Manager for Televisa (Mexico).
- Ralph Sanchez (Sub-secretary of International Relations of the Partido Popular Cristiano, Peru).
- Juan Marco Alvarez (MBA Business School INCAE, legislative candidate of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano de El Salvador, El Salvador).
- Nicolás Lucas (Coordinator of the Alliance for Rural Climate Resilience in Latin America and the Caribbean, Ecuador).
- David Vivas Eugui (Legal Advisor, Division of International Trade and Commodities, UNCTAD, Switzerland)ç
- Jorge Caillaux (Director of AGROKASA, President of SPDA, Peru).
- Jenny Vento (Anglo American- Quellaveco Project, Peru).

- Manuel Glave (Researcher, GRADE, Peru).
- María Jesus Ovalle (Office of International Affairs of the Ministry of Environment, Chile).
- Deyanira Camacho (Intellectual Property Division, Andean Community) .
- Jorge Hernando Pedraza (General Secretary, Andean Community).

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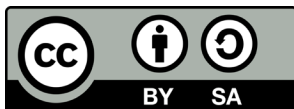
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