

## Lights and Shadows of the IPCC

*The latest UN climate report is brutal but falls short of the mark*

Juan Bordera and Ferran Puig Vilar

**T**here are glows and shadows in the latest part of the world's most crucial climate report, the sixth report of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). The text, from Group II, analyses impacts, adaptation and vulnerability and will go down in history as being framed between the - hopefully - end of a pandemic and the beginning of a regrettable war that, like all of them, should never have taken place.

In the 36 pages of the summary for politicians and the press—the part of the study that is undoubtedly and effectively under pressure from lobbies and governments<sup>1</sup>—we can find some pearls that invite us to think that some change is taking place within the

*The 36 pages of the summary suggest that some change is taking place within the scientific community on communicating the emergency.*

scientific community on how to communicate the emergency. However, these are small glimmers in a report that continues to err on the side of moderation and has probably missed the mark by not opting for a postponement in the publication of the conclusions of this part of the report. This could have served to generate excitement while sending a powerful and necessary message to the hawks, both Russian and Atlanticist: your wars are delaying the necessary action we all need to avoid climate breakdown. The challenges are global, and the solutions must necessarily be global too. We have no use for bloc politics at this stage.



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<sup>1</sup> ↪ Justin Rowlett & Tom Gerken: [COP26: Document leak reveals nations lobbying to change key climate report](#), BBC News, 21 October 2021.

Taking into account that this is almost certainly the last IPCC report with the capacity to make an impact in time - the crucial Group III part is missing, the first draft of which we leaked to the world last August and which is due<sup>2</sup> out on 4 April - the content still misses many problems that are common in this type of report: the integration of other factors such as the energy crisis, which is diluted in the models—when the energy required for adaptation will be needed more than ever—and the continued reliance on technologies based on magical thinking such as carbon capture and sequestration. In short, many problems continue to be stated with minced words and reliance on sustaining the target of staying below the famous 1,5°C figure, which is not possible for anyone who does the numbers and does not like self-deception. This has been acknowledged by the authors of the report themselves, who, in this study in the prestigious journal Nature,<sup>3</sup> explain why we will be close to the catastrophic 3°C increase by the end of this century—or also acknowledged by the eminent climatologist James Hansen, who recently said that the 1,5°C will be exceeded during this decade.<sup>4</sup>

But let us move on to the analysis. The lights. Let us breathe. They continue to include sentences with communicative power, such as: "Current unsustainable development patterns are increasing the exposure of ecosystems and people to climate risks", similar to those found in the leaked Group III drafts.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the word unsustainable is cited up to 9 times in the 36 pages of the summary. This denotes some progress in the recognition of reality, which, reading the full report, reaffirms the fact that the word degrowth - less and less taboo - appears no less than 27 times.

In a seeming paradox, the more sombre statements shed the most light, as they at least allow the problem to be

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identified. It is therefore also remarkable that UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed himself in these terms when presenting the report: "I have seen many scientific reports in my life, but nothing like this", "an atlas of human suffering" or probably the most accurate: "This abdication of leadership is criminal. The world's biggest polluters are to blame for the arson of our only home".

The word "indigenous" also appears 17 times, referring both to the peoples and their current population and to the suffering that the more than 400 million people we identify with this epithet will endure. This is crucial: at last, the IPCC is intertwining the other major ecological crisis, the loss of life and biodiversity, with the climate problem. At last, the scientific community, mostly Western, is beginning to give the importance it deserves to perhaps the most civilised people on Earth, those who, with approximately 6% of the population, are the custodians of 80% of biodiversity. This is precisely what is saving us from further aggravating the climate and food problem and from being even more exposed to pandemics. To protect biodiversity and ensure the essential services provided by ecosystems, the scientific community proposes to conserve between 30% and 50% of them. This is also a proposal with glows and shadows because, if poorly managed, it can be used to displace indigenous people from their lands.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> ↪ Juan Bordera / Fernando Prieto: [El IPCC considera que el decrecimiento es clave para mitigar el cambio climático](#) – CTXT, 7 de agosto 2021

<sup>3</sup> ↪ Jeff Tollefson: [Top climate scientists are sceptical that nations will rein in global warming](#) – Nature, 1 November 2021

<sup>4</sup> ↪ Nafeez Ahmed: [COP26 Pledges will have Catastrophic Consequences, Says Ex-NASA Climate Chief](#) — Byline Times, 16 February 2022

<sup>5</sup> ↪ Juan Bordera / Fernando Valladares / Antonio Turiel / Ferran Puig Vilar / Fernando Prieto / Tim Hewlett: [El IPCC advierte de que el capitalismo es insostenible](#) – CTXT, 22 de agosto de 2021.

<sup>6</sup> ↪ Survival: [Querida Humanidad](#)

Some of the other key findings of the report are:

- ➔ About half of the world's population, between 3,3 and 3,6 billion people, live in areas "highly vulnerable" to climate change. Imagine, if there are problems now with the rise of authoritarian regimes, what will happen if we do not act decisively.<sup>7</sup>
- ➔ Even at current levels of warming, millions of people face food and water shortages due to climate change. At 2°C and above, stable harvests will be scarce. And these analyses, as we say, take little account of the interrelationships between energy and rising fertiliser or food prices.<sup>8</sup> Experts such as Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, are calling for fundamental reform of our food systems to avoid unprecedented hunger: "The science is clear: without a major change in carbon emissions and the way we farm, we are likely to see massive crop failures and the collapse of our fragile food system."
- ➔ No inhabited region escapes the dire effects of rising temperatures and increasingly extreme weather. But some will be worse off: in southern Europe, one in three people would face water shortages even under the Paris Agreement scenario.
- ➔ "The increase in extreme weather and climate events has led to some irreversible impacts, as natural and human systems are pushed beyond their capacity to adapt." This subtle way of talking about points of no return is what is already happening to critical subsystems such as the Arctic or the Amazon.<sup>9</sup>
- ➔ Mass extinction of species, from trees to corals, is underway. And some critical ecosystems are losing their capacity to absorb carbon dioxide, converting them from carbon sinks to carbon sources.
- ➔ All this means that by all accounts—and mostly shadows—the famous 1,5°C is technically surpassed. When they are exceeded, as has consistently happened to these reports, the next one will be much worse.

To widen the shadows, which are already beginning to reveal themselves in this text, we should also note that the Agence France-Presse leak that went around the world, while the northern hemisphere was burning with temperatures close to 50 degrees in countries such as Canada, did not achieve its intended purpose. In the process of polishing (science) and dressing up (lobbies), the summary of the report has removed the headline that went around the world: "Life on Earth can recover from major climate change... Humanity cannot".<sup>10</sup> No one has rescued a single mention of it yet, perhaps because there is so much to read in the more than 3,500 pages of the full text, but not a trace of the actual sentence. It is not there. This is one of the grimmer shadows; we still have too much restraint within the scientific community with the emergency situation.<sup>11</sup>

*Life on Earth can recover from major climate change... Humanity cannot.*

<sup>7</sup> ↪ Juan Bordera: ["Si empieza a degenerar la situación del clima será más fácil que triunfen regímenes autoritarios"](#) – CTXT, 22 de febrero de 2022.

<sup>8</sup> ↪ Antonio Turiel y Juan Bordera: [Fertilizantes: ¿en la antesala de una gran crisis alimentaria?](#) — La Alianza Global Jus Semper, Febrero 2022.

<sup>9</sup> ↪ Juan Bordera: ["Desde la Ilustración, hemos creído que siempre más es mejor, que todo está en la razón"](#) — CTXT, 15 de abril de 2021

<sup>10</sup> ↪ Juan Bordera: [La vida en la Tierra puede recuperarse de un cambio climático importante... La humanidad no](#) — CTXT, 2 de julio de 2021.

<sup>11</sup> ↪ Ferran Puig Vilar: [Peor de lo esperado – Escalones hacia la moderación \(4\): Función moderadora del consenso científico. 2. La moderación en el IPCC \(a\): Funcionamiento, membresía y resúmenes de policymakers](#) — Usted No Se Lo Cree, 13 de octubre de 2019.

And the key underlying question is: why isn't even the IPCC daring to tell with the necessary clarity a truth that is obvious to anyone who has the data on the table and can understand it? Why is it so afraid to acknowledge that the target of staying below 1,5°C is obsolete? This does not mean that all is lost. On the contrary, it merely means that recognising the problem is more severe and urgent. It means that almost everything remains to be done. That everything possible must be done to stay below 1,5°C, and that recognising that this will no longer be possible will help raise awareness of the problem and accelerate action.

Why not be more forceful? What needs to be done seems almost impossible to imagine in today's culture. The culture of waste and microplastics even in placentas. The culture of blind faith in technology.<sup>12</sup> The culture of blocks—as they have to compete for their survival—does not seem to realise that they can end up with the culture of all life, as the sentence removed from the report warned.

Our culture would have to change radically to take on a model that would seek a comforting simplicity in addition to seeking cooperation. The good living, but with less material wealth. Is this still possible? No one knows. What is clear is that it is inevitable that we will end up forcibly moving towards this type of scenario of less energy wealth. We should be preparing ourselves.

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<sup>12</sup> ↪ Kistiñe García: [Plasticenta: parimos plástico](#) — El Salto Diario, 12 de febrero de 2021.

- ❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Jus Semper Global Alliance aims to contribute to achieving a sustainable ethos of social justice in the world, where all communities live in truly democratic environments that provide full enjoyment of human rights and sustainable living standards in accordance with human dignity. To accomplish this, it contributes to the liberalisation of the democratic institutions of society that have been captured by the owners of the market. With that purpose, it is devoted to research and analysis to provoke the awareness and critical thinking to generate ideas for a transformative vision to materialise the truly democratic and sustainable paradigm of People and Planet and NOT of the market.
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