

Editorial

COP30 in the Amazon: What can we expect?

Marcel Bursztyn, Carlos Hiroo Saito, Patrícia Mesquita and Cristiana Dobre

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The hosting of COP30 in the city of Belém, at the gateway to the Amazon, represents an important milestone for discussions on climate change and on the responsibilities of different countries and sectors of society in facing the challenges ahead. As the largest tropical forest on the planet—home to the greatest biodiversity—and given its role in carbon capture and rainfall regulation, the Amazon carries both symbolic and concrete weight in the strategies addressed at the conference.

Belém symbolises and reflects the situation of countries which, like Brazil, are marked by the difficult coexistence of short-term pressures and the imperative of sustainability. With more than 2.5 million inhabitants in its metropolitan region, Belém exemplifies the urban challenges that characterise major cities in the so-called Global South: unplanned growth, particularly in housing; deficits in environmental sanitation; limited mobility for residents; and inadequate infrastructure.

COP30 brought together representatives of 191 UN member states and also welcomed members of dozens of Indigenous peoples from the Brazilian Amazon and other countries. Gathered around debates on the climate crisis, vulnerabilities, mitigation and adaptation, different perspectives and interests were presented. As in previous COPs, the considerable gap remained evident between what science shows, what people experience, and what governments and economic actors are willing to commit to.

President Lula himself embodied this contradiction. During COP30, he advocated a roadmap to gradually reduce dependence on fossil fuels, even though in the weeks preceding the conference, he had publicly supported — and worked toward — Petrobras being granted a licence to prospect for oil along the Equatorial Margin near the mouth of the Amazon River.

It became clear that efforts to confront climate change face the same challenges highlighted in earlier COPs: the urgent pursuit of eliminating fossil fuels; the unequal responsibilities between central and peripheral economies; the need for consensus-based approval of documents, which ends up excluding from the agenda any issue that generates disagreement; and the question of climate finance.

There are also longstanding issues that shape environmental and sustainability debates — linked to perception, understanding and engagement. How can the recognition that the problem is global be translated into actions at the local level, where real life is lived and perceived by people?

It is worth recalling that, in 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio 92) established the slogan “think globally, act locally”. But should we act locally to repair disasters after they occur, or to prevent them in the first place?

Thirty-three years later, and we still face the same dilemma, now unfolded into a series of additional ones.

How can public actions and investments in mitigation (long-term) and even in adaptation (short and medium term) be prioritised when immediate and socially urgent problems — hunger, sanitation, housing, for example — are perceived as more legitimate and more expected by populations?

Who pays this bill: those responsible for the problem, or its victims?

What is the point of acting locally in isolated contexts if, globally, the major drivers of the crisis continue to act with impunity? A systemic understanding of causal interdependencies and multi-scalar processes still requires greater scientific literacy among the actors involved.

In 1992, we spoke of “common but differentiated responsibilities”. Since then, it has become evident that everyone bears responsibility. Yet this is still not fully internalised in public decision-making—neither at the level of individual nations nor internationally.

We now live in a reality in which we are informed in real time about everything happening everywhere. Yet we often act with indifference towards what affects “others”: both those living elsewhere and those who are yet to be born.

As a result, we witness a profound neglect of the challenges that threaten life on the planet—our neighbours’ lives and the lives of future generations.

One thing is sure: from all angles, it is cheaper to prevent (locally) than to remedy (globally).

What will be the legacy of COP30? Will it resemble the legacies of previous COPs, where little of what was agreed was actually implemented?

There were undeniably important political achievements, such as the first-ever formal recognition of the role of Indigenous peoples in forest protection and climate adaptation; the approval of a Gender Action Plan; the establishment of a mechanism for a just transition (the Belém Action Mechanism); and the adoption of a Global Goal on Adaptation accompanied by a set of indicators (considered weakened) to track how countries are preparing to face extreme events. Yet despite these achievements, can we truly be satisfied with what is repeatedly framed as “the possible progress”?

Scientists made a forceful public statement when references to phasing out fossil fuels and ending deforestation were removed from the COP30 final text:

“This is a betrayal of science and people, especially the most vulnerable, as well as being totally inconsistent with the reaffirmed goals of limiting warming to 1.5°C and the near exhaustion of the carbon budget. It is impossible to limit warming to levels that protect people and life without gradually phasing out fossil fuels and ending deforestation.”

(Carlos Nobre – Science Panel of the Amazon; Fatima Denton – United Nations University; Johan Rockström – Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research; Marina Hirota – Instituto Serrapilheira; Paulo Artaxo – University of São Paulo; Piers Forster – University of Leeds; Thelma Krug – President of COP30 Scientific Council).

Sustainability in Debate cannot but echo these words of protest and affirm the positions grounded in science.

In this edition, *Sustainability in Debate* brings together articles that directly address the challenges of the climate crisis, socio-environmental inequalities and territorial governance, combining rigorous empirical analyses, innovative methodological approaches and critical reflections on public policies and collective action.

Lefèvre, Assis and Caldas analyse the 2024 floods in Rio Grande do Sul through Anthony Downs’s issue-attention cycle, demonstrating how public and media interest in climate change rises abruptly following extreme events but dissipates rapidly. Schreiner *et al.* examine the climate catastrophe of May 2024 in the Porto Alegre Metropolitan Region through the experience of the Filhos de Sepé settlement,

emphasising the central role of social organisation and collective action in the construction of territorial responses. Behr and Duarte analyse Jair Bolsonaro's speeches at the United Nations General Assembly between 2019 and 2022, showing how environmental denialism operated as a strategy for the co-production of a new epistemic and political order. Brasil Junior *et al.* investigate the relationship between access to electricity, local development and emerging forms of urbanity in small villages in the western Amazon. Drawing on the case study of Caiambé (AM), the article shows how the transition from diesel-based systems to hybrid solar energy systems affects education, health, community organisation, and energy security, thereby contributing to low-carbon development pathways in isolated systems.

Silva, Rodriguez and Francisco analyse the spatial distribution of socio-environmental vulnerability in urban areas prone to flooding in the municipality of Araruama (RJ). Using census data, official records and GIS-based mapping, the study identifies neighbourhoods with critical levels of vulnerability, highlighting the overlap between risk exposure, social precariousness and low institutional response capacity. Maia *et al.* explore perceptions of the impacts of natural disasters in the Serrana Region of Rio de Janeiro from the perspective of organisations supporting affected populations. The article reveals persistent effects on mental health, education, housing and safety, underscoring the absence of structured public responses beyond emergency assistance. Oliveira *et al.* present an experience of Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PGIS) in the Potiguara Indigenous Territory, in the state of Paraíba, articulating citizen science, social cartography and territorial management. The study demonstrates how collaborative data production strengthens the recognition of threats, conflicts and cultural heritage, while enhancing Indigenous autonomy and protagonism in the defence of their territories. Santos and Tomasella analyse coastal erosion in the Paraíba do Sul River basin, with a focus on land-use change and sediment dynamics. The results indicate significant reductions in river flow and sediment transport associated with dams, hydrological regulation and territorial transformations, while also highlighting the complexity of coastal processes and the limits of simplified explanatory models.

Piacentini and Oliveira investigate municipal climate vulnerability in western Paraná between 2012 and 2024 using multivariate statistical analysis. By identifying differentiated spatial patterns of exposure to extreme events, the article offers methodological contributions to territorial planning and the formulation of public policies for climate change adaptation.

Guimarães *et al.* analyse the impacts of climate change and adaptive adjustments among traditional extractive communities in the Médio Juruá territory in the Central Amazon. Based on climate data and interviews, the study shows that extreme events are already profoundly altering local ways of life. At the same time, governmental responses remain largely limited to emergency measures, reinforcing the need for robust, territorially grounded adaptation policies.

Finally, Dobre *et al.* present a historical and bibliometric analysis of the trajectory of Sustainability in Debate, examining the journal's thematic evolution, patterns of authorship and collaboration, and its position within the field of sustainability studies. The article offers a critical reflection on the journal's role as a space of mediation between science, policy and society, reaffirming its contribution to the development of a critical and interdisciplinary agenda in the Global South.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue.

Happy New Year!

The Editors