



## Argentina's rejection of 2030 agenda undermines environmental sustainability and human well-being

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## ABSTRACT

In a recent speech to the UN General Assembly, Argentine President Javier Milei rejected the Pact for the Future and the 2030 Agenda, a comprehensive global framework for sustainable development encompassing 'people, planet, and prosperity.' This position undermines Argentina's capacity to tackle urgent socio-environmental



**Fig. 1.** Argentina faces a host of socio-environmental problems. Some of the most significant drivers that affect Argentina's ecosystems, people, and prosperity include deforestation, wildfires, desertification, poverty expansion, and overfishing. These multiple crises highlight the urgent need for effective and inclusive public policies that address these challenges at multiple spatial and political levels. Argentina's continuing commitment to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and to its corollary the Pact for the Future is critical to achieving the shared values expressed in the international consensus to work together for a just and sustainable future for people and nature (CAPA (Cámara Argentina de Pescadores Artesanales), 2024; Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC), n.d; Luna et al., 2022; MAGyP, 2020; World Bank, 2020).

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As an intergovernmental effort to mitigate unprecedented social and environmental crises (e.g., Díaz et al., 2019), the United Nations (UN) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015), which encompasses 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets and was reinforced by the recent Pact for the Future (UN, 2024a). This framework, strongly anchored in science, aims to guide decision-makers, academics, donors, businesses, and civil society toward a shared vision and goals that link society and nature, such as poverty alleviation, climate change mitigation, land and ocean use planning, and multi-dimensional justice (Anderson et al., 2019). Despite the significance of this global effort for a “developing” country like Argentina, President Javier Milei, in his recent debut address to the UN General Assembly, announced that his government rejects the Pact for the Future and the 2030 Agenda (see Financial Times, 2024; UNTV, 2024).

As the world's 8th largest country (World Bank, 2024), Argentina hosts about half the planet's biomes and encompasses a broad range of climates, ecoregions, species, cultures, and nature contributions to people (e.g., Olson et al., 2001; Tamburini et al., 2023). At the same time, it faces profound socio-environmental challenges (Nori et al., 2013, 2016; Kuemmerle et al., 2017; Prieto-Torres et al., 2022; Camino et al., 2023) related to drivers of change that can be direct (e.g., deforestation, habitat loss and deterioration, pollution, invasive species) and indirect (e.g., lack of effective governance, unsustainable economic systems, land tenure concentration) (IPBES, 2018) (Fig. 1). With a commodity-driven export economy, many of these problems stem from external factors and decisions made beyond Argentina's borders (e.g., international demands for agricultural products) and often respond to interests not aligned with national or local social actors (Washington et al., 2024). As a result, the recent decision to walk away from the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs further undermines efforts to pursue equitable and sustainable development based on local stewardship.

Constructive participation in international agreements on conservation, education, and sustainability can help transcend geographic, financial, and political barriers to search for solutions that ensure both environmental conservation and human well-being (Biermann et al., 2017). This new Argentine position, however, leaves the country's environmental and social well-being in an increasingly precarious situation. Indeed, as we write this Editorial, not only has poverty increased in Argentina and street protests are rising against structural adjustments in health, education, science, and other social policies, but various provinces are facing rampant wildfires that impact productive and natural systems. At the same time, with Executive Order 888/2024, the President recently dissolved various relevant funding instruments. One of these was established under the aegis of Law #26,331, passed by Congress in 2009, to enrich and conserve native forests, 70 % of which was destined to property owners to not only protect forests, but ensure the ecosystem services they provide to society. Overcoming our greatest socio-environmental challenges clearly demands linking our values with policy instruments from local to global levels.

Below, we briefly assess the importance of some of the SDGs in the context of Argentina's social-ecological systems:

**SDG2 (Zero Hunger)** aims to achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. As of the first semester of 2024, 52.9 % of Argentina's population live in poverty (INDEC, 2024), which is moving in the wrong direction toward achieving **SDG1 (Poverty Eradication)**, but also demonstrates that hunger and food security are now even more critical problems this government must face. **SDG2** proposes doubling agricultural productivity and income for small-scale farmers by promoting resilient agricultural practices and ensuring sustainable food production systems. These measures also recognize the interconnections with biodiversity, cultural continuity, and climate

change. Reversing hunger is particularly important for vulnerable social groups (e.g., Indigenous peoples, subsistence farming families) whose livelihoods depend on threatened ecosystems and traditional agricultural practices that are impacted by environmental (e.g., climate change) and socio-economic factors (e.g., expansion of industrial agriculture, Camino et al., 2023). International cooperation is essential to strengthen sustainable food systems by improving local capacities, helping communities adapt to socio-environmental challenges, and enhancing governance institutions and rural infrastructure. Clearly, addressing food insecurity is also tied to **SDG1 (Poverty Eradication)**, **SDG3 (Health Improvements)**, **SDG10 (Reduce Inequality)** and **SDG13 (Climate Action)**, underscoring the essential link between environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

**SDG6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)** applies to how Argentina's freshwater ecosystems play a critical role in supplying vital contributions to people that help achieve **SDG11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)**. However, according to the National Institute for Censuses and Statistics, in 2023, 26.8 % of Argentine homes still do not have wastewater treatment, and 9.8 % do not have access to drinking water (INDEC, 2024). From the glaciers of Patagonia to the wetlands of Iberá, protecting these ecosystems helps ensure water quality, ecosystem and public health, and people's livelihoods. Therefore, rejecting the 2030 Agenda endangers not just wildlife and habitats, but also weakens the country's ability to manage its water resources effectively, which in turn decreases possibilities for agriculture, energy production, and health, with adverse outcomes falling disproportionately upon more vulnerable groups (e.g., children, women, ethnic minorities). In particular, Indigenous peoples, local communities, and rural farming communities often depend directly on water sources for their livelihoods, thereby facing heightened risks as water insecurity increases under projected global scenarios of climate change and extractive industries (IPBES, 2018; Martínez-Cruz et al., 2024).

**SDG13 (Climate Action)** calls for steps to mitigation and adaptation to climate change and its impacts. For Argentina, this means investing in adaptation strategies, including the development of early warning systems and mitigation protocols for disasters like floods, droughts, and wildfires. While national legislation already includes specific actions like the creation of a Federal Cabinet of Climate Change that cuts across all ministries, it is imperative to operationalize these instruments as climate-related disasters continue to erode Argentina's biodiversity, economy, and human well-being (UNDRR, 2017; Fernández et al., 2022; Campbell et al., 2021). Not participating in the 2030 Agenda, compromises the pursuit of the international funding and technical support needed to build climate-resilient infrastructure and institutions, and also impedes the development of systematic research, integrated policies, and concrete actions to mitigate the severe impacts of climate change (e.g., prevent wildfires, Pacheco et al., 2021). Specifically, rejecting the 2030 Agenda hinders investment in research and innovation that could reduce reliance on fossil fuels—key drivers of climate change. These initiatives, aligned with Green Industrial Policies, are also crucial for building low-carbon, resilient economies based on **SDG9 (Resilient Infrastructure, Industries, and Innovation)** (IPBES, 2018).

**SDG14 (Life Below Water)** is exemplified by Argentina's vast marine ecosystems, including extensive coastlines, continental shelf, and deep-sea ecosystems that contribute to both ecological and socio-economic stability. This goal emphasizes the sustainable use of these marine resources. Argentina's recent initiatives to establish a National System of Marine Protected Areas represent significant advancements in marine conservation; however, these achievements are jeopardized by the country's rejection of internationally agreed standards. The structural and functional degradation of marine ecosystems compromises

ecological integrity and vital economic resources for fisheries and tourism, which require **SDG12** (*Responsible Consumption and Production*). This issue is further magnified when considering the symbolic and relational values these ecosystems hold as well for cultural identity.

**SDG15** (*Life on Land*) focuses on protecting terrestrial biodiversity and ecosystems. Long-term conservation of nature and its contributions to people demands both well-established strategies like protected areas and also developing or reinforcing community-based or -led approaches like participatory citizen councils or policies guided by local traditions and supported by science (e.g., wildlife management based on hunting taboos; Camino et al., 2018; sustainable use of wild vicuñas, Arzamendia et al., 2014). It is well-documented that protected areas alone are insufficient to safeguard many of Argentina's species and ecoregions against specific threats (Nori et al., 2016). Furthermore, the full inclusion of diverse social actors through multiple valuation of nature and participatory strategies is an ongoing task (Tamburini et al., 2023). Inclusive initiatives that involve Indigenous peoples and local communities, however, are not only more effective and sustainable, but they also improve **SDG16** (*Peace, Equity and Justice*). Therefore, the 2030 Agenda (as well as regional initiatives like the Escazú Agreement on Environmental Information, Participation and Justice) explicitly recognizes the linkages between environmental conservation and social objectives like **SDG5** (*Gender Equality and Empowerment*) and **SDG10** (*Overcoming Inequities*). It explicitly seeks to achieve sustainability by empowering marginalized social actors whose voices, rights, and values have been historically excluded from decisions in favor of market-based perspectives, often associated with unsustainable, extractive initiatives (e.g., in Argentina's Chaco region; Blum et al., 2022, Cáceres, 2015, Camino et al., 2023). Recognizing the reciprocal relationships between people and nature, also makes it possible to ensure nature's contributions to people, such as food, water, and energy, implicated in **SDG1** (*Poverty Eradication*) and **SDG12** (*Responsible Consumption and Production*).

There is an urgent need to implement more effective and inclusive public policies and decisions to address the polycrises of biodiversity decline, climate change, cultural erosion, environmental injustice, and poverty expansion (IPBES, 2022), which are core tenets of the 2030 Agenda. These challenges also offer an opportunity for governments, scientific institutions, businesses, and civil society from local to global levels to collaborate in advancing the SDGs with innovative solutions that balance environmental and socio-economic sustainability. Rejecting this global consensus damages Argentina's international standing. More importantly, it undermines the country's ability to overcome barriers and fill gaps to address critical socio-environmental challenges (Mastrángelo et al., 2019).

The 2030 Agenda and the Pact for the Future have received nearly unanimous international backing, and Argentina's new position places it in the company of a small group of less than 15 countries, including Iran, Syria, Russia, Nicaragua, and North Korea, who did not endorse the Pact for the Future (UN, 2024b). This withdrawal marks a shift from Argentina's historical commitment to global cooperation and is also reflected in changing national priorities toward its world-class scientific, educational, and public health systems. By walking away from the 2030 Agenda, the current government not only risks further isolating itself on the international stage, but also threatens the capacity of its public and private institutions and individuals to contribute to equitable and sustainable development in collaboration with the international community and national, provincial, and local authorities.

This broader framework, and particularly the SDGs, represents a holistic approach to integrate environmental conservation and human well-being, addressing the complex interconnections among ecology, economy, society, technology, and culture. These principles and targets have been co-constructed through decades of democratic processes under the auspices of the UN to ensure a sustainable, prosperous, and equitable future. They are not an imposition; instead, the SDGs offer tools for improving local, national, and international policies,

representing a common vision that allows diverse state and social actors around the world to work together toward shared values. As scholars engaged in linking science-policy in these fields, we are convinced that there is conclusive evidence that Argentina should re-engage with the 2030 Agenda for the sake of its people, economy, and nature.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Javier Nori:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Alejandro E.J. Valenzuela:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Micaela Camino:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Elena Abraham:** Conceptualization. **Gabriela Agostini:** Conceptualization. **Marcelo A. Aizen:** Conceptualization. **Virginia Alonso-Roldán:** Conceptualization. **Julietta R. Arcamone:** Conceptualization. **Yanina Arzamendia:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **German Baldi:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Diego Baldo:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Matías C. Baranzelli:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Marcelo Cabido:** Conceptualization. **Daniel Cáceres:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Anibal Carabaja:** Conceptualization. **Atilio Pedro Castagnaro:** Conceptualization. **Claudia Campos:** Conceptualization. **Juan Corley:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Javier M. Cordier:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Sandra M. Díaz:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Julián Faivovich:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Lucas Garibaldi:** Conceptualization. **Leonardo Galetto:** Conceptualization. **Gregorio Gavier-Pizarro:** Conceptualization. **Alejandro Giraudo:** Conceptualization. **Ricardo Gürtler:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Pablo Y. Huais:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Martin Kowaleski:** Conceptualization. **Estéban Jobbagy:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Alberto Kornblihtt:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Estéban Lavilla:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Gabriela Lichtenstein:** Conceptualization. **Marta Litter:** Conceptualization. **Rafael Loyola:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Enrique Martínez-Meyer:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Matías Mastrángelo:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Gabriela Mataloni:** Conceptualization. **Silvia D. Matteucci:** Conceptualization. **A. Sofia Nanni:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Ricardo A. Ojeda:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Pablo E. Penchaszadeh:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Jose Priotto:** Conceptualization. **Rubén Quintana:** Conceptualization. **Gabriel A. Rabinovich:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Martín Ramírez:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Juan Carlos Reboreda:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Adriana Rodríguez-Pérsico:** Conceptualization. **Valeria Sfara:** Conceptualization. **Manuel Sosa:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Daniela Tamburini:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Paula Taraborelli:** Conceptualization. **Pablo Teta:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Paula A. Tecco:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Alejandro Travaini:** Conceptualization. **Ana N. Tomba:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Mariana Totino:** Conceptualization. **David Vergara-Tabares:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Bibiana Vilá:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Christopher B. Anderson:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2024.110832>.

## Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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