

Colleagues,

Many thanks to the Government of Estonia for reaching out to civil society on a large scale. We recognize that this is absolutely essential, if we are to come to grips with our present environmental challenges, but not all UN Member States take this necessity as seriously as Estonia.

The Commons Cluster is a global network of ECOSOC accredited NGOs and individuals, including academics, indigenous peoples and social/economic reformers. We write collective reports, using modern IT tools and then make our ideas available to UN Member States when these are pertinent.

We recognize that all the ideas we are submitting, as well as the plethora submitted by others are too many to place in the Ministerial Outcome Document. For that reason, we wonder whether it would be an idea to combine the ideas you receive in a document that is easy to read by “ordinary people” and made available to schools, libraries and other institutions where the wealth of ideas can be used by the larger population. Thank you once more for your outreach.

Wishing you all the very best with your next step in creating the Ministerial Outcome Document.

In gratitude,

Lisinka Ulatowska

1. BETTER GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL DATA AND PARTNERSHIPS

Partnership specifically between

1. those living close to Nature;

2. scientists with sensitive instrumentation; and

3. local people using GIS to accurately assess areas in danger of reaching a tipping point.

Rationale: All human actions must be attuned to the Earth System in such a way that planetary boundaries are maintained that support human survival and well-being.

A healthy Earth System is essential for SCP. Since the subsystems of the Earth System (the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the biosphere, the geosphere and the noosphere) are in constant interaction and flux, it is a

challenge for scientists to know *where* to measure *what* in this vast constantly changing Earth System.

There are a number of types of measurement needed. For instance:

1. Which aspects of subsystems are in danger of reaching a tipping point;
2. Where, geographically, are greatest trouble areas and where the changes originate—the more accurately these are pinpointed, the better; and
3. Specifically how acute is the situation.

Those who actually depend on an accurate assessment of natural phenomena for their livelihoods, such as Indigenous Peoples and small scale farmers are best suited to pinpoint subtle areas of change within their geographic area; scientists, on the other hand are best suited to measure the degree of change once they know *what* to measure *where*. The two categories can then work together to find out how intense a phenomenon is in any one geographic location by working with ordinary people in diverse geographic locations, assisted by Geographic Information System Mapping Technology(GIS) to let them know the degree to which a phenomenon is taking place at any one location.

2. SUSTAINABLE AND EFFICIENT RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, INVOLVING PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

Ways of Motivating Constructive Action by People Everywhere for SCP.

1. **Promote and publicize *basic research* to show the true magnitude of threats; and empower people to take responsibility to reverse dangerous trends to the health and capacity of the Earth System to support the needs of human beings.**

2. **Make people aware of planetary boundaries that must be adhered to if the Earth System Is to be able to support human life and well-being.**

Clarification: Scientists have developed a series of 9 Planetary Boundaries that must be in place if the Earth System is to support human life. The following paper suggests that we have exceeded 3 of these: Climate Change; the biochemical flows, particularly with regard to the Phosphorus and

Nitrogen cycles; and the rate of biodiversity loss. Please see: **Source: Steffen, W., Richardson, K., Rockström, J., Cornell, S.E., Fetzer, I., Bennett, E.M., Biggs, R., Carpenter, S.R., de Vries, W., de Wit, C.A., Folke, C., Gerten, D., Heinke, J., Mace, G.M., Persson, L.M., Ramanathan, V., Reyers, B., and Sörlin, S. (2015) Planetary Boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. Science 347: DOI: 10.1126/science.1259855**

3. **Promote standards for stewarding the environment for the well-being of all people and Nature, while educating people, using formal, informal education, the media, etc.) about the consequences of doing harm to oneself and the Planet, including through overconsumption. Begin such education at primary schools and encourage media coverage using inspiring stories that speak to the heart.** This can be done starting at a very early age by introducing the Earth Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other relevant documents into the curriculum, which should also include instruction, beside on planetary health, also on personal health and well-being and on the negative effects of overconsumption. Combine these with information on work being done worldwide on the Rights of Nature, combined with inspiring stories of what “ordinary people are already doing and how to become involved.

4. **Instead of locking up those who harm the environment, involve them through community labour in correcting the harm they have created. It has proved effective to, for instance, to employ even the most hardened criminals to take care of animals of all sorts. Combine these programmes with showing the dangerous effects of overconsumption on people individually and on the environment.**

Rationale, points 1-4:

The more people are involved in sustainable and efficient resource management, the more effective and sustainable this will be.

People will be motivated to the degree that they see how problems affect them personally; experience at first hand the consequences of their actions; see clearly the benefits of taking constructive action to their own well-being and those they love most. A positive motivation is stronger than a negative one.

The accumulative effect of global sustainability efforts seems not to be having its intended global effect. Discussion of how we have been forging ahead to save the Earth without checking progress can be

found here: <http://synapse9.com/signals/2018/06/18/evidence-decoupling-still-zero/>. **In general terms, it would appear that competitively profitable sustainability simply reproduces "business as usual."**

If the UN were to aggregate the indicators of all unbounded environmental, economic, and societal impacts and compellingly present them as looming threats to individual and collective well-being and future if not promptly reversed, then those convinced by such data would see the role they can and must play and be motivated to act.

For outreach it is possible to bring compelling facts into the schools via relevant curriculum in sustainable development; and to the population at large using the media. Introducing people to Nature and animals has often tended to speak to the heart and opened people to more constructive forms of relating.

4. Educate people to recognize that they are both individually and collectively entitled to a fair share of the Earth's resources and also have the responsibility to ensure that these are safeguarded for the well-being of all people (present and future) and Nature. Include in education at all levels: access to environmental education, indigenous knowledge, and nature-based solutions
Use the ecological footprint as a metric of rights and responsibilities.

Rationale: all have an equal right to their fair share of the Earth's resources: Since the subsystems of the Earth interact *within each human being* through each breath they take and what they eat, drink and think, each person has an intrinsic right to their fair share of what the Earth System provides. This is already widely recognized, for instance:

- **In the 1972 UN, Conference on the Human Environment)** *"Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations."*
- **In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** by Art 22 The right

to social security; Art 25 A standard of living adequate for health and well-being including food, Art 26 (2) free and full development of their personality; etc.

Implementation of Standards to Preserve the Environment and Promote SCP

1. Implement circular economies AND waste management, focusing on food, plastics and marine litter by:

- **Determining stakeholder responsibilities for transitioning to a zero waste cradle to cradle economy, including such things as Extended Producer Responsibility, specific types of policies needed at all levels of government, moving towards 100% re-use and elimination of waste, and removal of any and all externalities.**
- **Universal establishment and adoption of National, Sub-National and Local Strategies, Programmes and Actions on SCP based on transitioning to fully sustainable consumption and production practices as rapidly as possible.**

2. Implement sustainable and efficient resource and land management to fully restore the health of the Earth's ecosystems – and refrain from degrading or destroying any additional natural areas; while ensuring that adequate resources are made available to enable civil society to participate fully in implementation.

There are a number of ways this can be approached, using financing mechanisms whereby harm to the environment is severely fined and the money from fines goes to restoring the environment. Here are just a few examples: .

- **Pigouvian Taxes can be used whereby huge fines are issued to those harming the environment and the perpetrators of the harm are then made responsible to restore the environment to its original healthy state.**
- **Commons Rent for stewardship of the environment by all people:** Here taxes are (partially) removed from labour and real

estate and instead placed on the use of land and other commons resources for which there is a high demand. In this way, people are encouraged to take care of the land and natural resources for the use of which they pay a fee; and work is encouraged since it is not taxed and so is taking care of real estate rather than hoarding it as an investment.

- **Cap and Share:** The use of depleteable natural resources is strictly capped to ensure that these are not overused. Each year, the amount above that which has been capped is auctioned off to the highest bidder, who uses the resources, for instance, to make products; and then passes the costs of the permit to the buyers. In this way, the cost of the use of the depleteable materials is shared among the users and the resources without these becoming depleted.

Enforcement Using Legal Instruments

3. **Nations and subnational governments should be encouraged to place the Rights of Nature in their Constitutions.** For examples, see www.harmonywithnatureun.org.
4. **Declaring Ecocide a Crime against Humanity.**

Rationale: Since harm to the environment and those who have the sensitivity to help safeguard us from harming the environment can endanger both the lives and livelihoods of all, ecocide should be considered a Crime Against Humanity, as first debated by the UN's International Law Commission in 1947 and as a Crime Against Peace (as now being proposed by Polly Higgins); and prosecuted under Universal Jurisdiction.

5. Creating an International Court for the Environment

Rationale: Although Crimes Against the Environment can be prosecuted using the ICJ, there should be an International Environmental Court, considering the potential harm such crimes can visit on human lives, livelihoods and well-being.

General Remarks on Dealing with the Environment and Especially the Hydrocycle

Environmental matters are more complex to come to grips with than other matters, since human beings are integral to Nature and thus unable to step outside of Nature and oversee it. All the systems of the Earth also constitute one indivisible whole. One way of coming to grips with this complexity from within is through working with interlinkages. For instance there is a need to address the interlinkages between agriculture, access to clean water and sanitation, ecosystem services, and ecosystem restoration and the need to invest in biological waste treatment to ensure that no wastes enter back into the watershed untreated and that nutrients are not lost to nor degrade or destroy either habitats or the natural environment

Here are some general thoughts centering on interlinkages and the need to safeguard the hydrocycle, supplied by Stella Joy and Tara Joy of Active Remedy Ltd.

“A characteristic of the Earth’s climate that distinguishes it from all other known planets is the coexistence of water in three physical states (solid, liquid, and gas). The cycling of water among the three phases is important not only for driving the atmospheric general circulation but for the very existence of life as we know it.” (USGCRP, ‘A Plan for a new science initiative on the global water cycle’, executive summary, 2001)

“In Earth System science, climate is not the long term average of weather statistics, but involves the non linear interactions between the atmosphere, oceans, continental ice, and land surface processes, including vegetation, on all time scales.” (R.A. Pielke Sr, et al.2003)

“Understanding the role the hydrologic cycle plays in key planetary processes is essential to our nation and societies around the world. It is becoming increasingly clear that one of the most significant challenges of the coming century will be to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of water for the world.” (USGCRP Report 2001)

“The current pace and scale of human development is altering the hydrological cycle in ways that has eroded the capacity of ecosystems to

provide life-sustaining functions and services. Rivers that for centuries ran from source to sea now run dry in many years due to damming, diversion and depletion of glaciers and water resources.” (UN Water, ‘The Global Water Crisis: Addressing an Urgent Security Issue’ 2012)

Mainstreaming the safeguarding of the hydrological cycle and water related ecosystems is the most cost efficient, long-term sustainable, integrated strategy for facing the negative impact of climate change and achieving long-term environmental sustainability.

As a key strategy for reducing the negative impacts of climate change and disastrous fresh water shortages it would be timely to fully implement Target 6.6 and 15.1 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which world governments agreed upon in New York in 2015:

Target 6.6: “By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.”

Target 15.1 “By 2020 ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements.”

This is supported by UN Research and HLPE Reports:

“Ensuring that ecosystems are protected and conserved is central to achieving water security – both for people and for nature. Ecosystems are vital to sustaining the quantity and quality of water available within a watershed, on which both nature and people rely. Maintaining the integrity of ecosystems is essential for supporting the diverse needs of humans, and for the sustainability of ecosystems, including protecting the water-provisioning services they provide.” (UN Water, Analytical Brief, 2013)

“Forests perform vital ecosystem services, including the regulation of the water and carbon cycles and protection of biodiversity, that are essential to sustainable food production and FSN in the long term. These contributions vary according to types of forests and the way they are managed. They are of course particularly important locally for forest-dependent people, but also have considerable impacts at broader scales, including global.” (FAO, HLPE, 'Sustainable Forests for Food and Nutritional Security' 2017)

“Maintaining the integrity of ecosystems before they become compromised is an essential component of achieving water security and reducing the potential for conflicts. The continuous pace of human development is

threatening the capacity of ecosystems to adapt, raising concerns that ecosystems will reach a tipping point after which they are no longer able to provide sustaining functions and services, and will become unable to recover their integrity and functions.” (U.N Water, Analytical Brief, 22/3/2013)

“Given their important role in water supply and regulation, the protection, sustainable management and restoration of mountain ecosystems will be essential.” (UNESCO, Climate Change Impacts on Mountainous Regions of the World, 2013)

Below is a link to a Report on approaching the 2030 SDG Agenda from a hydrological cycle based perspective.

https://www.activeremedy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Approaching_The_2030_Agenda_From_A_Hydrological_Cycle_Based_Perspective_Looking_Beyond_the-Goals1.pdf

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