

Leadership Dialogue 1: Reflecting on the urgent need for actions to achieve a healthy planet and prosperity of all

About the Leadership Dialogues

The international meeting at Stockholm+50 is a commemoration, and a time for bold action and engagement. It presents an opportunity to reflect, connect, accelerate and scale actions for a better future on a healthy planet with prosperity for all.

The 2030 Agenda as well as the continuing COVID-19 crisis have highlighted the importance of a healthy planet for human progress and prosperity. A degraded planet poses limits to wellbeing and prosperity, creating obstacles to a better future. The concept note [“Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”](#) introduces this global challenge and the opportunities it presents for the upcoming meeting.

The Stockholm+50 Leadership Dialogues aim to engage governments, international organisations, business and the private sector, civil society organisations, including youth, women, Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), rural communities, and other relevant stakeholders in an exchange for the opportunities to overcome barriers to implementation, to connect actions, and to create new change pathways across generations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This background paper reflects the discussions held in the first round of Informal Working Groups in early March as well as the interventions by Member States and Major Groups and Stakeholders provided during the Stockholm+50 Preparatory Meeting on 28 March 2022, held under the auspices of the UN General Assembly in New York. Key messages from the Preparatory meeting that are relevant to all three Leadership Dialogues include an emphasis on the engagement of youth groups and the centrality of intergenerational equity in the potential outcomes of the international meeting.

Leadership Dialogue 1 – “Reflecting on the urgent need for actions to achieve a healthy planet and prosperity of all” – considers the urgent need for actions to achieve a healthy planet and prosperity of all, where aspirations and rights can be fulfilled.

The context

There are several key multilateral initiatives and other conferences taking place this year – such as the UNEA 5.2 and UNEP@50; the Conferences of the Parties to the UNCCD, the CBD and the UNFCCC and the 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference; and the Transforming Education Summit. Additionally, there are many new initiatives, which have been announced by governments, organisations and the private sector, to contribute to the protection of the environment, such as the Ocean Plastics Charter, the Global Ocean Alliance, and the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People. Stockholm+50 is not intended to duplicate these discussions nor to revisit existing commitments, but to create the momentum and the alliances that will accelerate action at a scale to deliver on the commitments.

We must work urgently to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis, while avoiding accelerating pollution and unsustainable behaviours. Right now, key habitats and ecosystems such as forests and grasslands are being converted at very high rates for natural resource extraction. By destroying nature, we are destroying the web of life that supports our existence on Earth. We must stop undermining our own future.

Issue areas

1. Transforming our relationship with nature

Halting biodiversity loss and restoring ecosystems

Healthy ecosystems are essential for humanity. They provide the life support systems upon which our survival and well-being depend. The extent of current trends in biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation requires urgent action and a shift to understanding our dependencies and risks associated with the decline in the flow of nature's benefits to people and economies, and their distributional effects.

Mitigation and adaptation to fight climate change

The world is heading for a temperature rise of near 3°C this century – far beyond the Paris Agreement goals of limiting global warming to well below 2°C and pursuing 1.5°C.¹ The footprint of current consumption behaviour is highly unequal, with the top 10 percent of income earners producing almost 50 percent of total carbon emissions, while the bottom 50 percent of income earners produce less than 7 per cent.²

Key challenges remain, such as fair and effective carbon pollution pricing, greater ambition and effectiveness of mitigation efforts, including the deployment of environmentally sound and clean technologies, as well as scaled-up financial, technology transfer and capacity-building support for adaptation and mitigation action.

There is a wide recognition that healthy ecosystems and nature present opportunities for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Strengthened ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions can build resilience, reduce vulnerability and provide carbon storage and sequestration, thus yielding multiple benefits and underpinning our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The rights and views of local people, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), need to be factored into policies involving land interventions and land-use change. While the Glasgow Climate Pact³ raises ambitions for climate adaptation, current efforts remain insufficient. Additional finance, strengthened capacities and concrete actions are needed to close the adaptation gap.⁴

New measures of progress toward sustainable development

Governments and international institutions can pursue new measures of progress that incentivise market, economic and financial practices towards sustainable development. Such measures can make the ecological foundation of economies central to development and planning, which could be supported by strengthened regulations to restore natural capital. Adopting approaches such as comprehensive environmental accounting, with biodiversity and its ecosystem services valued as assets, and integrated into GDP accounts are proving to be effective. Similarly, carbon accounts could help to establish innovative measures including incentives. Measures of multidimensional vulnerabilities can be considered for all countries.

2. Producing and consuming sustainably and fighting pollution

Achieving sustainable consumption and production

Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are fuelling climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as pollution and waste, with an unequal distribution of costs and benefits. The regenerative and restorative dimensions of sustainable consumption and production have often been overlooked in national policy frameworks and business practices, and yet they have a key role to play in reducing

¹ UNEP (2021). *Emissions Gap Report*. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2021>; IPCC WGIII, 2022

² UNEP (2020). *Emissions Gap Report*. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from <https://www.unep.org/emissions-gap-report-2020>

³ UNFCCC (2021). *Glasgow Climate Pact*. Decision -/CP.26. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/glasgow-climate-change-conference-october-november-2021/outcomes-of-the-glasgow-climate-change-conference>

⁴ UNEP (2021). *Adaptation Gap Report*. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from <https://www.unep.org/resources/adaptation-gap-report-2021>

pressures and increasing positive impacts on ecosystems. Accelerating efforts towards sustainable consumption and production, sustainable energy, and resource extraction and use, and making trade a force for good, are urgent actions.

Fighting plastic and chemical pollution

Plastics and chemicals are integral to almost all sectors of society, bringing important benefits in areas from medicine and agriculture to consumer goods, clean technologies and poverty alleviation. Their sound management is essential to avoiding risks to human health and ecosystems and substantial costs to national economies. A legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution would be a critical step forward.⁵ Strengthening legal frameworks and institutional capacity – including the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions, as well as SAICM – while providing incentives for innovation and collaboration are key elements of this transition.

Sustainable food systems

Food systems are one of the key drivers of biodiversity loss and changes in land- and water use, and they are also impacted by biodiversity degradation and climate change. Interventions in food production and consumption can bring simultaneous multiple benefits to human and planetary health as well as to jobs and livelihoods. Governments, businesses and consumers can do better on what we grow, how we grow it, how we distribute it, and how we tackle food loss and waste. These steps could all ensure greater resilience of food supply chains. At the same time, IPLC issues, including the fulfilment of their rights, land tenure and the respect and protection of their traditional knowledge must be understood and applied.

3. Justice, inclusion and intergenerational equity

Environmental and social justice, gender equality and accountability

Acting synergistically on the key issues of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and justice will require transformative change that ensures a fundamental, system-wide re-organization across technological, economic and social factors, including values and paradigms, goals and principles. The recently adopted Human Rights Council resolution 48/13⁶, which recognizes the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment can serve as a catalyst to allow governments, legislators, courts, and citizen groups around the globe to take action to respect, protect and fulfill the right to a healthy environment for all.

The fulfilment of human rights, including the right to meaningful and informed participation, and achievement of gender equality gives agency to individuals and peoples in vulnerable situations and is essential for designing fair, inclusive and effective actions to use, conserve and restore nature. Gender-responsive implementation of global climate and biodiversity goals is key to sustainable development. International human rights law and international environmental law also establish a clear accountability framework for environmental and human rights violations.

The justice system and anti-corruption measures in relation to environmental crimes are an essential part of the integrated solutions to protecting biodiversity. The universal implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which articulate human rights obligations and responsibilities of States and businesses respectively, is a key component of this framework. The effective implementation of the UN Guiding Principles, including through human rights due diligence, would protect the environment and those who depend on it and ensure access to justice and effective remedies when harms do occur.

⁵ UNEA (2022). *End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument*. UNEP/EAS/Res.14. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/38525>

⁶ HRC (2021). *The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment*. A/HRC/RES/48/13. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F48%2F13&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

A just transition to sustainable socio-economic systems

The transformation to sustainable socioeconomic systems will be disruptive and hence safety nets for workers will be needed to solve social tension and avoid rejection or the postponement of urgent actions. It is critical to address the key issues of diversity, equity and inclusion – so that we eliminate poverty, ensure equality and empower women. For example, funding for ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions and adaptation, should include labour conditions, gender equality and create decent jobs. Rethinking our economic models and institutions should advance a just transition, supporting the phase-out of harmful industries and promoting global collaboration.

Intergenerational equity

The actions of the current generation are often the result of inherited systems and can themselves echo across generations creating patterns and pathways for the future. This generation's demographic, equity and equality patterns will impact humanity's relationship with nature in the future and the rights of future generations. Intergenerational equity lies at the heart of sustainable development ensuring that every generation holds the Earth in common with members of the present generation and with other generations, past and future.

Science, education and culture to build solidarity and collaboration

The diverse values of nature, including how we interact and relate to nature can be better reflected in policy and action. Western and indigenous environmental ethics and philosophy can be integrated into our educational efforts throughout the entire educational system.⁷ This could build solidarity and collective action between different stakeholder groups. Science, education and culture, including enhancing lifelong learning, skills on environmental issues and stewardship directed to all, including women and girls, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, all provide a long-term route to the transformation of how we interact with nature while ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth.

If we are to enhance the biosphere's health and reduce our pressures and demands, large-scale changes will be required over the next 10 years, underpinned by unprecedented levels of fulfilment of commitments, ambition, coordinated actions and political will. We must recognize the true value of nature, create resilience and address inequalities, to achieve prosperity, rights and dignity for all – for current and future generations.

Key messages and urgent actions recommended⁸

1. A healthy planet is essential for our social and economic progress, well-being and resilience, and to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

- Collective and individual action must respond with urgency to the rapidly closing window to adapt to a changing environment and secure a healthy planet and prosperity for all. Business-as-usual poses severe threats to our well-being, prosperity and future. The planetary crisis is already a humanitarian crisis and requires new mechanisms to effectively address climate-induced emergencies, disasters and wars.
- Urgent actions require domestic policies and enabling conditions that promote holistic and integrated solutions to tackle climate change, reverse biodiversity loss and prevent pollution.

⁷W. Kelbessa, Environmental Ethics and Policy. Draft paper to the volume on **Reimagining the Human-Environment Relationship: A global policy reflection on alternative paradigms for our collective well being In support of Stockholm + 50**, UNEP-UNU/CPR, supported by IDRC, Canada

⁸ Heard at the Preparatory meeting on 28 March 2022, New York

Using rights-based approaches can connect socio-economic systems with the triple planetary crisis and address intergenerational responsibility and equity.

- New measures of progress toward sustainable development should inform policy and decision-making towards a sustainable development pathway and holistic approaches that truly value nature.
- Effective adaptation to climate change, ecosystem restoration and disaster risk reduction, at all levels, need to be scaled-up, including through integrated risk management, and investments in ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions. Carbon pricing, taxation and fossil fuels subsidies reforms can also be key tools to help countries mobilize complimentary climate finance to address mitigation and adaptation challenges.
- The scale of action needed requires that all finance – domestic and international – from public, private and philanthropic sources, should dramatically reduce our emissions from the energy, industrial and agriculture sectors, reverse biodiversity loss and prevent pollution. Expand the group of countries that have prioritised support fully towards the clean energy transition, using their resources to enhance what can be delivered by the private sector. Signatories will end new direct international public finance for unabated fossil fuels by the end of 2022.⁹

2. Effective and fair multilateralism enables the implementation of existing commitments, reached through consensus, and reflecting the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.

- Developing countries, including Least Developed Countries¹⁰ and Small Island Developing States, are among the most vulnerable and disproportionately affected by the adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation and other disasters. There is an urgent need for the simplification and acceleration of existing procedures to access financing for climate projects, including for Middle Income Countries to face their specific challenges. Access to finance, technology and technical know-how is particularly important for the most climate-vulnerable countries should be significantly increased beyond the current levels.
- Sustainable, predictable and innovative climate finance should balance support for mitigation and adaptation. The commitment undertaken by developed countries of \$100bn annual climate finance goal by 2020 to support developing countries has not been met and must be fulfilled urgently. Enhanced commitments for annual climate finance should build on this goal, notably through the new, collectively quantified goal for climate finance, which will be set in by 2024. Concessional finance should be significantly scaled up and climate finance should not be a source of additional external debt for developing countries.
- Science, education, knowledge-sharing and technology transfer are crucial for effective climate action, ecosystem restoration, fighting pollution and disaster risk reduction. Collaborative efforts should be scaled up at all levels to support awareness and institutional capacity, including on approaches such as integrated risk management, adaptation, prevention and anticipatory action.

3. The implementation of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is an important step towards achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication, inclusivity and gender equality. It is important to strengthen capacity on the environmental rule of law.

⁹ Statement on International Public Support for the Clean Energy Transition. 4 November 2021. <https://ukcop26.org/statement-on-international-public-support-for-the-clean-energy-transition/> and <https://unfccc.int/news/end-of-coal-in-sight-at-cop26>

¹⁰ Renewed support for the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022-2031 can help to address climate change and accelerate the implementation of 2030 Agenda.

- Intergenerational equity plays an important role in rethinking environmental governance in the context of the triple planetary crisis and as a feature of environmental rule of law. Building a just and equitable world is at the core of the SDGs.
- Real and meaningful participation by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), women and youth should be enabled at all levels of decision-making. The roles, responsibilities and rights of IPLCs – including their intellectual property rights – must be recognized and their knowledge harnessed, while formal and non-formal education frameworks should allow citizens to gain awareness of the urgency of environmental action to make a difference in their communities.
- The implementation of multilateral environmental agreements should be accelerated, the capacity of countries in the Global South strengthened to effectively enforce environmental rule of law and develop monitoring and accountability schemes to measure progress on implementation.
- Environmental crimes that drive biodiversity loss and deprive communities and governments of future revenues and development opportunities should be addressed. Enhanced and collaborative law enforcement responses can address environmental crime, enhance livelihoods and security, as well as restore wildlife and ecosystems.

4. Integrated and joint approaches can accelerate effective climate action, ecosystem restoration, pollution prevention and disaster risk reduction.

- Coordinated action on SDG 12 can accelerate sustainable supply chains, resource efficiency, the sound management of chemicals and waste, and regenerative production models. Efforts across the public and private sectors should align, incentivizing knowledge sharing and global collaboration at an unprecedented scale.
- Further to the recently adopted UNEA resolution on circular economy, establish an inclusive, multilateral, multi stakeholder dialogue on pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production including through resource efficiency and circular economy.
- Efforts are needed to eliminate environmentally harmful agricultural subsidies and to promote policies for sustainable food systems. An open and non-discriminatory multilateral system should facilitate access to safe, diverse, and nutritious food, while investing in the regenerative agriculture transition, which represents an economic opportunity to jointly achieve climate, biodiversity and pollution goals.
- Efforts are also needed to accelerate sustainable production and consumption through amplifying norms of sufficiency, switching to selling functions, setting stronger sustainability standards and promoting policies, investments, decent jobs and knowledge sharing to repair, reuse and recycle globally.