



## Why does Stockholm+50 matter? What did it achieve? What does it offer going forward?

By [Ligia Noronha](#), UN Assistant Secretary-General and Head of UNEP, New York Office

In the weeks that have passed since the gavel dropped on 3 June, marking an end to Stockholm+50, a handful of important questions have emerged. The unique meeting, which brought together UN member states, the UN, and an incredibly diverse set of other stakeholders, was both a commemoration and an opportunity to catalyse action. So, in the wake of months of planning and intense consultations, I offer here some reflections on why Stockholm+50 matters, what it achieved, and what it can offer going forward.

### Why does Stockholm+50 matter?

Stockholm+50 was a commemoration of 50 years since the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment. However, the 2–3 June international meeting was not of celebration of past successes—although many exist. It was a moment of reflection; a time to focus on ways to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to tackle the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. It was also a time to highlight the opportunity for positive change that the future can hold.

Science has made it abundantly clear that patterns of unsustainable consumption and production are driving these crises, not just poor enforcement of rules and regulations. Additionally, addressing the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and related recovery—which has seen deep economic disruptions and social inequities across the world—was a central theme in Stockholm+50 discussions.

There were also concerns that many earlier commitments were not being met and multilateralism was not seen to be effective and fair as it was not delivering on earlier promises made. Losing faith in governance and concerned about their uncertain future, youths are increasingly restless and eager to have their voices heard on issues that affect their lives and future, and to influence decisions going forward. There was also concern about siloed approaches and the lack of integrated responses to issues that were cross cutting and interconnected.

It should also be noted that going into Stockholm+50, a deep distrust was evident across groups. A divide on many issues between the Global North and the Global South has been growing, especially with regard to environmental and climate injustices, and inequity in natural resource use; a concern with the growing vulnerability to impacts from climate change among those least responsible for it; growing threats to environmental activists and a shrinking civic space, ongoing wars and a new war in Ukraine were additional complicating factors.

The weight of this broad set of influencing forces had led to a real need for fresh thinking on why the global community finds itself at this crossroad and what needs to be done to ensure

collective well-being. With this global context in mind—and guided by the UN General Assembly resolutions [75/280](#) and [75/326](#)—Stockholm+50 was designed with the vision of charting a path toward a healthy planet for all.

Central to achieving this vision was ensuring the international meeting helped rebuild relationships of trust by enabling conversations on environment and development matters that were not bound by political negotiations, accelerate system-wide action for a sustainable and inclusive COVID recovery, connect and build bridges across many environmental and development agendas (through learning from earlier meetings but also by informing and influencing future multilateral conversations and negotiations on key concerns), and rethink conceptions and measures of well-being and progress.

Further, the meeting provided an opportunity to garner support for a universal recognition of a human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, to explore rights of nature, to mainstream alternative voices, solutions and ideas, and to enhance the voices and engagement of youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in decision making around sustainability transitions.

## What did Stockholm+50 achieve?

Stockholm+50 brought together member states, the UN and a broad set of stakeholders to discuss solutions to issues of crucial global significance. The urging to delegates to lead with solutions and actions on commitments and the crises we face can be heard in the opening statements by co-hosts, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson of Sweden and President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, the [UN Secretary-General António Guterres](#), the President of the General Assembly, Abdullah Shahid, the President of the ECOSOC, Colleen Kelapile, and [UNEP Executive Director \(and Secretary-General of the international meeting\) Inger Andersen](#).

Without a negotiated outcome, it may be difficult to easily glean the achievements that resulted from this intense engagement. In addition to the formal and informal studies, consultations and other activities prior to and in Stockholm and elsewhere (through associated events), there are three broad outcomes that stand out as major wins: a sense of renewed global multi-stakeholder engagement, collective reflection that resulted in calls for system-wide change, and the publication of the Stockholm+50 [Agenda for Action, Renewal and Trust](#).

Firstly, the open architecture of engagement at Stockholm+50 was unique and allowed the global community to make their voices and views known. This response to a demand for action and co-created outcomes allowed for truly inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement and a sense of partnership. Because Stockholm+50 had no negotiated outcome, it allowed the global community to be bold, ideational and demanding.

This engagement produced ideas that are now available to be carried forward into forthcoming meetings. It was an opportunity to hear the voices of the youth and to engage with new perspectives and alternative paradigms. These are now available in key messages from the leadership dialogues ([LD1](#), [LD2](#), [LD3](#)), the global [youth policy paper](#), in the reports of the

[national](#) and [regional](#) consultations, in the [outcome](#) of the business round tables, in the collection of [essays on alternative voices](#), and ideas for transformative actions emerging from the discussions and collective thinking from the [side events](#).

Secondly, the international meeting enabled a collective pause for an open, unfettered reflection on what needs to be addressed today for a healthy planet for all. In 1972, the focus of the Conference was on environment, poverty and development. The strong outcomes that emerged were centred on institutions, frameworks, rights, responsibility, and environmental governance—notably resulting in the establishment of the UN Environment Programme.

Fifty years hence, the world has seen both economic, social and environmental transformations. Many for the good—such as poverty reduction, new technologies, many Multilateral Environmental Agreements—but some have resulted in the planetary and social crises that we have today. The world has, as the SEI/CEEW [report](#) for Stockholm+50 summarizes, moved from a 1972 situation of underdevelopment and scarcity and pollution to a 2022 situation of overdevelopment, affluence and inequity with planetary footprints that will influence our wellbeing into the future.

There was a clear recognition that the triple planetary crisis is threatening the achievement of the sustainable development goals and could jeopardize future development opportunities. There were many conversations around over-consumption and under-consumption in Stockholm. There were calls for pushing the boundaries of knowledge, critically on the way we do business. There were calls for system-wide changes, not incremental tinkering; revisiting the economic signals to allow change to happen. The conversations spoke of the exploitative relationship to the planet and to each other, and of our financial system that is misaligned with environmental and social goals. They spoke to the interconnectedness of the crises we face—climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and inequality and the criticality of integrated responses.

Thirdly, the international meeting resulted in a Stockholm+50 “Agenda for Action, Renewal and Trust,” which includes the [final recommendations](#), which were summarized by co-presidents Sweden and Kenya in the [closing plenary](#), to achieve the vision of a healthy planet for all as our responsibility and our opportunity. The 10 actions of the Agenda include the *what* needs to be done and the *how*. The Agenda places human well-being at the centre of a healthy planet for all, recognising that a healthy planet is a prerequisite for peaceful, cohesive and prosperous societies; it focuses on restoring our relationship with nature by integrating ethical values; and it calls for the adoption of a fundamental change in attitudes, habits, and behaviours.

Beyond this, the Agenda has recommendations to address the economic and financial drivers of planetary instability: in support of national implementation of existing commitments; on the importance of recognizing and implementing the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; on the need to rebuild relationships of trust for cooperation and solidarity; a focus on intergenerational responsibility as a cornerstone of sound policymaking;

reinforcing and reinvigorating multilateralism; and, finally, the use of the outcomes of Stockholm+50 to reinforce and reenergize ongoing international processes.

It is also important to note the many [initiatives and declarations](#) that delivered on the three Stockholm+50 principles of engagement: Intergenerational responsibility, interconnectivity and implementation opportunity.

## What does Stockholm+50 offer going forward?

Stockholm+50 provides new ideas, new models of engagement and new possibilities for strengthening environmental governance. There are five pathways of importance:

1. A focus on the economic and financial drivers of planetary instability: The Stockholm+50 Agenda for Action, Renewal and Trust can spearhead a movement towards a shift in the global narrative on environmental matters, focusing not just on the normative and the legal aspects of environmental governance, but also strongly on the economic and financial drivers of planetary stability. The importance of system-wide changes in the economic system to contribute to a healthy planet, which include among others, new measures of progress and well-being and valuing the environment in decision making. Transforming global value chains in high-impact sectors—such as food, energy, manufacturing, mobility, plastics, construction and the built environment—towards becoming net zero, nature positive, pollution free and equitable for all and aligning finance and business with these goals, are key to addressing the planetary and the inequity crises. Scaling-up of sustainable consumption and production, and circular economy are central to the recommendations and contain real opportunities for achieving the SDGs and a healthy planet
2. An environmental governance practice centred on ethics, stewardship and responsibility: A new discourse on these values can be pivotal in the reconstruction of environmental governance for a healthy planet for all and to rebuilding of trust and solidarity. A greater role is required for judges, educators, religious leaders and interfaith groups, youth, women and indigenous peoples, the business sector to create the tipping points for positive change to happen.
3. A movement toward an inclusive, networked and distributed form of environmental governance and multilateralism: The open architecture of engagement and the ideas, solutions and recommendations for actions coming out of Stockholm+50 suggests that a movement towards a more multi-level and multi-agency, polycentric form of environmental governance and multilateralism could be possible and requires careful consideration. A tool to track accountability and transparency on commitments and deliverables can also help build trust in the system.
4. Our Common Agenda, intergenerational responsibility and the long view. Intergenerational responsibility, a key plank of Stockholm+50, well aligns with the core proposals in the [Our Common Agenda](#) report, relevant to duties to the future, strategic

foresight, and solidarity to succeeding generations. This principle of engagement is evident in the proposals of the Youth policy paper, the Ministerial Declaration on Future Generations, and a Contract for the Future. Many of these concepts and ideas can and must feed into the Summit of the Future in 2023.

5. Finally, three initiatives were launched at Stockholm+50 that can be transformational, help build trust, scale actions and leapfrog: a) A [Data Driven Environmental Solutions Hub](#) (supporting developing countries capacity to act to address the triple planetary crisis); b) [CODES Action Plan for a Sustainable Planet in the Digital Age](#); and c) [Green Jobs for Youth Pact: Accelerating young skills and talent for green jobs](#) (ILO, UNEP, UNICEF).

In essence, Stockholm+50 was a unique moment when the global community, including youth and other groups, came together in determination to call for intergenerational responsibility and equity, and for systemic shifts in our economy towards achieving a healthy planet for all. Much energy was unleashed. Many hopes were articulated. It is our collective responsibility to take this forward and build that future together.