

**“STOCKHOLM+50: A HEALTHY PLANET
FOR THE PROSPERITY OF ALL – OUR
RESPONSIBILITY, OUR OPPORTUNITY”**

Thought piece towards a Concept Note for the
International Meeting, June 2-3, 2022

Prepared by UNEP

A COMMEMORATION, A REFLECTION - A TIME TO ACT

The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm marked a watershed moment. Recognizing the centrality of the environment for human well-being, it spawned environment ministries and agencies worldwide, created a host of new global agreements to protect the environment, and recognized the need for an anchoring institution in the United Nations – the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

*Five decades after the Stockholm Conference made the link between environment and poverty; thirty years after Rio chartered sustainable development; and seven years after the world adopted the 2030 Agenda, Stockholm again welcomes the world in 2022. Anchored in the Decade of Action, the theme of the international meeting is **“Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity.”** It will be an occasion to raise awareness on the importance of protecting our planet and drive action towards achieving sustainable development for the well-being of current and future generations, further recognize the interconnections between humans and nature, and centerstage the value of a healthy planet for all.*

Stockholm+50 is a commemoration, a time for reflection of this interconnectedness and, critically, a time for urgent actions to anchor and harness emerging opportunities for a better future on a healthy planet as part of our responsibility to present and future generations. It is time to make bold choices, by listening to and in support of the most vulnerable, the weakest and those at risk;¹ by improving human lives and human flourishing with a development nested in a healthy planet; by pivoting to a development that shifts from its current material and carbon intensity, which privileges the few and reduces opportunities for the many, and places longer term development at risk. Less developed and emerging economies are exposed to multiple stresses, including COVID-19, the climate emergency, and the debt crises. This is a time to focus on innovative means of implementation and policies to enable countries to increase fiscal space, invest in sustainable infrastructure, rebuild key sectors and value chains, and unleash finance and investment in recovery and long-term sustainable development to ensure a safer, healthier, resilient, and more equitable world.

*Our common future and agenda need collective actions, partnerships, social protection systems, a new social contract and compacts with nature. While “we the peoples” face common challenges, the ability to respond and change course varies across nations based on resources and capacity. The UN Secretary-General’s **Our Common Agenda**² calls for reinvigorating inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism to address the “breakdown and unending crisis” and a “breakthrough to a greener and safer future.” A future of renewed opportunities, and of solidarity. As the Secretary-General reflected on the state of the broken planet in December 2020, “Solidarity is humanity. Solidarity is survival.”*

*This note speaks to the organizing principles of engagement – **Implementation, Interconnection and Intergenerational**; and **5 Rs - pathways to a healthy planet** which will help frame the Leadership Dialogues and consultations and serve as guidance for commitments and actions. Based on the UN General Assembly Resolution 75/326, the leadership dialogues will address the following themes:*

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

Leadership dialogue 2: Achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leadership Dialogue 3: Accelerating the implementation of the environmental dimension of Sustainable Development in the context of the Decade of Action.

¹ S.R. Tikekar, ‘Epigrams from Gandhiji’, 1949, <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/mahatma-gandhi-quotes.php>, accessed October 11, 2021.

² UN Secretary General, “Our Common Agenda”, Online, September 10, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda>.

“STOCKHOLM+50: A HEALTHY PLANET FOR THE PROSPERITY OF ALL – OUR RESPONSIBILITY, OUR OPPORTUNITY”

Thought piece towards a Draft Concept Note for the Meeting

OUR ‘INTERGENERATIONAL’ RESPONSIBILITY

1. Over the last 50 years, the economy and human wellbeing has progressed substantially, lifting hundreds of millions from poverty. Improved access to education and health have increased the well-being and capabilities of entire generations across the world, increasing freedoms and expanding opportunities over time.³ Our natural world, and human ingenuity, has created the basis for prosperity and human development.
2. However, the science tells us that our planet - and thus the economies, societies and people that depend on it – is under severe and growing pressure.⁴ An increasingly degraded planet is evident in the growing air pollution, climate instability, nature loss, plastic waste, nitrogen overload, anti-microbial resistance, chemicals and rising toxicity which are all impacting on human well-being and thereby eroding capabilities and limiting freedoms.⁵ Interconnectedness increases the pace and scale of risk transfer.
3. The 2030 Agenda and the COVID-19 crisis have centre-staged again the relationship of human progress and prosperity to a healthy environment. A degraded planet poses limits to well-being and prosperity, creating obstacles to a better future. We are depleting the stock of wealth in nature that sustains life and is the springboard of future well-being.⁶ Adjusted for planetary pressures, few if any countries are capable of delivering on high levels of human well-being in a way compatible with a common future.⁷
4. The strains on the planet are mirrored in fractured societal relations and rising inequalities, which were only aggravated by COVID-19. Over 100 million people were pushed into poverty as a result of the pandemic.⁸ Income inequalities increased by more than any other period so far in this century,⁹ placing further strain on governments’ abilities to keep the social fabric

³ UNDP, *The 2020 Human Development Report*, New York, 2020, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-report>.

⁴ IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C approved by governments”, 2018, <https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/>; IPBES, *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, 2019, <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>; UNEP, *Global Environment Outlook 6*, Nairobi, 2019, <https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6>; UNEP, *Global Chemicals Outlook II: From Legacies to Innovative Solutions*, Nairobi, 2019, <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-chemicals-outlook-ii-legacies-innovative-solutions>; Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*, New York, 2019, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf; IRP, *Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want*, UNEP, Nairobi, 2019, <https://www.resourcepanel.org/reports/global-resources-outlook>; SIPRI, *Anthropocene (In)Securities – Reflections on Collective Survival 50 Years After the Stockholm Conference*, E Lövbrand and M Mobjörk (eds.), SIPRI Research Report No. 26, Oxford, 2021, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/anthropocene_insecurities.pdf.

⁵ UNEP, *Making Peace with Nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies*, Nairobi, 2021, <https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>.

⁶ UNEP, *Inclusive Wealth Report 2018*, Nairobi, 2018, <https://www.unep.org/resources/inclusive-wealth-report-2018>.

⁷ UNDP, *The 2020 Human Development Report*, New York, 2020, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-report>.

⁸ World Bank, *World Development Report 2020*, Washington, DC, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2020>.

⁹ Credit Suisse, *Global wealth report 2021*, Zürich, 2021, <https://www.credit-suisse.com/about-us/en/reports-research/global-wealth-report.html>.

together. Many countries, particularly lower income and least developed, are desperately struggling to recover from COVID-19 and have been set back by years if not decades.¹⁰ As the UN Secretary-General has pointed out, *“humanity’s welfare – and indeed, humanity’s very future – depend on solidarity and working together as a global family to achieve common goals”*.¹¹

5. Unsustainable consumption and production drive planetary, health, and equity crises. Here again the science is clear: the patterns of unsustainable consumption and production throughout much of the world are key drivers of the environmental and human crises that we currently face.¹² Inequality is starkly evident in the use of natural resources with asymmetric distribution of the related benefits and environmental impacts across countries and regions. UNEP’s and ILRI’s report on *Preventing the Next Pandemic* suggests that seven principal consumption and production mediated factors are driving the emergence of zoonotic diseases.
6. Today, we are at a moment in the history of the human environment not dissimilar to 1972. But today, we know more about the causes, the impacts and the opportunity of actions and the costs of inaction.¹³ Thus, while the opportunities remain, the responsibilities have grown.
7. The impacts of the planetary crises call for actions today. We have a responsibility to the current and future generations for the footprints of today that may limit their well-being in the future. **The notion of responsibility was well embedded in the 1972 Declaration.** As the Secretary General of the 1972 Conference, Maurice Strong, put it when opening the debate at UNGA in 1972, *“it is the first acknowledgement by the community of nations of new principles of behaviour and responsibility which must govern their relationship in the environmental era.”*¹⁴

OUR ‘IMPLEMENTING’ OPPORTUNITY

We have a vision for the future we want – it is embodied in the 2030 Agenda. Supporting these achievements for the longer term, we need a healthy planet in which the climate is stable, the planet is free from pollution, we live in harmony with nature, biodiversity flourishes and human capabilities and freedoms continue to grow for all.

8. The coming year will be pivotal for People, Planet and Prosperity, with major decisions on the table for climate, nature, and pollution. It is anticipated that the agreements reached through these political processes will strengthen the current Decade of Action towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. The outcomes of the various global and regional processes can be brought into the thinking at Stockholm+50 for a healthy planet through **5 interconnected pathways**. These

¹⁰ UNDESA, “UN/DESA Policy Brief #81: Impact of COVID-19 on SDG progress: a statistical perspective”, New York, 2020, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-81-impact-of-covid-19-on-sdg-progress-a-statistical-perspective>.

¹¹ UN Secretary General, “Our Common Agenda”, Online, September 10, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda>.

¹² IRP, *Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want*, UNEP, Nairobi, 2019

¹³ The Stockholm Declaration (UN Conference on the Human Environment, *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment*, New York, 1973, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102582>) alerted us to the need of acting wisely to protect the planet: *“We have reached a moment in history in which we must guide our actions around the world, paying more attention to the consequences that they may have for the environment. Through ignorance or indifference, we can cause immense and irreparable damage to the earthly environment on which our lives and well-being depend.”*

¹⁴ M Strong, “Statement by Maurice Strong at the second committee of the General Assembly”, 19 October 1972. Quoted in L. B Sohn, *The Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment*, The Harvard International Law Journal, Volume 14, No 3, Summer 1973.

pathways will serve to chart a course towards Stockholm+50 and beyond through providing frames for the Leadership Dialogues and enable us to measure progress towards a healthy planet.

- **Regeneration**¹⁵: of nature and ecosystems, of social and community resilience and institutions¹⁶ of solidarity and delivery on the UN Decade of Action and Ecosystems Restoration; through reciprocity, between peoples and between people and nature; and recognition of the home that the planet provides to human and non-human, present and future generations alike, and the right and the need for a healthy planet and human environment.¹⁷
 - **Recovery**¹⁸: from COVID-19, from social and environmental and implementation deficits; from loss of jobs and income through skills-building opportunities, innovative financing and social protection schemes.
 - **Rebalance**¹⁹: of relations with other living species, of access and use of resources, energy, food and materials²⁰, through reduction of wasteful production, consumption, and unequal footprints that derive from, and result in, unequal access to opportunities and income; through repurposing of agricultural, fossil fuel and fishery subsidies, aligning finance with healthy planet actions.
 - **Renewal**²¹: of multilateralism that is stronger, more networked, inclusive and anchored within the United Nations; and of the social contract and interconnections between peoples, governments, civil society, children and youth, and the private sector²² looking to building opportunities to strengthen institutions in support of implementation.
 - **Reimagine**²³: a common future through listening and responding to the voices of current and future generations, the youth, indigenous peoples, those marginalized by a loss of resilience, and to the needs of non-human species on a fragile planet;²⁴ and one that promotes a meaningful, diverse engagement of all stakeholders and is fit for purpose to address the inherent opportunities, responsibilities and delivery of unrealized commitments
9. By taking stock of both the opportunities before us and the responsibilities towards other generations and other species, we will draw from the legacy of the 1972 Stockholm declaration and lay a path towards the future that is bold, decisive, and shared, that also values ecosystems intrinsically going beyond their value and importance to human needs and uses. The complexities and uncertainties and insecurities that accompany interconnectedness and interdependence, are best addressed through greater collective

¹⁵ In support of Leadership Dialogue 1.

¹⁶ CBD, *First Draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework*, 5 July 2021, <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/abb5/591f/2e46096d3f0330b08ce87a45/wg2020-03-03-en.pdf>.

¹⁷ UN News, "Access to a healthy environment, declared a human right by UN rights council", Online, October 8, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102582>.

¹⁸ In support of Leadership Dialogue 2, below.

¹⁹ In support of Leadership Dialogue 2, below.

²⁰ Builds on the outcomes of COP 26 and the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit.

²¹ In support of Leadership Dialogue 3, below.

²² UN Secretary General, "Our Common Agenda", Online, September 10, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda>.

²³ Through the visioning and perspectives of state and non-state actors.

²⁴ UN Secretary General, "Our Common Agenda", Online, September 10, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda>.

action, and enhanced and inclusive multilateralism. We can build on prior efforts to reimagine and rebalance, to revive and to recover, and ultimately regenerate the social and environmental ecosystems that support life on earth. In the past 50 years, we have accomplished much – and yet much remains to be done. It is time to take stock, and build pathways from our diversity and knowledge, towards a future that works for all.

INCLUSIVE AND INTERCONNECTED – FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will help create a healthy planet for the prosperity of all. But how do we get there? And how do we build on the global processes that are underway this year?

10. Stockholm+50 will complement the important spaces that have been created for discussing and resolving climate, nature and pollution challenges. Its central value added goes beyond aggregating the insights and decisions from these political processes: it represents a chance to think and act beyond the silos of individual challenges towards a systemic approach, one that builds on existing initiatives and agreements and that takes them one step forward – marking a milestone on how we conceive and deliver on human well-being, capabilities and freedoms by focusing on the needs of the human environment in the 21st century.
11. To make progress, we need to break down the challenge of navigating towards the next 50 years into manageable sets of actions. The process around the leadership dialogues and stakeholder consultations will provide the focus and bring together the actors necessary to highlight the actions required for a healthy planet, connecting existing agreements and political commitments arising out the key global processes to address the triple planetary crisis.
12. Based on the UN General Assembly Resolution 75/326,²⁵ and evolving from the intergovernmental tracks and stakeholder engagements and consultations, the meeting will have three leadership dialogues, content and direction of which will develop over time.
13. **Leadership Dialogue 1: Reflecting on the urgent need for actions to achieve a healthy planet and prosperity of all**, where aspirations and rights can be fulfilled and which focus on the need to live in harmony with nature²⁶, ecosystems restoration, including how we measure and define wealth and prosperity, and integrate human development and planetary pressures with a focus on gender equality, social equity, ecological security, innovation, lifestyles and youth. In short, this leadership dialogue will focus on transformative actions, moving beyond incremental change to systemic change, where the ambition is to redefine our relationship with nature by taking further steps to achieve net-zero carbon, nature-positive, and zero-pollution societies.

²⁵ UNGA, “Modalities for the international meeting entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”, Res A/RES/75/326, New York, 2021, <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/326>.

²⁶ UN, “Harmony with Nature”, Online, <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/unDocs/>, accessed October 11, 2021.

14. Leadership dialogue 2: **Achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic**, with a focus on actions needed to recover and build forward from the pandemic and its adverse impacts on people, planet and prosperity; and to put the world back on track to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. This could be through a focus on sectors most affected by COVID-19, through rethinking financing, social protection schemes for the informal sector, policies for circularity and sustainable consumption and production, digitalization, where job creation, skills building, and capacity enhancement form a central part of the just transition for all countries and in particular for the poorest and most vulnerable. To summarize, this is where the short-term actions needed to recover and build forward from the pandemic are brought together to rebalance development to address inequity, wasteful consumption, unequal opportunity, and relations with nature, building on the various global ongoing global and regional processes of 2021/22.

15. Leadership dialogue 3: **Accelerating the implementation of the environmental dimension of Sustainable Development in the context, of the Decade of Action**. This dialogue will focus on multi-level governance, institutions, multilateral frameworks, and commitments highlighting accountability, accessibility, and incentives necessary to go from commitment to action, focusing on showcasing concrete benefits at country level. It will focus on aligning private and public agendas, including financial, economic, normative, and others; thinking around global public goods; and where innovative financing and capacity building opportunities can be explored to strengthen institutions, human capabilities and the infrastructural foundation for a more equitable, resilient and sustainable transition to a healthier planet leaving no one behind. In short, this leadership space is about focussing on the means to implement commitments and actions, ensuring delivery on the 2030 Agenda, the Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement and the national implementation plans of the emerging Global Biodiversity Framework through a renewed engagement with a multilateralism, that is inclusive and networked, and that works for all.

16. With UNEP as focal point, Sweden and Kenya as co-hosts, and partners across the globe, including UN agencies, local governments, cities, civil society, women, indigenous groups, faith-based groups, academia, children and youth, industry, finance, and philanthropic foundations, we seek an open architecture and an inclusive approach that reflects the richness and diversity of voices and perspectives to reimagine a common, prosperous future on a healthy planet.

17. Importantly, these dialogues and consultations will also inform follow-up to the international meeting, including the launch of legacy initiatives designed to help countries accelerate progress on sustainable development priorities and move **“from commitment to action”**. **Join us on this journey towards Stockholm+50 – and beyond.**