

UN Environment Management Group Nexus Dialogues



Outcome Document

The international UN meeting “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity” will take place from 2-3 June 2022, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm.

The UN Environment Management Group (EMG) organized a **2-Part Nexus Dialogue Series on Stockholm+50** to consider achievements and challenges encountered by the UN system in addressing the environmental agenda since the 1972 Stockholm Conference. The Dialogues highlighted reflections of a diverse array of people who have worked with the UN system in different capacities on lessons learned since 1972, and their recommendations on the future implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Key messages noted during the Stockholm+50 Nexus Dialogue Series

An esteemed roundtable of high- and expert-level representatives furnished a brief historical overview since the Stockholm Conference in 1972:

- The **Stockholm Conference in 1972 was vital in creating a normative structure for pressing environmental issues.**
- **Stockholm 1972** furthered the understanding of the human environment through:
 - Understanding the Earth as a complex system of stimuli and responses;
 - Governance and environmental diplomacy as enabling environments; and
 - Shifting from economic development towards human-centered development based on a clean and healthy environment.
- **As a direct result of the Stockholm Conference, UNEP was established**, acting as the leading global environmental authority promoting environmental governance including the

environmental rule of law, global and regional programmes, and capacity-building, particularly in national environmental ministries. Further, UNEP welcomed the engagement of non-state stakeholders, contributing strongly to both global democracy and scientific environmental diplomacy.

- However, as discussions progressed, **a sense of institutional competition within the UN system ensued**. UNEP co-existed with other, distinct conventions and independent entities, leading to emerging, systemic, and ongoing fragmentation of the environmental agenda.
- In 1992, the Commission on Sustainable Development¹ was created, reinforcing **institutional assumptions that UNEP focused on the environment while economic/social dimensions were left to other actors**.
- The 1972 Stockholm Conference produced a political euphoria of multilateralism and action, yet today the world may stand in greater peril as **scientific warnings are eschewed in favor of short-term politics**.

Since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the UN system has experienced milestone successes:

- **Stockholm 1972 framed a new ethos and principle of global responsibility and solidarity**. Language in the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment², located in the Preamble and Principles 24 and 25 laid the ground for five decades of multilateral environmental law.
- The UN system has successfully **shifted the debate from siloed environmental discussion towards multi-faceted and progressively-nuanced nexus integration** (i.e., the MDGs, Rio+20, and the 2030 Agenda) which has yielded, among other insights, the centrality of the environment for human beings, the human right to a healthy environment, and the formal recognition of the relationship between environmental degradation and humanitarian crises.
- The UN system has experienced a **greater level of participatory governance**, engaging stakeholders ranging from the private sector, civil society, and public sector actors.
- A focus on intergenerational equity and human dignity³, both mentioned in Principle 1 of the Stockholm Declaration⁴, **has strengthened the voice of women, indigenous peoples, and youth**, forming the foundation of shared responsibility and the reimagination of the social contract.
- Thematically, the **UN system's work on the ozone and Montreal Protocol have been major planetary successes**, made possible by UN-wide efforts, and stakeholder engagement to generate the scientific evidence base needed to inform policies and investment decisions.
- **Scientific ambitions set in the Multilateral Environmental Agreements have contributed to- and benefitted from- UN system efforts** to identify and monitor environmental challenges via

¹ Commission on Sustainable Development, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/csd.html>

² United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 16 June 1972; U.N. General Assembly Resolutions 2994/XXVII, 2995/XXVII and 2996/XXII of 15 December 1972, <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/29567/ELGP1StockD.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

³ Leaving no one behind, <https://www.un.org/en/desa/leaving-no-one-behind>

⁴ Ibid., <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/29567/ELGP1StockD.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

intergovernmental scientific assessments, thereby ensuring the knowledge is jointly-owned and leveraged by member states.

Despite successes, the UN system has encountered challenges since the 1972 Stockholm Conference:

- **Inclusive, networked multilateralism⁵ is necessary for global governance and collaborative solutions**, and unfortunately, it continues to be threatened by “me first” approaches. Solidarity and shared responsibility in the context of the common good will lead to intergenerational equity.
- **The complex interplay between environment and development has remained challenging since Stockholm 1972**, particularly as stakeholders internalize that high-level promises can be made without political follow-through.
- Stockholm 1972 was beneficial for the global north’s environmental development; **however other parts of the world continue to experience inequitable development and progression**:
 - Rates of natural resource extraction and consumption have shifted between countries, yet overall patterns from 50 years ago have not changed.
 - Environmental and trade agendas continue to be misaligned with resource use, pollution, and labour.
 - The model of linear development (i.e., the evolutionary model of least developed, developing, and developed countries) is not contested, and may bias UN system efforts.
- Unlike in the past century, **conflicts today are increasingly protracted and domestic, amplified by the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution**. People displaced by conflict continue to live in areas most vulnerable and least adapted to respond to climate change.
- As the human right to a healthy environment was recently recognized by the Human Rights Council⁶, **regulation and accountability mechanisms are needed to hold stakeholders responsible for environmental destruction**. Simultaneously, **indigenous peoples and environmental defenders require increased formal and legal recognition and protection from harm**.
- In **addressing social and economic dimensions in parallel to climate change and other environmental efforts**, there remains work to be done:
 - Environmental development will not progress successfully unless the livelihood of the poorest is guaranteed.
 - Within the UN system, central issues (e.g., race and gender) have gained recognition, but deeper efforts should be undertaken to integrate them into programmatic impact.
 - Though environmental goals are set, scientific advice is deemphasized and implementation falls short. In addition to national action, there may be value in

⁵ SG/SM/20264, 21 September 2020, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20264.doc.htm>

⁶ Access to a healthy environment, declared a human right by Human Rights Council, 8 October 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102582>

empowering local government and financial sector actors to undertake the appropriate next steps.

- **The lack of institutional coherence within the UN system has led to fragmented decision-making**, affecting a changing world experiencing detrimental resource issues. For example, there is no organization with a global mandate on energy within the UN, despite energy's cross-cutting impacts on environmental, economic, and social development, and with technological change, innovation, and capital investments rapidly altering its landscape.

Looking ahead, lessons learned and new insights ahead of Stockholm+50 were identified and shared:

- **Stockholm+50 represents a reinvigorated opportunity to renew inclusive, networked multilateral cooperation** and for the UN system, member states, and multi-level stakeholders to feed into the 2030 Agenda. Three lessons underscore the sentiment:
 - A fundamental “rethink” of humanity’s relationship with nature is required and must recognize the intrinsic value of nature, and the interdependence of humans with nature.
 - Efforts to renew multilateralism must be accompanied by reframing national sovereignty in a dynamic world needing a global governance system.
 - Leaders must seek to cultivate a deeper sense of global solidarity and relearn the “why” behind international cooperation and collaboration, in addition to the “how.”
- In addition to improving multilateralism, **rectifying fragmentation of agencies’ environmental mandates and reducing internal territorial conflict within the UN system is critical**. Some environmental institutions remain frozen in time, struggling to adapt to the changing world, an issue which is compounded by UN system inharmony, further wasting resources.
- **The UN system is capable of achieving more**, including:
 - Mitigating the risk of COVID-19 and hedging against future, similar pandemics.
 - Addressing the direct drivers of unsustainable production and rebalancing natural resources for the prosperity of all.
 - Supporting governments and other stakeholders to set standards and shift the incentives needed to phase out subsidies for the fossil fuel industry and repurposing subsidies for the agricultural sector towards a just transition.
 - Facing the gap between global commitments and local implementation of legislation, as well as the gap in enforcement of constitutional and procedural rights for environmental defenders, indigenous peoples, local communities, and fellow citizens.
- **Environmental degradation can be reduced and climate resilience of vulnerable people increased by addressing humanitarian needs ahead of environmental shocks** through reliable and timely forecasting information. This requires financial resources from donors, local capacity-building, and multilateral collaboration across civil society, governments, and the UN system.

- Inertia caused by hardwired investments made decades ago is currently impacting economic trajectory; however, **investment decisions concerning the next 30 years are occurring at present and require attention.**
- A **System of Environmental Economic Accounting⁷** has initiated a new definition of wealth, in terms of human and environmental well-being, complementing financial measures. The system uses non-financial impacts (e.g., carbon) as “denominators” or currency to reframe traditional economic accounting processes and help rethink – for example - taxing fossil carbon releases, and rewarding sequestration. Similar accounting processes can be pursued for biodiversity (using minimum subsistence level), food systems (using food production and consumption), human health, employment, wellbeing, and so forth.

Ahead of Stockholm+50, the following recommendations and aspirations for the future were suggested:

- **Stockholm+50 can accelerate UN system efforts towards a healthy planet for the prosperity of all, in both current and future generations,** by focusing on nexus interlinkages and integrated implementation:
 - The UN must enhance its multistakeholder and multilateral advisory essence.
 - System change should be made through well-established pathways of conventions and agreements that come together, e.g., through COPs or UNEA.
 - Empower youth and child stakeholders to allow them to have impact at international, national, and local levels.
- **The UN system may find value in empowering a science-based institution** to adopt global legislation to protect planetary boundaries in the common global interest, negotiating the sharing of responsibilities across governments and corporations, and to implement and enforce these decisions with adequate resources for continued capacity-building.
- **Intergenerational equity and regard for nature should form the foundation of all UN system efforts** focused on sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12), transforming the financial and economic system to redirect investment flows from nature-negative to nature-positive.
- A system’s most effective leverage point is by addressing its ethical framework – its *raison d’être*. **Stockholm+50 should reinvigorate multilateralism and global solidarity by strengthening the reasons behind international unity, reciprocity, and diversity.** Leaders must find their unique place in a global system, in empathic collaboration with others, in order to embrace new ideas and commit to a shared responsibility.

We would like to thank the following high-level and expert panellists and organizations for their valuable contributions to the Stockholm+50: A 2-Part Nexus Dialogue Series:

⁷ System of Environmental Economic Accounting, <https://seea.un.org/>



Stockholm+50: Taking Stock of Our Responsibility & Opportunity (23 November 2021)

Moderator: Mr. John E Scanlon AO, former Secretary-General of CITES, CEO, Elephant Protection Initiative Foundation & Chair, UK Government Challenge Fund

- Ms. Haruko Okusu, Principal Coordination Officer, UNEP
- Ms. Johanna Lissinger Peitz, Ambassador for Stockholm+50, Senior Advisor at Ministry of Environment, Sweden
- Ms. Kerstin Stendahl, Head of Ecosystems Integration Branch, UNEP
- Mr. Ivar Baste, co-Chair for Future of GEO process Steering Committee, Senior Advisor at Norwegian Environment Agency
- Ms. Johannah Bernstein, International Environmental Lawyer, Bernstein & Associates
- Mr. Jamil Ahmad, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, UNEP
- Mr. Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Senior advisor on governance and sustainability, Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future
- Mr. Steven Stone, Deputy Director, Economy Division, UNEP
- Mr. Eduardo S. Brondizio, Distinguished Professor, Anthropology & Adjunct Professor of Dept. of Geography & School of Public & Environmental Affairs, Indiana University Bloomington, nominated by UNESCO
- Mr. Jan Cherlet, Senior Environmental and Social Sustainability Advisor, Programme - Humanitarian & Development Division, WFP
- Mr. Tim Scott, Senior Policy Advisor, Environment, Nature, Climate, Energy, UNDP
- Ms. Adriana Zacarias Farah, Head & Global Coordinator for Global Opportunities for SDGs (GO4SDGs), UNEP

Stockholm+50: Foreseeing the Future of Our Responsibility & Opportunity (30 November 2021)

Moderator: Mr. John E Scanlon AO, former Secretary-General of CITES, CEO, Elephant Protection Initiative Foundation & Chair, UK Government Challenge Fund

- Ms. Haruko Okusu, Principal Coordination Officer, UNEP
- Ms. Johanna Lissinger Peitz, Ambassador for Stockholm+50, Senior Advisor at Ministry of Environment, Sweden
- Mr. Adil Najam, Dean, Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University
- Mr. Adnan Amin, former Director-General, International Renewable Energy Agency and Senior Fellow at Harvard's Belfer Center
- Mr. Arthur Dahl, President, International Environment Forum
- Ms. Paola Deda, Director, Forests, Land and Housing Division, UNECE
- Ms. Joan Carling, Environment and Indigenous Rights Defender
- Mr. Benjamin Schachter, Associate Human Rights Officer, OHCHR
- Ms. Zinta Zommers, Humanitarian Affairs Officer, Anticipatory Financing, OCHA
- Mr. Felipe Gómez Gallo, President, Student Platform for Engineering Education Development (SPEED), nominated by Youth Constituency, UNEP
- Ms. Sara Cognuck González, Climate Youth Activist from Costa Rica, UNICEF Consultant, nominated by UNICEF