

# Delivering on the vision of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A UN System Contribution to Stockholm + 50



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

**EMG**

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>I. Reflections on Achievements and Challenges in Delivering on Stockholm 1972 .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Stockholm 1972: 50 years thence.....	1
• A triple planetary crisis .....	3
• Deepening inequality .....	4
• SDGs achievement is off-track .....	4
• Institutional siloes.....	4
• Weakening multilateralism and the need for global solidarity .....	4
<b>II. Connecting Recent UN Global Processes to Stockholm+50.....</b>	<b>6</b>
A. Human actions are driving adverse changes in climate, biodiversity, and ecosystems ....	7
B. Adverse climate, biodiversity, and ecosystem changes are hurting humanity .....	7
C. People, planet and prosperity should be addressed in a balanced manner through systemic and structural transformation .....	8
<b>III. Looking forward: Accelerating Actions for a Healthy Planet and Prosperity for All..</b>	<b>10</b>
A. Resetting humanity's relationship with nature .....	12
B. Creating resilience on a planetary and human scale .....	13
C. Addressing the triple planetary crisis synergistically .....	15
D. A human rights-based approach that leaves no one behind, strengthened institutions, accountability and justice.....	18
E. Sustainable and inclusive recovery and a just transition .....	21
F. Transformative actions to sustainability .....	23
G. Reinvigorating multilateralism and enhancing partnerships.....	25
<b>Annex: References .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Annex: Contributors and Reviewers.....</b>	<b>36</b>

## Executive Summary

On 24 May 2021, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution 75/280 to convene an international meeting entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”, in Stockholm on 2 and 3 June 2022 to commemorate the 50 years since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. This report has been prepared following the decision of the Senior Officials of the UN Environment Management Group to submit a contribution to Stockholm+50 that provides a UN system-wide perspective on delivering on the vision of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Stockholm 1972 was the first world conference to address the environment as a major issue. It catalyzed a new era of multilateral environmental cooperation and treaty-making, placed environmental issues at the forefront of international concerns, and marked the start of a dialogue among UN Member States on the link between economic growth, the pollution of the air, water, and oceans, and the well-being of people around the world. It articulated a key aspect of international cooperation on environment and development issues – i.e. that common efforts to defend and improve the human environment for present and future generations must be shared equitably, with international cooperation needed to raise resources to support developing countries. Stockholm 1972 has had a legacy of multilateral environmental norm-making, science-policy integration, and institution-building over the past fifty years.

But despite some progress, efforts to meet the commitments to limit environmental damage have largely failed. Today’s increasingly unequal and resource-intensive development model degrades and surpasses Earth’s finite capacity to sustain human well-being. The world still faces a complex of global challenges that threaten human health, prosperity, equality, and peace as well as the timely achievement of the SDGs. These challenges include: a triple planetary crisis consisting of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution; deepening inequality; SDGs achievement is off-track; institutional siloes at the national and internal levels; weakening multilateralism and the consequent need for global solidarity.

The well-being of present and future generations depends on an urgent and clear break with current trends of environmental decline through an integrated approach and whole-of-system thinking. Human actions are driving adverse changes in global climate, biodiversity, and ecosystems, as unsustainable development approaches and policies produced stark and growing inequalities, direct and indirect impacts on the effective enjoyment of human rights and destabilizing and dangerous planetary change, such as climate change, water shortage, more frequent disease outbreaks, biodiversity loss, threats to key ecosystems, and more frequent disasters. At the same time, these adverse changes are hurting humanity, placing the ecological foundations of human society and the natural systems that support other species and provide invaluable ecosystem services in great danger, and their linkages and feedback loops result in cascading risks to all the 17 SDGs. The underlying causes of the current complex of environmental crises facing the global community demonstrate the interdependence and interlinkages among the various dimensions of sustainability, from health, well-being, and social and economic prosperity to climate and ecosystems.

Structural transformations are needed to significantly strengthening social protection systems and public services (including health systems, education, water, sanitation, digital access, and other basic services); increasing investments in science, technology, and innovation; creating fiscal space in developing countries; taking a green economy approach; investing in clean and renewable energy and sustainable industry; strengthening risk governance; transitioning to sustainable food systems; reducing barriers to trade in green goods and services; and mainstreaming environmental sustainability into trade agreements to boost opportunities of a green economy through technological transfer, skill enhancement, and fresh market opportunities. In addition, the implementation of human rights, including the rights of public access to environmental information, meaningful participation in environmental decision-making, and access to justice and remedy helps protect the planet and promote sustainable development. Enhanced global and regional cooperation, including support for developing countries, is needed. The implementation of the groundbreaking multilateral commitments made by governments and the UN system from 2013 to 2015, which laid the foundations for the post-2015 multilateral framework of action, now needs to be enhanced.

The 2020s will be a decisive decade, and the year 2022 will be pivotal for people, the planet, and prosperity, with major intergovernmental decisions on the table for climate, nature, and pollution. Stockholm+50 is an opportunity to renew inclusive, networked multilateral cooperation among all stakeholders. Discussions can be framed along an interconnected pathway of regeneration, recovery, rebalance, renewal, and reimagination of humanity's relationship with the planet and with itself. Building on the commitments and actions set out by the 2030 Agenda, the suggested areas of focus and accelerated action including by the UN system towards a healthy planet for the prosperity of all could include:

- 1) Resetting humanity's relationship with nature
- 2) Creating resilience on a planetary and human scale
- 3) Addressing the triple planetary crisis synergistically
- 4) Adopting and implementing a human rights-based approach to ensure that no one is left behind
- 5) Promoting a sustainable and inclusive recovery
- 6) Catalyzing transformative actions for adaptation and sustainability
- 7) Reinvigorating multilateralism and enhancing partnerships

# I. Reflections on Achievements and Challenges in Delivering on Stockholm 1972

On 24 May 2021, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution 75/280 to convene an international meeting entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”, in Stockholm on 2 and 3 June 2022 to commemorate the 50 years since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.<sup>1</sup>

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued an urgent call last year for global solidarity to address “the greatest cascade of crises in our lifetimes.”<sup>2</sup> His 2021 report “Our Common Agenda” made clear that the economic security, social welfare, and political stability of countries, as well as the human rights of peoples, are intricately bound up with the health of the national and global ecosystems on land and sea, and that challenges in these should be addressed together.<sup>3</sup> He called for enhanced multilateral cooperation driven by global solidarity and framed by a more inclusive and networked multilateralism to navigate this complex landscape and deliver effective solutions.<sup>4</sup>

*“The biggest success has been carrying the environment from the fringes to the mainstream. ... The world has realized that we cannot pollute our way to development. ... The opportunity, at its basic level, is to turn widespread commitment and awareness on the triple planetary crisis – the crisis of climate change, the crisis of nature and biodiversity loss, and the crisis of pollution and waste – into action.” Inger Andersen, Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme*

The principles, commitments, and plans of action and implementation agreed upon by UN Member States in the multilateral policy areas of environment, economics, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (Stockholm 1972) provide the global community with invaluable perspectives, frameworks, and guidance as it reflects at Stockholm+50 on the achievements and challenges in creating a better relationship between humanity and our natural world.<sup>5</sup> By recognizing the importance of multilateralism in tackling the Earth’s triple planetary crisis – climate, nature, and pollution – Stockholm+50 could serve as the springboard to accelerate the implementation of the UN Decade of Action for delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This report has been prepared following the decision of the Senior Officials of the UN Environment Management Group<sup>6</sup> to submit a contribution to Stockholm+50 that provides a UN system-wide perspective on delivering on the vision of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## Stockholm 1972: 50 years thence

Stockholm 1972 was the first world conference to address the environment as a major issue. It resulted in the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration, which contained 26 principles and an Action Plan. While it reflected the geopolitics of its time and shaped the multilateral environmental discourse to follow, including the approaches taken by UN Member States to the relationship between environment and development,<sup>7</sup> the Declaration nevertheless catalyzed a new era of multilateral environmental cooperation and treaty-making. It placed environmental issues at the forefront of international concerns.

The conference marked the start of a dialogue among UN Member States on the link between economic growth, the pollution of the air, water, and oceans, and the well-being of people around the world. It agreed on an Action Plan and the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).<sup>8</sup> Mindful of the sectoral responsibilities of other UN organizations, UNEP was given a system-wide cross-sectoral design with responsibilities in science, norm-setting, implementation, and review. These forward-looking system-wide features of UNEP were to some extent toned down after its establishment, and have since only been partly reinvigorated, as the cross-sectoral nature of today’s environmental emergencies have become increasingly evident. The original interagency coordination mechanism was for instance disbanded in 1977, and only re-established in 2001 in the



form of the Environment Management Group (EMG). The environment fund which was set up to finance environmental programmes in the entire UN system is no longer used to foster coherence in the UN system.<sup>9</sup>

***“The 1972 Stockholm Conference was a pivotal moment for development: for the first time, environmental challenges and their impact on human wellbeing were placed centre stage. 50 years later, as the world faces complex challenges -- from the devastating effects of COVID-19, accelerating climate change, the continued degradation of our natural world, and active conflicts at an all-time high -- countries need to come together once again with the same determination of Stockholm.” Achim Steiner, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme***

Stockholm 1972 spurred multilateral environmental diplomacy and triggered the active participation of civil society and the recognition of the role of science in policymaking.<sup>10</sup> Stockholm 1972 was the first acknowledgment by the international community of “new principles of behaviour and responsibility which must govern their relationship in the environmental era,”<sup>11</sup> providing a normative framework for both the UN and national governments to comprehensively consider environmental issues and the urgency of addressing them. The Stockholm Declaration put on a par the three basic goals of humanity: protection of the human environment, peace, and global economic and social development.<sup>12</sup>

The conference highlighted the interaction between human rights and wellbeing, development, and the state of the world’s environment and set the stage for subsequent reiterations of this recognition in Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and UN declarations.<sup>13</sup> It showed that environmental issues are inherently political, not just scientific or technical, meaning that political negotiations and decision-making are necessary for global environmental cooperation.<sup>14</sup> It articulated for the first time a key aspect of international cooperation on environment and development issues – i.e. that common efforts to defend and improve the human environment for present and future generations must be shared equitably, with international cooperation needed to raise resources to support developing countries.<sup>15</sup> It also made a clear connection between the quality of the environment and the enjoyment of human rights by present and future generations.<sup>16</sup>

Science has ever since Stockholm 1972 played a key role in identifying emerging environmental issues and providing the evidence base needed to address them. Over the last 50 years trade has grown tenfold, the global economy has grown nearly fivefold, and the world population has doubled. Human prosperity has on average doubled and development gains have been achieved, but about 1.3 billion people remain poor and at least some 700 million are hungry. Human development is largely fuelled by a tripling in the extraction of natural resources, food production, and energy production and consumption over the past 50 years. The number and severity of environmental challenges, many unrecognized at the time of the conference, have increased substantially, and scientific and environmental governance structures (i.e., multilateral environmental agreements and scientific assessments) have been developed to address them.<sup>17</sup>

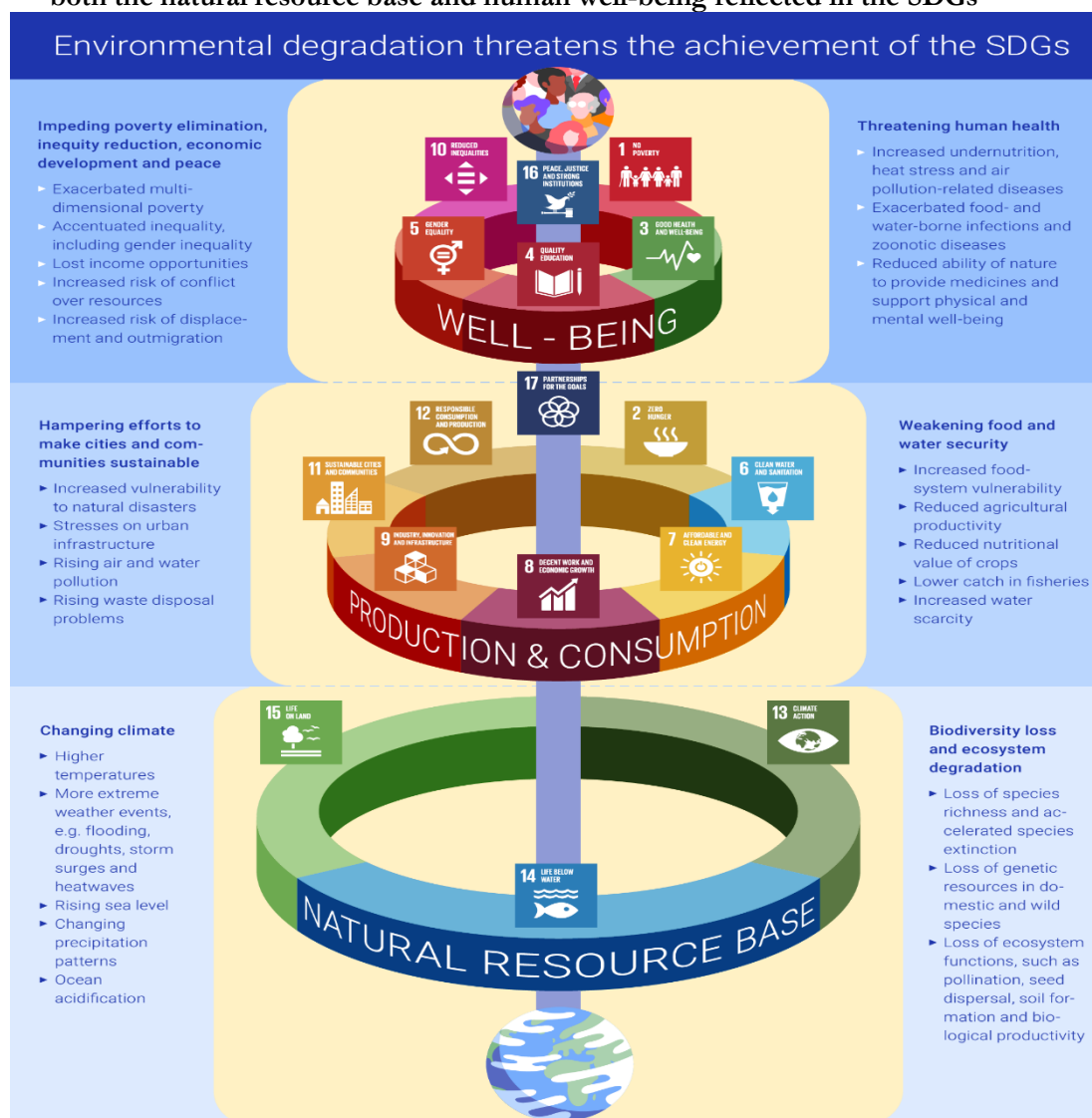
Stockholm 1972 led to the growth of national and international environmental laws, resulting in the “modern era” of environmental law<sup>18</sup> composed of over 500 MEAs, the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, a broader understanding of environmental rights including the linking of a healthy environment to human rights,<sup>19</sup> and it laid the groundwork for significant achievements in various areas, such as progress in rebuilding the ozone layer,<sup>20</sup> the adoption of policies and actions to reduce air pollution,<sup>21</sup> as well as in the development of other environment-related international instruments such as the UN water conventions<sup>22</sup>. In short, Stockholm 1972 has had a legacy of multilateral environmental norm-making, science-policy integration, and institution-building over the past fifty years.

***“The Stockholm Conference enabled the environment to become mainstreamed. There is now the recognition that a healthy environment is a necessity for livelihood, economic development, and prosperity of humankind.” Megumi Seki, Executive Secretary, Ozone Secretariat***

Despite some progress, efforts to meet the commitments to limit environmental damage have largely failed. Today’s increasingly unequal and resource-intensive development model degrades and surpasses Earth’s finite capacity to sustain human well-being. Environmental changes are undermining hard-won

development gains by causing economic costs and millions of premature deaths annually. They are impeding progress towards ending poverty and hunger, reducing inequalities, promoting sustainable economic growth, work for all, and peaceful and inclusive societies. The world still faces a complex of global challenges that threaten human health, prosperity, equality, and peace as well as the timely achievement of the SDGs (see Figure 1).<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 1: Environmental changes impact adversely both the natural resource base and human well-being reflected in the SDGs**



Source: UNEP (2021b), Making Peace with Nature:

A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies (2021), Figure 4.1

These challenges which are global in origin and magnitude include:

- **A triple planetary crisis** -- The overall environmental situation globally is deteriorating and the window for effective remedial action is closing, with the world on track for warming of at least 3°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100.<sup>24</sup> The health of the atmosphere and marine and terrestrial ecosystems on which humanity and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever, eroding the very foundations of economies, livelihoods, food security and nutrition, health, and quality of life worldwide.<sup>25</sup> This in turn is creating a new risk landscape for humanity in which multiple environmental, economic, political, health, humanitarian, and other crises interact with and exacerbate each other.<sup>26</sup> In short, the world is facing a triple planetary crisis consisting of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. These emergencies are inextricably interrelated and

consequently, they must be addressed together to “maximise the benefits and minimise trade-offs”.<sup>27</sup> Tragically, those who contribute the least to the climate crisis are the ones who suffer the most. They are the marginalized, women and girls, children, racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, older people, LGBTQI+ people, indigenous communities, the displaced, and urban poor, and rural communities. The climate crisis shines a spotlight on a spectrum of inequalities. Extreme weather-related events interact with other drivers of inequality and humanitarian need to further impact all aspects of life, from food security, health and nutrition to basic services, shelter, livelihoods and political stability.<sup>28</sup>

*“Extreme weather-related events interact with other drivers of humanitarian need to impact all aspects of life, from food security, health and nutrition to political stability. We need to shift our mindsets and approaches. We need to become more transformational in our ambitions.” Martin Griffiths, Under Secretary-General, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

- **Deepening inequality** – Driven by powerful economic, social and environmental forces, income inequality has been persistent and has increased in most developed countries and some middle-income countries, despite declines in most countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and several African and Asian countries over the last two decades. Income and wealth are increasingly concentrated at the top, increasing income disparities among and within countries, with significant impacts on gender, inter-generational equity and exposure and vulnerability to hazards.<sup>29</sup> Inequality is also reflected in a widening digital divide.<sup>30</sup> Despite the recognition in several MEAs that developed countries have a particular responsibility to take the lead in acting on environmental degradation and provide resources for developing countries to do the same, per capita emissions remain much higher among the rich than the poor, both among countries and within countries.<sup>31</sup>
- **SDGs achievement is off-track** -- From various reports prepared by UN system agencies, the world is not on track towards meeting the SDGs, with the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts exacerbating challenges in doing so.<sup>32</sup> Before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress was being made on implementing the Goals in important areas such as reducing poverty, improving maternal and child health, increasing access to electricity, and advancing gender equality. In many instances, however, those advances were not happening fast enough, and progress had either stalled or reversed in reducing inequality, lowering carbon emissions, and tackling hunger. With the pandemic still raging in many parts of the world, and the emergence of new conflicts, the extent to which the achievement of the Goals has been further derailed is not yet fully known. However, the pandemic has already had a significant impact in some areas, undermining decades of development efforts.<sup>33</sup>
- **Institutional siloes** -- Humanity’s ability to manage cooperatively our complex and interlinked global economic, human rights, health, environmental, and humanitarian crises have not kept pace with the deepening of these crises due to an international system that has become fragmented and outgrown its original design and national decision-making processes that are done in siloes.<sup>34</sup> Resource allocation decisions and efforts towards achieving poverty reduction objectives and humanitarian response often failed to include an environmental dimension, and environmental measures were implemented in a silo and often were formulated without consideration of their impact on the root causes of poverty, economic security, conflict, or overall human health and well-being.<sup>35</sup> The SDGs were framed to build on the interdependencies and interlinkages between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions and provide integrated resource management and sustainable development solutions within a coherent framework based on nexus thinking.<sup>36</sup> While this approach of breaking down siloes and fostering collaborative action on the SDGs is a hallmark of the 2030 Agenda, much remains to be done to make this approach effective at both the international and national levels.<sup>37</sup>
- **Weakening multilateralism and the need for global solidarity** – The need for an integrated and well-functioning multilateral system to address interlinked global challenges has been



expressed since the 1972 Stockholm Conference and subsequently reiterated in other UN declarations.<sup>38</sup> The complex of global interlinked crises requires a shared global response founded on a deep sense of international cooperation and collaboration based on equity and a renewed determination to fulfil long-standing commitments.<sup>39</sup> However, multilateralism, including the agreement on and the pursuit of multilateral solutions to address global problems, is facing severe challenges with the rise of nationalism in many countries and the increasing tendency of countries to rely on unilateral or plurilateral approaches. Current experience with these crises shows a critical paradox: international cooperation is more needed than ever but also harder to achieve. The UN Secretary-General has called for a renewed commitment to a rules-based order, and a reformed, reinvigorated, strengthened multilateral system.<sup>40</sup>

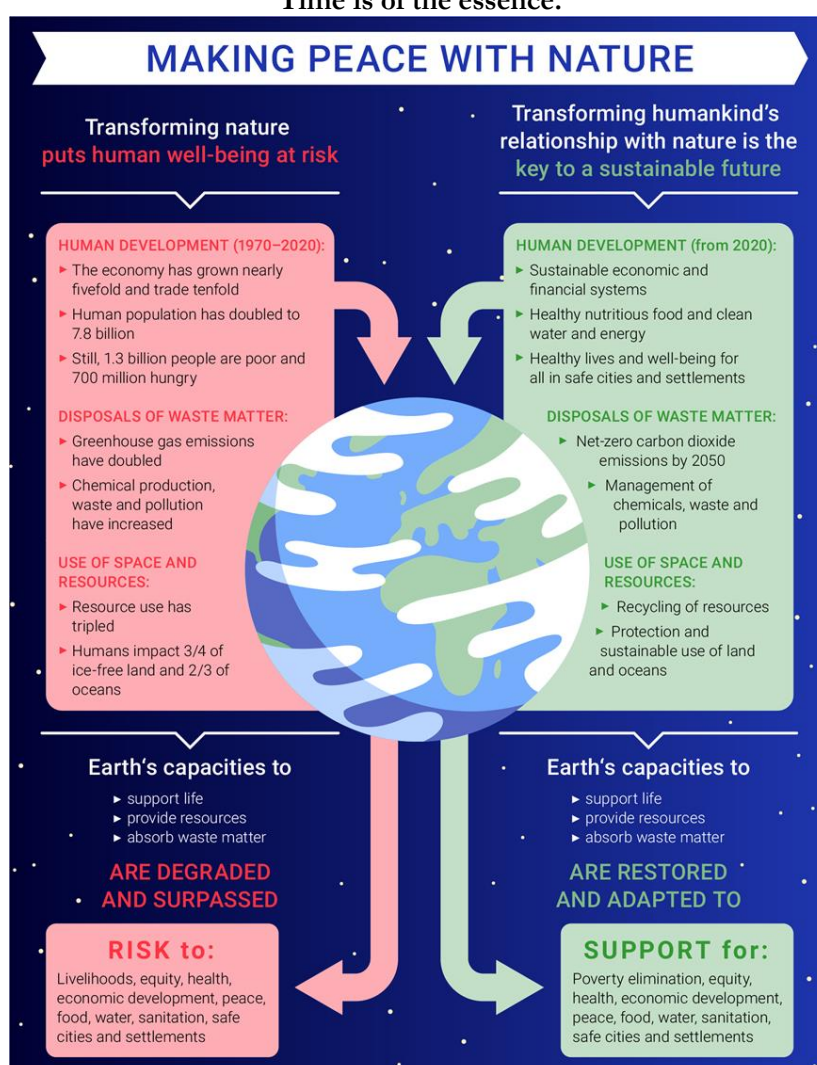
**Table 1:**  
**Achievements and Challenges since Stockholm 1972**

Achievements	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of “Only One Earth”</li> <li>• New era of multilateral cooperation and diplomacy on environment and development</li> <li>• Inspired new norms and principles that fostered the growth of international and national environmental law</li> <li>• Recognition of linkage between poverty and environment</li> <li>• Opened space for participation of non-state actors</li> <li>• Recognition of connection between humans and nature</li> <li>• Launched an “environmental rights revolution”, including the human right to a healthy environment</li> <li>• Elevated importance of science with state of environmental assessment and reporting</li> <li>• New paradigm integrating economic growth, human rights, social equality, and environment</li> <li>• Establishment of UNEP</li> <li>• Enhanced understanding of interlinked risks threatening the stability of ecological, social and economic systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today’s increasingly unequal and resource-intensive development model degrades and surpasses Earth’s finite capacity to sustain human well-being</li> <li>• Planetary resilience is at its weakest – the triple planetary crisis</li> <li>• Rising socio-economic inequalities</li> <li>• SDG achievement is off track</li> <li>• Fragmentation and siloed approaches among international institutions to multilateral and national environment and development decision making</li> <li>• Weakening multilateralism</li> <li>• Lack of global oversight over non-state actors while strengthening the participation of civil society</li> <li>• Monitoring implementation on the ground</li> <li>• Weak science-policy interface</li> <li>• Challenge of environmental coordination in the UN system due to institutional and resource constraints</li> <li>• Weak risk governance</li> </ul>

## II. Connecting Recent UN Global Processes to Stockholm+50

The well-being of present and future generations depends on an urgent and clear break with current trends of environmental decline through an integrated approach and whole-of-system thinking. The coming decade is crucial. Society needs to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 45 percent by 2030 compared to 2010 levels and reach net-zero emissions by 2050 to limit warming to 1.5 °C as aspired to in the Paris Agreement, while at the same time addressing the climate change adaptation gap, conserving and restoring biodiversity and minimizing pollution and waste. Everyone has a role to play in ensuring that human knowledge, ingenuity, technology, and cooperation are redeployed from transforming nature to transforming humanity's relationship with nature. Polycentric governance is key to empowering people to express themselves and act environmentally responsibly without undue difficulty or self-sacrifice (see Figure 3).<sup>41</sup>

**Figure 2: The well-being of present and future generations depends on an urgent and clear break with the current trends of environmental decline. Time is of the essence.**



Source: UNEP (2021b), Making Peace with Nature:

A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies (2021), Figure KM1

Stockholm+50 is not taking place in isolation. It is inspired by transformative agendas and commitments from recent UN global processes. This Chapter presents a brief overview of key messages from the recent UN-supported intergovernmental science-policy processes, on the themes of Stockholm+50. It highlights the interconnected challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed for a healthy planet towards the prosperity of all.

#### A. Human actions are driving adverse changes in climate, biodiversity, and ecosystems

*“The Stockholm meeting called for action on virtually all environmental issues and recognized the complex relationship of those issues to economic and social development. Yet here we find ourselves 50 years later with climate change and biodiversity loss at levels far worse than was imagined in 1972. Stockholm told us what needed to be done, and it is up to us to deliver.” Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals*

Human activities have transformed the Earth’s natural systems, exceeding their carrying capacity and disrupting their self-regulatory mechanisms, with likely irreversible consequences for humanity.<sup>42</sup> Current global efforts to reduce human-caused emissions and mitigate global warming fall short of the 30 percent emission reductions needed by 2030 to limit warming to 2C and the 55 percent needed for 1.5C.<sup>43</sup> Current efforts to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change are also insufficient and the adaptation gap needs to be addressed.<sup>44</sup>

Sectoral analyses such as those on oceans, land, and biological diversity all highlight the adverse impact that human activities have had on the state of the natural

environment. UN reports have noted that oceans are under threat from a wide range of anthropogenic pressures, threatening their ability to contribute to poverty eradication, a sustainable economy, and food security and nutrition.<sup>45</sup> Human use of and demand for land-based resources directly affect more than 70% of the global, ice-free land surface and drive increasing land-based greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, land degradation, loss of natural ecosystems, and declining biodiversity.<sup>46</sup> Biodiversity is declining faster than at any time in human history due to multiple human drivers, including current production and consumption patterns.<sup>47</sup>

Analyses from UN and other international organizations have shown that even as current patterns of economic development and globalization contributed to significant and unprecedented reductions in global poverty levels, unsustainable development approaches and policies have produced stark and growing inequalities, direct and indirect impacts on the effective enjoyment of human rights and destabilizing and dangerous planetary change, such as climate change, water shortage, more frequent disease outbreaks, biodiversity loss, threats to key ecosystems, and more frequent disasters.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, multilateral action can effectively address a global environmental issue, as can be seen in the success in recent decades in healing the ozone layer.<sup>49</sup>

#### B. Adverse climate, biodiversity, and ecosystem changes are hurting humanity

The triple planetary crisis has placed the ecological foundations of human society and the natural systems that support other species and provide invaluable ecosystem services in great danger, and their linkages and feedback loops result in cascading risks to all the 17 SDGs. These planetary changes are undermining hard-won development gains by causing economic loss, increased poverty and hunger, and millions of premature deaths annually.<sup>50</sup>

Various reports highlight the interconnections and fault lines between global economic recovery, the widening of inequalities between countries, and economic, social, and environmental risks.<sup>51</sup> These adversely affect the ability of countries to pursue sustainable development objectives such as sustainable industrialization, sustainable food production, productive and decent full employment, and the full enjoyment of all human rights, including the right to a healthy environment, food, and the right to development, particularly for women, children and other marginalized groups.<sup>52</sup> Children are suffering some of the harshest consequences of the triple planetary crisis – almost every child is now exposed to at least one climate or environmental shock, and approximately 1 billion children residing in 33 countries<sup>53</sup> are considered to be at extremely high risk from the impacts of climate change.

### C. People, planet and prosperity should be addressed in a balanced manner through systemic and structural transformation

The underlying causes of the current complex of environmental crises facing the global community -- including climate change, biodiversity loss, water shortage, land degradation, and pollution -- demonstrate the interdependence and interlinkages among the various dimensions of sustainability – from health, well-being, and social and economic prosperity to climate and ecosystems.<sup>54</sup> Earth's environmental emergencies and human well-being need to be addressed together to achieve sustainability, thus viewing people and planet as interconnected socioecological (human-nature) systems.<sup>55</sup>

*"We have to work together to take urgent action to support the co-existence among all human beings."  
Kitack Lim, Secretary-General,  
International Maritime Organization*

To meet this challenge, economic, financial, and productive systems can and should be transformed to lead and power the shift to sustainability, invest in the transition to a sustainable future, and ensure that knowledge, technology, and cooperation are redeployed from transforming nature to transforming humanity's relationship with nature. Society needs to include natural capital in decision-making, eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies and invest in the transition to a sustainable future. Biodiversity, climate, and other environmental finance could be ramped up by redirecting some of the values and costs associated with subsidies to fossil fuels, agriculture, fisheries, and transport which exceed \$5 trillion per year.<sup>56</sup>

Within their respective mandates, UN agencies have stressed the importance of linking sectoral issues as key elements in an integrated and transformative agenda towards sustainability. These include decent work and social protection; micro, small and medium business development and support to business ecosystem organizations; human rights; sustainable urbanization; the sustainable ocean-based economy and the effective use of ocean science; sustainable land and forest management; supporting least developed countries; improved water resources management; biological diversity; a global transition away from fossil fuels; disaster risk reduction, greater solidarity; health, as well as advancing safe, orderly and regular migration.<sup>57</sup> Many countries have started taking a more coordinated and integrated approach to their sustainable development pathways.<sup>58</sup> Since 2007, the UN system has sought to integrate environmental sustainability in its facilities and operations, including through the annual collection, analysis, and publication of information provided by UN system entities on their environmental impacts.<sup>59</sup>

The structural transformations needed will require significantly strengthening social protection systems and public services (including health systems, education, water, sanitation, digital access, and other basic services); increasing investments in science, technology, and innovation; creating fiscal space in developing countries; taking a green economy approach; investing in clean and renewable energy and sustainable industry; strengthening risk governance; transitioning to sustainable food systems; reducing barriers to trade in green goods and services; and mainstreaming environmental sustainability into trade agreements to boost opportunities of a green economy through technological transfer, skill enhancement, and fresh market opportunities.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the implementation of human rights, including the rights of public access to environmental information, meaningful participation in environmental decision-making, and access to justice and remedy helps protect the planet and promote sustainable development. The objective for all countries should be to build a diversified and inclusive green economic system that integrates the human right to public participation, that is powered by renewable energy sources and green technologies, and where economic activities within and across sectors are interconnected through resource-efficient linkages managed based on nexus thinking.<sup>61</sup>

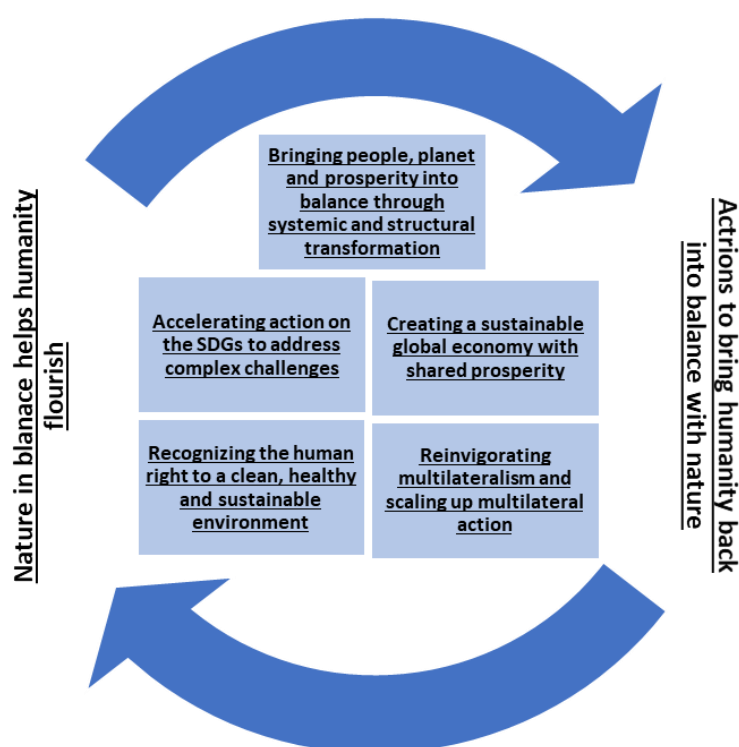
Enhanced global cooperation, including support for developing countries, is needed and is critical to promoting green, risk-informed, resilient, human rights-based, and inclusive development, as well as to strengthening the coherence and consistency of the international financial, monetary, and trading systems and addressing the integrated nature of the challenges facing the global community.<sup>62</sup> The regional dimension of addressing common environmental problems also needs to be addressed, including through the use of regional collaborative platforms and networks. All countries now face the challenge of transitioning to economic structures that keep emissions and resource consumption within ecological limits. This requires a fundamental structural transformation in a hyper globalized economy and institutional ability

to mobilize domestic resources.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, such structural transformation should ensure that all peoples can live a life of dignity and well-being in which apartheid, racial segregation, discrimination, colonial and other forms of oppression, and foreign domination are eliminated.<sup>64</sup>

The implementation of the groundbreaking multilateral commitments<sup>65</sup> made by governments and the UN system from 2013 to 2015, which laid the foundations for the post-2015 multilateral framework of action, now needs to be enhanced. The outcomes of recent multilateral processes have highlighted the need for a systemic and structural transformation to address the interconnected challenges facing people, the planet, and prosperity. They have called for accelerating action on the SDGs to address complex challenges;<sup>66</sup> pushed for a transformed, resilient, and inclusive sustainable global economy with shared prosperity;<sup>67</sup> recognized the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment;<sup>68</sup> and recognized the need to reinvigorate multilateralism and scale-up multilateral action on environmental and climate issues.<sup>69</sup>

*“Only One Earth’ means we need strong multilateralism and cooperation to manage our finite land and water resources together. There are no international boundaries on the blue marble.” Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia*

**Figure 3:**  
**Connecting transformative agendas and multilateral commitments to Stockholm+50**





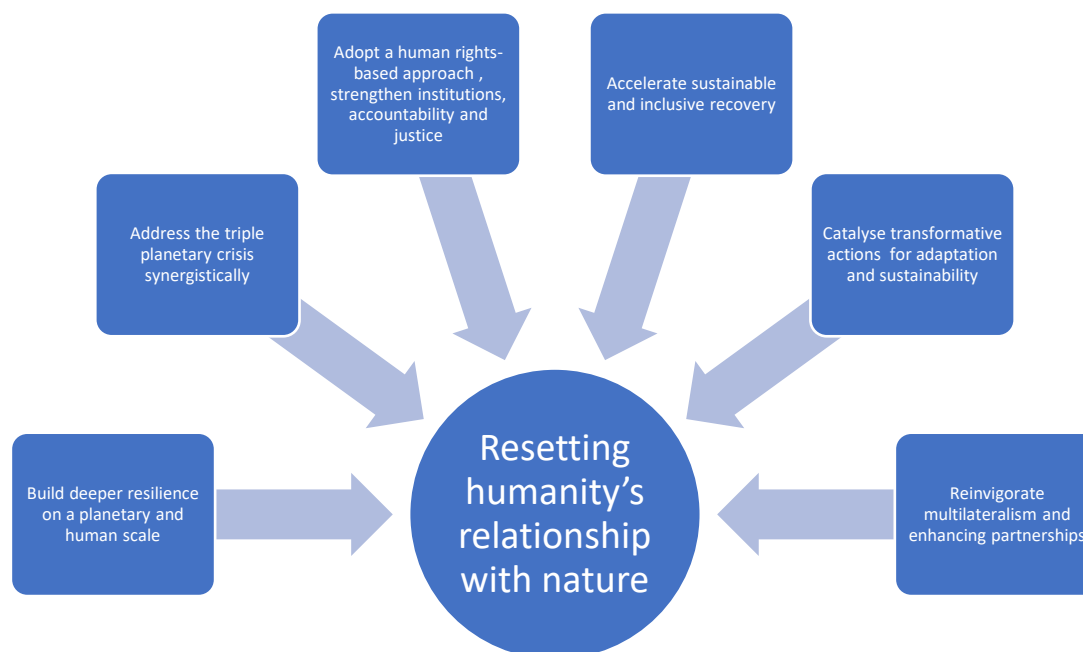
### III. Looking forward: Accelerating Actions for a Healthy Planet and Prosperity for All

The 2020s will be a decisive decade when humanity risks crossing certain biophysical thresholds that are necessary for its survival.<sup>70</sup> The year 2022 will be pivotal for people, the planet, and prosperity, with major intergovernmental decisions on the table for climate, nature, and pollution. The agreements reached through these political processes should strengthen the work being undertaken in this Decade of Action for achieving the 2030 Agenda. Stockholm+50 is an opportunity to renew inclusive, networked multilateral cooperation among all stakeholders.<sup>71</sup> Discussions can be framed along an interconnected pathway of regeneration, recovery, rebalance, renewal, and reimagination of humanity's relationship with the planet and with itself

Building on the commitments and actions set out by the 2030 Agenda, the suggested areas of focus and accelerated action including by the UN system towards a healthy planet for the prosperity of all could include:

- 8) Resetting humanity's relationship with nature
- 9) Creating resilience on a planetary and human scale
- 10) Addressing the triple planetary crisis synergistically
- 11) Adopting and implementing a human rights-based approach to ensure that no one is left behind
- 12) Promoting a sustainable and inclusive recovery
- 13) Catalyzing transformative actions for adaptation and sustainability
- 14) Reinvigorating multilateralism and enhancing partnerships

**Figure 4:**  
**Accelerating actions for a healthy planet and prosperity for all**



**Table 2: Focus areas and key actions**

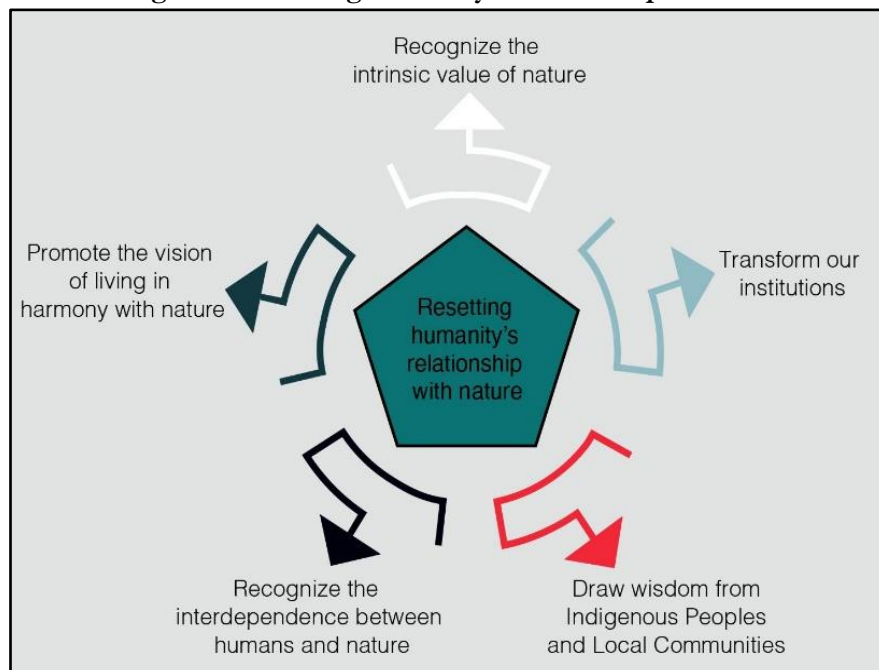
Areas of focus for accelerated actions	Key actions
<b>Resetting humanity's relationship with nature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizing the intrinsic value of nature</li> <li>• Promoting the vision of living in harmony with nature</li> <li>• Recognizing the interdependence between humans and nature</li> <li>• Transforming institutions to reset humanity's relationship with nature</li> <li>• Drawing wisdom from Indigenous Peoples and local communities</li> </ul>
<b>Building resilience and reducing risks on a planetary and human scale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing interdependencies between people and ecosystems</li> <li>• Addressing inequality</li> <li>• Addressing threats to human health and welfare</li> <li>• Using a whole of society approach</li> <li>• Using ecosystem-based approaches or nature-based solutions</li> </ul>
<b>Addressing the triple planetary crisis synergistically</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing how we value nature</li> <li>• Addressing common drivers</li> <li>• Transforming and greening economic, trade and financial systems to power the shift</li> <li>• Ensuring that institutions are fit for purpose</li> <li>• Scaling up sustainable and inclusive recovery from COVID-19</li> <li>• Strengthening the science-policy interface</li> <li>• Leveraging the digital transformation</li> <li>• Leaving no one and no state behind</li> </ul>
<b>Adopting and implementing a human rights-based approach to ensure no one is left behind</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing participatory mechanisms to include all of society</li> <li>• Regulatory reform to promote the environment/sustainable development/human rights interface</li> <li>• Promoting and recognizing the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities</li> <li>• Ensuring actions are based on human rights law and standards</li> <li>• Strengthening criminal justice and anti-corruption measures in relation to environment-related crimes</li> </ul>
<b>Promoting a sustainable and inclusive recovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring a just transition</li> <li>• Scaling up green job creation and empower small businesses</li> <li>• Improving and mainstreaming early warning systems, anticipatory action, and integrated preparedness actions</li> <li>• Scaling up SDG-oriented approaches</li> <li>• Transforming consumption, production and supply chains</li> <li>• Developing new metrics for measuring progress and growth</li> </ul>
<b>Catalysing transformative actions for adaptation and sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embarking on a transformative change pathway for the SDGs</li> <li>• Transforming economic and financial systems to power the shift to sustainability</li> <li>• Undertaking transformative change that is just</li> <li>• Effecting transformative change in governance systems</li> <li>• Using the five main levers that can generate transformative change</li> <li>• Establishing longer-term goals for adaptation and strengthening community resilience</li> </ul>
<b>Reinvigorating multilateralism and enhancing partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting a solidarity-based approach to multilateralism</li> <li>• Enhancing partnerships towards international cooperation</li> <li>• Strengthening the United Nations system as the lodestar of multilateralism</li> </ul>

### A. Resetting humanity's relationship with nature

The importance of resetting and restoring humanity's relationship with nature has been recognized within the UN system, with the UN Secretary-General making an explicit call for humanity to “reset our relationship with nature,”<sup>72</sup> saying that “everyone will lose unless humanity makes ‘peace with the planet’.”<sup>73</sup> The restoration of humanity's relationship with nature became the focus of World Environment Day 2021, which also marked the launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration – a ten-year global push to prevent, halt and reverse ecosystem degradation.<sup>74</sup>

More broadly within the UN system, there have been several messages from recent global processes and UN flagship publications that reinforce this call. Most recently UNEP's *Making Peace with Nature* report asserts that making peace with nature is the defining task of the coming decades. The report emphasizes that “by transforming how we view nature, we can recognize its true value. By reflecting this value in policies, plans, and economic systems, we can channel investments into activities that restore nature and are rewarded for it. By recognizing nature as an indispensable ally, we can unleash human ingenuity in the service of sustainability and secure our health and well-being alongside that of the planet.”<sup>75</sup>

**Figure 5: Resetting humanity's relationship with nature**



Source: James Swain

#### Key actions:<sup>76</sup>

- **Recognizing the intrinsic value of nature --** A fundamental rethink of humanity's relationship with nature should recognize the intrinsic value of nature and acknowledge that nature has value in its own right, independent of its instrumental value to humans.<sup>77</sup> This philosophical and conceptual rethink of the value of nature should recognize the interdependence between humans and nature and incorporate the ethics of stewardship and

*“To take meaningful action on nature loss, countries need to systematically account for the value of natural capital and adopt a whole-of-economy approach to addressing the drivers of environmental degradation, including pollution, climate change, and biodiversity and ecosystem services loss.”*  
**David Malpass, President, World Bank Group**

guardianship. Most recently, the 2019 Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)<sup>78</sup> has elevated the importance of promoting different types of values that need to be promoted in decision making. This is echoed by the Dasgupta Review's emphasis on the importance of recognizing nature's existence value and intrinsic worth.<sup>79</sup> By transforming how we view nature, we can recognize its true value.

- Promoting the vision of living in harmony with nature --** The IPBES set out a conceptual framework for understanding the concept of living in harmony with nature. It is a “perspective on good quality of life based on the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species and elements of nature. It implies that we should live peacefully alongside all other organisms even though we may need to exploit other organisms to some degree.”<sup>80</sup> The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that is being negotiated should anchor a 2050 vision that has living in harmony with nature at its core. The concept also underpins the UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution to proclaim the UN's International Mother Earth Day. The UNGA resolution commemorates the Earth as “humankind's only home and source of human life and calls for a redefinition of humankind's relationship and co-existence sustainably with the planet”.<sup>81</sup>
- Recognizing the interdependence between humans and nature --** Resetting our relationship with nature must be based on the comprehensive understanding of the reinforcing feedback relationship of humans and nature, i.e. one will not flourish sustainably unless the other one is in good shape. Science provides objective bases and evidence-based insights for understanding such interdependence. The recognition by over 80% of UN Member States of the right to a healthy environment, which has also been recognized by the UN Human Rights Council,<sup>82</sup> provides a legal articulation of such interdependence, as at the core of this right is the understanding that human rights are intertwined with the environment in which we live.<sup>83</sup> Religions and faith communities also bring important insights about the ethics of stewardship and guardianship that should underpin the interdependence of humans and the greater Earth community, all of which are essential to the goal of resetting our relationship with nature.

*“Our relationship with nature needs to change to ensure this one Earth is for all of us.” Elizabeth Mrema, Executive Secretary, UN Convention on Biological Diversity*
- Transforming institutions to reset humanity's relationship with nature --** Effective institutions are the foundations on which to rebuild our engagement with nature and manage our assets. Twentieth-century institutions and systems of accounting have proved to be unfit to curb unsustainable production and consumption. They have also widened the wealth gap and deepened inequities within and between countries. What these imply is that there must be fundamental transformations in the governance systems and institutions and their underlying economic system, development model, human lifestyle, and the understanding of human well-being to bring about green recovery and sustainable development.<sup>84</sup>
- Drawing wisdom from Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities --** Solutions for some aspects of the nature crisis may lie with the Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, who guard, steward, and protect nature with their unique knowledge. One of the main IPBES findings is that nature in Indigenous territories is declining, but at a much slower rate than in other areas including protected areas. We cannot achieve our goals for the planet without respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities,<sup>85</sup> rectifying discriminatory practices and power imbalances, and systemically integrating historical knowledge, lived experiences and feedback from affected communities into decision-making, planning and programming.<sup>86</sup>

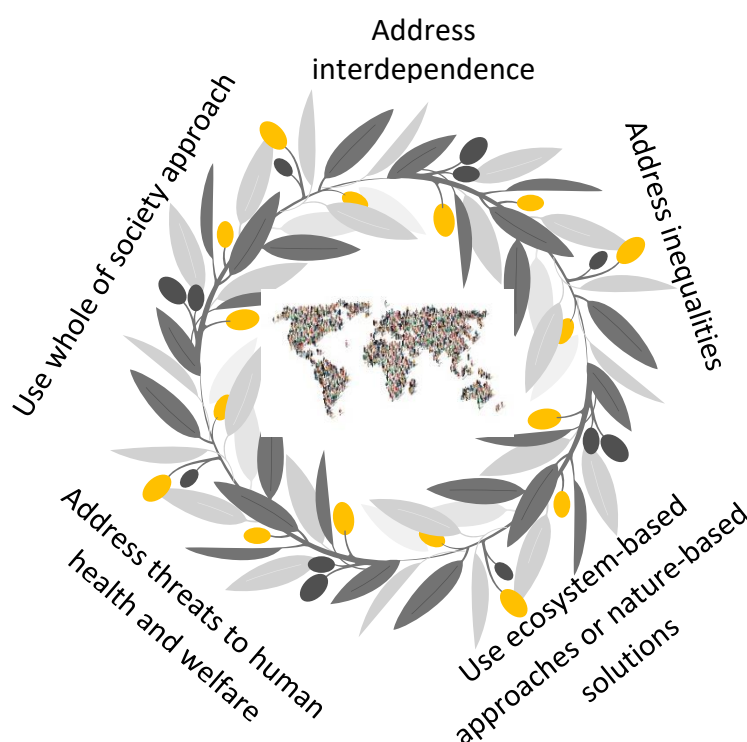
## B. Creating resilience on a planetary and human scale

Advancements in science, data collection, and global connectivity have highlighted that “change is happening more quickly and surprisingly across multiple dimensions and scales than we ever thought

possible.”<sup>87</sup> Environmental degradation, climate change, and pollution disproportionately impact persons in vulnerable situations including the poor, women, children and youth, minorities, migrants, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities.<sup>88</sup> Future generations will also be adversely affected by these issues. Accordingly, strong and inclusive resilience must be developed and scaled up, including through a human rights-based approach that guarantees the meaningful and effective participation of impacted communities and marginalized groups to achieve transformative change, reduce unequal impacts and create risk-informed and resilient societies.

According to the 2021 SDG Report<sup>89</sup>, had the paradigm shift envisioned by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development been fully embraced over the past six years, the world would have been better prepared to face the COVID-19 crisis through stronger health systems, expanded social protection coverage, more equal and resilient societies, and a healthier natural environment.

**Figure 6: Creating resilience on a planetary and human scale**



**Key actions:**<sup>90</sup>

- **Addressing interdependencies between people and ecosystems** -- The starting point for building resilience is to recognize that we have disconnected ourselves from nature and forgotten that our economies and societies are fundamentally integrated with the planet. Building human and planetary resilience starts from the belief that humans and nature are strongly intertwined in one social-ecological (human-nature) system. Efforts are needed to deepen the awareness that our economies and societies are fundamentally integrated with increased knowledge about how we can strengthen the capacity to deal with the stresses caused by environmental change. “It is about finding ways to deal with unexpected events and crises and identifying sustainable ways for humans to live within the Earth’s boundaries.”<sup>91</sup> Scaling up a united human, animal and environmental health or One Health approach bringing together different sectors to achieve better public health is essential to prevent future pandemics.<sup>92</sup>

*“Productive economies and decent work need a healthy planet. An estimated 1.2 billion jobs depend on healthy ecosystems.”* Guy Ryder, Director-General, International Labour Organization



- **Addressing inequality** -- According to UNDP's 2020 Human Development Report, how people experience planetary pressures is tied to how societies work. Broken societies are putting people and the planet on a collision course. Easing planetary pressures in a way that enables all people to flourish in this new age requires dismantling the gross imbalances of power and opportunity that stand in the way of transformation within and across countries, adopting a human rights-based approach.<sup>93</sup>
- **Addressing threats to human health and welfare** -- To address the risks and threats exposed by the triple planetary crisis and the pandemic, Governments and the international community should make structural transformations and develop common solutions guided by the SDGs. These include significantly strengthening social protection systems and public services (including health systems, nutrition, education, water, sanitation, hygiene, and other basic services); supporting the participation of persons, groups, and peoples in vulnerable situations; developing solutions for people to move through safe and regular pathways; increasing investments in science, technology, and innovation; creating fiscal space in developing countries; taking a green-economy approach and investing in clean energy and industry, and transitioning to sustainable food systems.<sup>94</sup> These transformations should be undertaken in a just and equitable manner, with support and resources for those most affected by environmental harms, and using risk-informed planning, decision-making and investment across all sectors.
- **Using a whole of society approach** -- Building back better from the adverse effects of the triple planetary crisis and the pandemic requires effective multilateralism and the full participation of all societies. This global crisis demands a shared global response and a unified vision of coherent, coordinated, and comprehensive responses from the multilateral system. Since the COVID-19 pandemic affects everyone, everywhere, the implementation of solutions requires action and participation from all sectors of society, including Governments at all levels, the private sector, academia, civil society, and individuals.<sup>95</sup> Given that its greatest impact is on those already marginalized, such as women, children and youth, minorities, migrants, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities, the participation of such groups in identifying solutions is key.
- **Using ecosystem-based approaches or nature-based solutions** -- The natural environment is humanity's first line of defense against many hazards. Nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches could be explored and scaled up to manage disaster risks and build resilience.<sup>96</sup> This is fundamental to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its Goals, including poverty eradication, health, food security, inclusive economic prosperity, and sustainable livelihoods.<sup>97</sup> Nature-based solutions may offer an opportunity to address a wide range of urgent societal challenges such as deteriorating food, air, and water quality, and prevent and limit the impact of future health emergencies, including pandemic outbreaks of animal-borne diseases.<sup>98</sup> However, any activities that forcibly displace Indigenous Peoples and local communities, impacting on their cultural identity and traditional knowledge, as well as threatening the traditional governance systems that have enabled the sustainable development of land for generations, must be avoided.

*"Environmental degradation drives risk, but nature can also be used to manage risk." Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction*

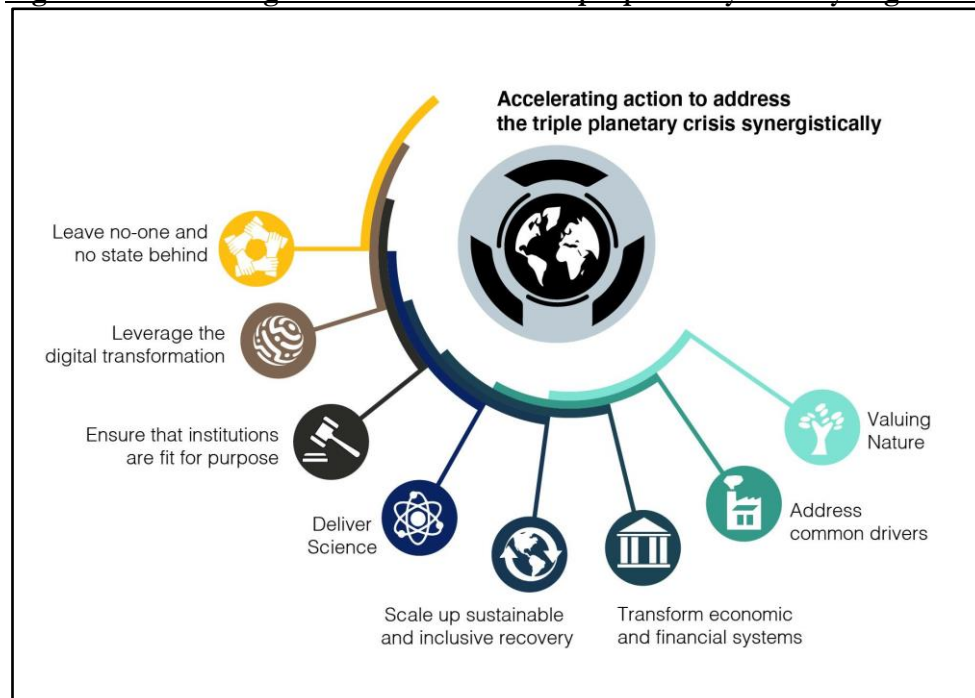
### C. Addressing the triple planetary crisis synergistically

Given the current rate of rapid decline in biodiversity and ecosystems globally, efforts to achieve the major environmental and societal goals such as those laid out under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change are clearly off track.

A triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste is now upon the world, the result of centuries of resource-intensive and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption in

particular parts of the world that have given rise to today's highly unequal and inequitable global economy. All aspects of the planetary crises will need to be addressed together and at the same time, in the context of the achievement of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty, as envisioned under the 2030 Agenda, bearing in mind the need for equity across countries and generations.

**Figure 7: Accelerating action to address the triple planetary crisis synergistically**



Source: James Swain

### Key actions:

- Changing how we value nature --** Fundamentally recasting how we value and invest in nature and integrate that value into policies and decisions at all levels will require, inter alia, overhauling subsidies and other elements of economic and financial systems and fostering innovation in sustainable technologies and business models and systematic internalization of environmental and social costs and benefits. For example, ecosystem service valuation and assigning monetary values are considered by some experts as an effective way to ensure that natural capital is made visible and considered in our policies and decision making but these types of valuations may also not fully capture nature's value.
 

*“Only a profound change in our system of values will allow us to restore our relationship with nature and to move from the dominance of economic values and economic growth towards values promoting collective well-being. ... We need to amplify our action to use knowledge, technology and skills to restore our relationship with nature.”*  
**Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**
- Addressing common drivers --** The common thread that runs through this triple planetary crisis is unsustainable production and consumption. Robust efforts are needed to reverse the relentless and unlimited extraction of resources from the Earth, the production of waste and pollution, the continued use of fossil fuels, habitat encroachment, and other unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, all of which are having a devastating impact on the natural world, propelling climate change, destroying nature, and raising pollution levels.
- Transforming and greening economic, trade, and financial systems to power the shift --** Economic, trade, and financial systems and business institutions can and should be transformed

to lead and power the shift to sustainability. Transforming these systems means improving our relationship with nature, understanding all of its values, and putting them at the heart of our decision-making. They are integral parts of the solution and are essential for economic development and poverty reduction. Greening the economy and trade and finance arrangements are therefore key for overcoming the planetary crisis as well as recovering from the pandemic. These actions should ensure that developing countries can meet their needs for sustainable development and achieve the SDGs, in particular through enabling access to environmental goods, technologies, and services, including finance for investing in green practices; driving business practices through changing demands in global markets and new regulations and standards for market access, and stimulating and spreading innovation. Doing so also includes promoting human rights safeguards and accountability for all actors, including businesses; transparent reporting and monitoring; inclusive and human rights-based finance accessible by the communities protecting nature on the ground; and redirecting, repurposing or eliminating all environmentally harmful subsidies<sup>99</sup>.

- **Ensuring that institutions are fit for purpose --** The triple planetary crisis cannot be solved without laws and institutions that protect people, rights, and the environment. Institutions need to be fit for purpose to meet today's global challenges through new modes of governance and adaptive management that give greater priority to the environmental dimension of the SDGs while promoting gender equality and education for sustainable production and consumption are essential. Societies must ensure that institutions can undertake and implement long-term strategic and integrated policymaking with social, cultural, institutional, and technological innovation while taking into account current, emerging, and new challenges. In all of this, public rights of information, participation, and access to justice, particularly for the most marginalized, are essential. Furthermore, corporations and other business entities need to be given a social and environmental purpose beyond profit.
- **Scaling up sustainable and inclusive recovery from COVID-19 --** We need to massively accelerate the pathway to resource-efficient industries, fuel green growth and economic development which provides green jobs, all to accelerate sustainable consumption and production and build resilience through recovery. The recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic should be green, sustainable, and inclusive so that the capacity of present and future generations to address and respond to the triple planetary crisis is not compromised. COVID-19 recovery packages, the transition to low-carbon and resilient economies and the decade of action to deliver on the SDGs all present opportunities to align development, climate, disaster risk reduction and environmental policies.<sup>100</sup>
- **Strengthening the science-policy interface --** Robust science is essential for developing policy-making options, identifying solutions, and guiding actions for environmental sustainability, equipping us to address the planetary crisis. This will require bringing together the latest scientific evidence showing the impacts and threats of climate change, the biodiversity crisis, and the pollution that kills millions of people every year and making it accessible to all people.
- **Leveraging the digital transformation --** With less than a decade to shift the needle on environmental challenges, the scale, speed, and impact of the actions we need to counter these existential threats must accelerate, through digital technologies and other technological innovations that allow us to share environmental knowledge and insights and promote universal digital access

*"Fully addressing the triple planetary crisis remains impossible without a profound commitment to enhanced knowledge sharing, capacity building, open information exchange, and technology transfer. For this reason, we must effectively and urgently improve global access to relevant data, science, and information to stimulate technological innovations, enable evidence-based and inclusive policy-making, and empower all societies to achieve sustainable development." David Malone, Rector, United Nations University*

to close the digital divide. Digital transformation can accelerate greater climate action, sustainability and prosperity using technology as an enabler for the achievement of the SDGs.<sup>101</sup>

*"Information and communication technologies are recognized as an enabler for development. They have the potential to be part of the solution to address the world's most pressing climate concerns and enable the much-needed transition to a circular economy." Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General, International Telecommunication Union*

- **Leaving no one and no state behind --** We need to scale up efforts to address the special needs of at-risk communities, including marginalized sectors and children, and States affected by or vulnerable to disasters and conflicts. As nature's known cycles have changed, thereby increasing chronic vulnerability and never-ending crisis management, there is a need to be more transformational, integrated, and inclusive, including through preventing conflict and violence and mitigating disaster risks through early warning, forecast-based financing, and anticipatory

action can help address the drivers of displacement and reduce displacement risks.<sup>102</sup> Further, governments need to address the implications of climate change for migration and to foster people's resilience to remain in place with dignity or move as a form of adaptation.<sup>103</sup> Efforts are also needed to scale up to a greater understanding of the linkages between the environment and human security, assist with climate change adaptation, advance the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and promote the participation of impacted communities and States in identifying solutions that protect nature and support peace and resilience. This should include international cooperation that is based on equity and justice and reflects the need for the transfer of wealth, knowledge, and resources from the rich to the poor (both between and within countries) to support inclusive and equitable sustainable development.

#### **D. A human rights-based approach that leaves no one behind, strengthened institutions, accountability and justice**

To achieve a healthy planet and prosperity for all it is essential to take a human rights-based approach to all actions. Taking a human rights-based approach to global policies and measures designed to address environmental issues means that as these are developed, their main objective should be to fulfil human rights. Principles and standards derived from international human rights law, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the core universal human rights treaties, should guide all policies and programming in all phases of the process.<sup>104</sup>

Environmental harm interferes with the enjoyment of human rights, and the exercise of human rights helps to protect the environment and to promote sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda, like so many global agreements and declarations, has roots in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fulfilment of human rights is crucial to leaving no one behind.<sup>105</sup> In 2021, the UN Human Rights Council recognized that a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a human right.<sup>106</sup> The right to health has been long recognized by international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Strengthening justice-system measures can address a variety of trafficking and economic crimes, contribute to reversing negative trends in biodiversity loss, and mainstream preventive approaches into national and international biodiversity management.

**Figure 8: A human rights-based approach, leaving no one behind  
strengthening institutions, accountability, and justice**



**Key actions:** <sup>107</sup>

- Ensuring actions are based on human rights law and standards** -- Human rights law and standards establish important obligation for multilateral, national, and local actions on the triple planetary crisis and sustainable development. Integrating human rights, including women's rights and gender equality, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the right to a healthy environment, in environment and development-related policy discussions and decision-making at all levels, including in funding decisions, is an obligation. The UN Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights (Call to Action) urges strengthening of the synergies between human rights and all pillars of the work of the UN, multilateralism that places human rights at its very centre, and the advancement of the human right to a healthy environment. The UN system plays an important role in this area by ensuring its actions are based on international human rights law and standards and by supporting Member States to fulfil their human rights obligations relating to biodiversity and the environment.
- Enhancing participatory mechanisms to include all of society** -- Enhancing people's human rights to participation, access to information, and justice as part of governance and decision-making processes is a key element for ensuring that the human rights of individuals and communities are respected and reflected in environmental matters. Achieving the multi-dimensional 2030 Agenda requires participation by all to create inclusive and transformative change and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and resources at all levels, starting in communities. Successfully addressing the triple planetary crisis while leaving no one behind requires promoting the representation of,

*"All people everywhere are entitled to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, to stand up for the environment without fear of persecution and reprisal, and to exercise their rights to access information, participate and access justice in environmental matters. Only a Stockholm + 50 process and outcome that affirms these truths and effectively mobilizes resources, governments, and people for the realization of the human right to a healthy environment can deliver a healthy planet for the prosperity of all."*  
**Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**



inter alia, women and girls, children and youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities in environmental governance and strengthening procedural rights for meaningful participation, access to information, and access to justice in environmental matters for all. By promoting participatory reporting mechanisms on environment and climate commitments, a constructive sense of collective input can be achieved. In the same way that the implementation of solutions to the pandemic requires action and participation from all sectors of society, including Governments at all levels, the private sector, academia, civil society, and individuals – youth and women, in particular<sup>108</sup> -- so too would solutions to the triple planetary crisis. At the same time, such solutions should safeguard human rights and ensure accountability for all actors, including businesses and through inclusive and human rights-based finance.

- **Regulatory reform to promote the environment/sustainable development/human rights interface** -- The consideration of human rights, including the right to a healthy environment needs to be integrated into decision-making at all levels. The human right to a healthy environment has been recognized by the Human Rights Council and by more than 80% of UN Member States through their constitutions, domestic laws, judicial systems, and international commitments. Under the UN Secretary General's Call to Action for Human Rights, the UN system should support Member States in developing and implementing laws and policies that respect, protect and fulfil this right. This includes individual access to justice and effective remedies for environment-related rights violations and abuses as well as protection mechanisms for human rights defenders and environmental and climate activists. These will be critical to developing an integrated approach to operationalizing the environment/sustainable development/human rights interface.
- **Promoting and recognizing the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs)** -- At least a quarter of the world's land area, including many areas with the highest biological diversity on the planet, is traditionally owned, managed, used or occupied by Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples often possess traditional ecological knowledge as well as knowledge related to ecosystem changes in their territories, and they have nature-based and sustainable resource management and use practices, yet this knowledge is rarely taken into account by researchers and policymakers.<sup>109</sup> The UN must promote recognition of this knowledge, and should actively support the engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in ecosystem management and international policy processes such as the CBD and the UNFCCC and their active participation in decision-making, particularly regarding ecosystem and natural resource management. The inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in active decision-making that affects them is their right. In the context of ecosystem and natural resource management, the international community can also learn from and make use of IPLCs' traditional knowledge and resource management systems in a manner that respects and protects their rights. Donors, financial institutions and aid organizations should be encouraged to invest more directly into local and affected communities. IPLCs must not be forcibly displaced from land or threatened with violence or harm for acting to protect their land and communities.
- **Strengthening criminal justice and anti-corruption measures concerning environment-related crimes as an essential part of the integrated solutions to protecting biodiversity** -- Justice and accountability measures can protect environmental human rights defenders from threats related to their efforts to preserve the planet. Strong and transparent legislative frameworks, an effective criminal justice system, international cooperation, and anti-corruption measures are a necessary part of the solutions to addressing biodiversity loss due to crimes affecting the environment.

*"The most crucial factor in scaling implementation is resources ... to help countries build capacities, raise awareness, and improve legal frameworks and institutions ... we need greater political commitment, both on the environment generally and on crimes that affect the environment specifically. I believe that Stockholm+50 is coming at just the right time, to build on and contribute to the existing momentum on environmental action ..."* Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

## E. Sustainable and inclusive recovery and a just transition

The COVID pandemic must be an inflection point that shifts our collective attention and action to building resilient, equitable, and sustainable communities and economies. Sustainable, inclusive, and just recovery involves re-orienting the economic system to (a) align the development model with the “Future We Want” outcome document of the 2012 Rio+20 Conference and the 2030 Agenda and improve human wellbeing in a tangible and evaluable way; and (b) increase the harmony of the relationship between human development and nature.<sup>110</sup> The 2021 SDG Report urges that as countries invest in recovery, “they must not go back to failed models and broken systems that did not serve their people”. The SDG Report also emphasizes that to build human resilience and reduce inequalities, quality essential services must be made available to everyone. Working to guarantee universal access to these services must be an integral part of global recovery.<sup>111</sup>

Recovery processes must also contribute to redressing the global planetary crisis. As discussed in greater detail below, this means tackling the direct and indirect drivers of environmental decline, notably in high-impact sectors such as agriculture, transport, infrastructure, and the extractive industries. Transformative change will be essential to transforming economic, financial, food, water, and energy systems with the participation of impacted communities to support the shift towards sustainability whilst meeting human development needs in an equitable, resilient, healthy, and sustainable manner. Sustainable, inclusive, and just recovery must benefit from integrated assessment frameworks based on a nexus approach that can holistically examine the interdependencies and interrelated dynamics of the five interrelated and interdependent building blocks for a green recovery (prosperity, health, nature, justice, and transformation) and the SDGs.<sup>112</sup>

*“Food insecurity is driven by conflict, pandemics, and climate extremes. It is our greatest challenge. We are working to turn this challenge into an opportunity through the promotion of green and climate resilient agrifood systems.” Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization*

Just transition measures can be crucial for supporting people affected by the changes needed to address the triple planetary crisis and to ensure that no one is left behind in the transition; to do so, these measures must tackle the root causes of injustice and unsustainability, challenge systems of exclusion and discrimination, and seek to improve prosperity and well-being for all.<sup>113</sup>

**Figure 10: Sustainable and inclusive recovery and a just transition**



**Key actions:**<sup>114</sup>

- **Ensuring a just transition** -- Social inclusiveness must become the foundation of the economic and social transformation. Policymakers must move away from the outdated linear economic model that promotes GDP growth “at all costs” to a new economic system fit for 21st-century global challenges with a greater focus on economic, social, and environmental wellbeing and the attainment of human rights aimed at creating a genuine balance between people, prosperity and planetary boundaries and achieving sustainable development.
- **Scaling up green job creation and empowering small businesses** -- New and inclusive job opportunities need to be created through clean and green transitions and investments in low-carbon industries and small businesses, in soil and water conservation (including land restoration and wetlands conservation), afforestation, and reforestation, irrigation, flood protection and the certification of indigenous knowledge. Some priority areas for a green recovery would include looking at clean energy, investing in sustainable management of natural capital, sustainable buildings, energy efficiency, sustainable transportation, and investing in research and development, education, and connectivity. It is especially important to ensure equal opportunities for women and to develop the skills and competencies to improve fair wages and labor opportunities. Employment policies should focus on up-skilling and reskilling workers thereby improving wages and labor opportunities, achieving social inclusion, and guaranteeing the adaptation of the workforce and by investments in environment and climate change education and skills building for children and youth to empower them to participate in building a green economy. Investing in small firms as the center of a green transition generates a ‘double dividend’ of private and social gains, including more and better jobs, significant competitive advantage in international markets, innovation, and improved resilience to shocks.
 

*“We cannot only focus on the health of women and girls and young people, but we also have to focus on the health of the planet they depend on.” Ib Petersen, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund*
- **Improving and mainstream early warning systems, anticipatory action, and integrated preparedness actions.** – Early action based on foresight, projections and analysis across sectors need to drive and trigger investments for community resilience. There is a need to ramp-up and prioritize early action, such as preparedness measures through linking climate science and longer-term projections with increased investments in suitable financing mechanisms. Such climate-specific preparedness measures should be mainstreamed and integrated with existing preparedness activities across the system. System-wide anticipatory action needs to be scaled up to reduce costs and suffering, protect hard-won development gains, and enable faster recovery from climate-related disasters. To be sustainable, anticipatory action should be integrated with national and local disaster risk management systems and shock-responsive safety nets and complement other disaster risk financing mechanisms and climate adaptation financing. Early warning systems need to be strengthened, improved, and mainstreamed to ensure early warning translates into early action.
- **Scaling up SDG-oriented approaches** -- The needed structural transformations include significantly strengthening social protection systems and public services (including health systems, education, water, sanitation, and other basic services); increasing investments in science, technology, and innovation; creating fiscal space in developing countries; taking a sustainable and green economy approach and investing in clean energy and industry; reducing disaster risks; and transitioning to sustainable food systems.<sup>115</sup>
- **Transforming consumption, production, and supply chains** -- Progress to promote sustainable production and consumption is uneven, with significant releases of pollutants and wastes into the environment. Accelerating the shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns is a prerequisite to addressing global crises, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, and is central to achieving sustainable development. Other efforts are needed to support sustainable supply changes and reduce the impact on ecosystems caused by global demand for commodities. Massive scaling up of efforts is also needed to accelerate the transition to sustainable

growth patterns based on a decarbonized, resource-efficient, and circular economy.

- **Developing new metrics for measuring progress and growth --** Sustainable, inclusive, and just recovery necessitates a paradigm shift to one that facilitates economic growth that is environmentally sustainable rather than considering economic growth as the sole or the most important objective of human activities and policy making. For building back better, we require revisiting the definitions and frameworks we use to assess development, human wellbeing, and the success of nations. To evaluate our success, we need a set of indicators and new metrics that take into account environmental externalities and also reflect other aspects of human well-being and prosperity.

## F. Transformative actions to sustainability

The SDGs for conserving and sustainably using nature and achieving sustainability by 2030 and beyond cannot be met by current trajectories. Instead, they will require transformative changes across economic, social, political, and technological domains. The Secretary-General stressed that humanity is now at “code red” and has called for all sectors to work together.<sup>116</sup> Clear recognition of the nature of the planetary emergency helps provide a new compass for nations and injects the essential urgency into decision-making, underpinned by the social and economic transformations needed to secure the long-term health and well-being of people and the planet.<sup>117</sup>

This transformative change needs to consist of “a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values”<sup>118</sup> as well as within political and legal spaces, including taking a human rights-based approach. Nothing short of a system change is needed, including world views, norms, values, and governance, to put humanity onto transformative pathways to sustainable recovery and development.

**Figure 11: Transformative actions to sustainability**



**Key actions:**<sup>119</sup>

- **Embarking on a transformative change pathway for the SDGs --** Transformative change that will enable us to achieve the SDGs and other internationally agreed targets requires cross-sectoral policy action across many areas relevant to all the SDGs.

*The agenda for the future needs to be one of integration with nature. Investing in nature and investing in sustainability is the one way we can have better lives and a better planet for all.” Martha Rojas-Urrego, Secretary-General, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance*



- **Transforming economic and financial systems to power the shift to sustainability --** Economic incentives have generally favored expanding economic activity over environmental conservation or restoration, and often generating considerable environmental harm. Key dimensions of the transformation of economic and financial systems include:
  - Full natural capital accounting integrated into public and private decision-making.
  - The promotion of human rights safeguards, accountability for all actors including businesses, transparent reporting and monitoring, inclusive and rights-based finance, and a robust, clear set of indicators reflecting human rights principles
  - Adding social and environmental obligations to the fiduciary obligations of financial institutions and corporations.
  - New metrics, including for inclusive wealth and natural capital, for measuring sustainable economic progress, as opposed to continued reliance on gross domestic product (GDP) with its many deficiencies.
  - Putting a price on carbon, phase-out of environmentally and socially harmful subsidies, and redirection of perverse subsidies towards low-carbon and nature-friendly solutions.
  - Shifting taxation from production and labor to resource use and waste to promote a circular economy that uncouples prosperity from pollution and favors job creation.
  - Providing developing countries with more support as mandated in several MEAs, including finance, technology transfer, and capacity building, to enhance their actions to address environmental challenges.
  - Integrate, layer, and sequence risk financing and insurance models to ensure that vulnerable communities are sufficiently protected. Innovative mechanisms should be linked to climate-adapted social protection systems or budget allocations – especially where insurance is unaffordable and may potentially increase inequalities – as well as other instruments like national disaster funds and contingent credit lines.
  
- **Undertaking transformative change that is just --** Reducing inequalities and the risk of social conflict from environmental degradation, including biodiversity and habitat loss, climate change, air, land, and water pollution, illegal exploitation, increased disaster risk, and the rise of zoonotic diseases requires a transformative change to promote equity and address individual and community rights to property, resources, and education. We cannot solve the nature crisis if we are not simultaneously solving social inequities. Human priorities and needs must be met, particularly within the most vulnerable and low-income communities. People and communities play a critical role in safeguarding ecosystems, which is also why inclusion is critical. Transformative changes needed to achieve sustainable development will be most successful when they are human rights-based, just, respectful of gender equality, and include recognition that there will be different impacts on men, women, children, and the elderly. Changes need to be made with the participation of impacted communities, consider underlying societal values and behavior, and seek to address societal and environmental goals.
  
- **Effecting transformative change in governance systems --** The transformative changes needed for the SDGs and other internationally agreed environmental goals will not be possible with incremental environmental policies alone. A mix of social and technological improvements and innovations is required, facilitated by effective policy measures and cooperation on a scale from the local to the international. Efforts to achieve sustainable development while promoting gender equality and education for sustainable production and consumption would be enhanced by transformations in governance systems at all levels. Such transformative changes could be through using new modes of institutional governance and adaptive management that bridge institutional silos and support the ability and policy space of States to enable coordinated policy changes to protect the environment, pursue sustainable development and respect human rights in an equitable and just manner. Such transformative governance change would also include establishing longer-term policy goals and institutional arrangements for adaptation and strengthening community resilience by combining emergency response, longer-term social protection, social safety nets, nature-based programs, and other services to boost adaptive capacities and strengthen resilience of communities.<sup>120</sup>



- Using the five main levers that can generate transformative change -- To generate transformative change, the underlying indirect drivers for the deterioration of nature can be addressed by tackling incentives and capacity-building; promoting cross-sectoral cooperation; ensuring pre-emptive action; grounding decision-making in the pursuit of resilience while managing uncertainty; and enhancing environmental law and implementation.<sup>121</sup>

*"We must be optimistic that we do have the technologies and resources, and we know what needs to be done to reverse course in many areas where we have drifted too much from where we need to be, such as climate and production systems." Rafael Mariano Grossi, Director-General, International Atomic Energy Agency*

### G. Reinvigorating multilateralism and enhancing partnerships

Stockholm+50 can make an important contribution towards reinvigorating multilateralism and global solidarity and trust. Business as usual is no longer an option to meet the triple planetary crisis. The multilateralism system needs to be reinvigorated to deal with these challenges and strengthen the global framework of rules and norms that govern the actions of both State and non-State actors. The acceleration of actions has an important governance dimension requiring a renewed, reinvigorated, and transformative multilateralism based on global solidarity.<sup>122</sup>

The UN system with its unparalleled capacity can play an important role to leverage and facilitating an inclusive green recovery for sustainable development. At the same time, implementing the transformative sustainability agenda can reinvigorate the UN system and make it fit for purpose.

UNEP's original coordination role for the environment across the UN system should be strengthened to facilitate and orchestrate a coherent, integrated, and solidarity-based approach in the UN system in response to the planetary crisis.

**Figure 12: Reinvigorating multilateralism and enhancing partnerships**



The transformation to a sustainable future necessitates unprecedented cooperation across intergovernmental structures in the UN system in ways that echo but go beyond the original system-wide design of UNEP. Interagency cooperation mechanisms such as, but not limited to, the UN Environment Management Group (EMG) can play a key role in mobilizing knowledge and know-how across multiple sectors and inform their respective multilateral governing structures accordingly. The UNEA could invite the EMG to present for its consideration an approach such as an interagency rolling plan for cooperation to support transforming the economic, financial, energy, food, health, industry, infrastructure, humanitarian affairs, peace keeping, and human settlement sectors within the context of the 2030 Agenda. The implementation of such an approach could involve the provision of policy guidance by Member States based on regular progress reports to UNEA and the respective governing bodies of the EMG member institutions.

## Key actions:

- **Adopting a solidarity-based approach to multilateralism** – The spirit of global solidarity, of the sense that we belong to one human family with common hopes, dreams, and aspirations for a better future, should be at the core of reinvigorating multilateralism as the means for enhancing international cooperation towards achieving the SDGs and building an inclusive, equitable and sustainable future, including the generation and provision of the needed finance, technology, and capacity-building support to developing countries. Reflecting solidarity means acceptance of the other as one's own and equal such that global problems that require global solutions would be worked on together in the spirit of global cooperation and through equitable burden-sharing. Solidarity-based multilateralism means helping and working with each other in our collective self-interest.

*“Only One Earth” is more relevant than ever before. It refers to the idea of sharing. We are sharing this planet. We must then share solutions to the many challenges we are facing. We can only share these responsibilities if we recognize that this a precondition for each and every one of us to thrive.” Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*
- **Enhancing partnerships towards international cooperation** – UN Member States are at the core of a reinvigorated multilateralism. Member States collectively define the parameters of international cooperation to address global challenges and the achievement of the SDGs and see to its implementation through their individual and collective actions. To do so in the most effective way that reflects solidarity and a whole of society approach, enhancing partnerships among and between Member States and non-State actors will be critical towards ensuring that international cooperation to address global challenges consider different perspectives and national circumstances, generate consensus, and support effective and equitable sustainable development actions.
- **Strengthening the United Nations system as the lodestar of multilateralism** – The UN system needs to be strengthened, reinvigorated, and made fit for purpose for it to serve as the primary vehicle through which multilateral processes develop global solutions to the triple planetary crisis and the achievement of the SDGs. Its centrality in intergovernmental discourse and decision-making and international cooperation can be enhanced and reinvigorated through the provision by Member States of increased resources to the UN system, the mobilization, and sharing of knowledge, the breaking down of institutional silos, improved cross-sectoral interaction and communication, and enhanced UN system-wide coordination and coherence arrangements in support of the SDGs and in meeting the global challenges posed by the triple planetary crisis.

*“The best way to advance the interests of one’s own citizens is by advancing the interests of our common future. Interdependence is the logic of the twenty-first century. And it is the lodestar of the United Nations ... This is our time. A moment for transformation. An era to reignite multilateralism. An age of possibilities. Let us restore trust. Let us inspire hope. And let us start now.” Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations*



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## Endnotes

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- <sup>95</sup> UN (2021h), The Sustainable Development Goals Report (2021)
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