

STOCKHOLM+50: PROTECT THE GLOBAL COMMONS FOR THE PROSPERITY OF ALL

This policy brief from the Global Commons Alliance to Stockholm+50 outlines seven recommendations for Stockholm+50 to safeguard the global commons - the interconnected Earth systems vital for all life and civilization.

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Our relationship with Earth has changed profoundly since 1972 and the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. Pressure on our planet's life support system has increased exponentially. Much of this pressure has come from a small minority of richer people, companies and countries. Today, Earth's climate, biodiversity, ice sheets, Amazon rainforest and ocean circulations are approaching irreversible tipping points. The stakes could not be higher. We risk losing a liveable Earth.

Myriad stark warnings about the planetary emergency have been issued in recent years: from scientists, Nobel Laureates, citizens, businesses and investors. So far, the global response has been too little, too late. We are failing, collectively, to steward the planet for future generations. This failure is felt in devastated lives and livelihoods and deepening anxiety for the future. As UN Secretary General António Guterres says, humanity faces a stark and urgent choice: breakdown or breakthrough.

We know we need to deliver the fastest economic transformation in history, making this decade a decisive decade for humanity. We face extraordinary challenges in succeeding, not just because the climate and environmental impacts are rapidly accelerating, but also because the decade has begun with a global pandemic, targeted military aggression, and growing inequity.

The Global Commons Alliance proposes SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS to accelerate planetary stewardship and help make Stockholm+50 a success. We believe these goals are essential and achievable within the Stockholm+50 framework.

1. REDEFINE THE GLOBAL COMMONS

The global commons must be redefined for the Anthropocene. Stockholm+50 is an important moment to define a stable and resilient Earth as a global commons.

Protection of the global commons is guided by two principles: the principle of the common heritage of humanity, and the principle of common (but differentiated) responsibilities.

Historically, international law identifies four global commons: the High Seas, the atmosphere, Antarctica and outer space. These are domains beyond the jurisdiction of any one country to which all have access, in theory at least.

But since 1972, scientists have proposed Earth has entered a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. Humans are now the prime driver of change of Earth's interconnected systems, including climate, freshwater, oceans, biodiversity and the ice sheets. A scientific paradigm shift in how we understand humans' relationship with Earth has added to the great wealth of indigenous knowledge to show how these systems function as our life support. These systems are the foundations of a stable and resilient planet, which is fundamental prerequisite for civilization to prosper and thrive. Human civilizations have thrived during the remarkably stable and resilient phase of the Earth system over the past 10,000 years (since we left the last Ice Age). Evidence indicates that without large-scale interference, this phase could have been expected to continue for a further 50,000 years.

In 2009, researchers identified nine planetary boundaries that keep Earth in a relatively stable state. Since then, scientific understanding of vulnerabilities in the Earth system has increased tremendously. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (Assessment Report 6) included mapping of fifteen known systems which have the potential to cross climate tipping points. We have ample evidence now that critical parts of our life support system are at risk of crossing abrupt and/or irreversible tipping points, condemning future generations to global-scale environmental disruption lasting centuries or millennia. The West Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets, the Amazon rainforest and the Atlantic ocean circulation are some of the systems already undergoing unprecedented changes. Without immediate action, the risk of crossing dangerous tipping points on Earth rises dramatically.

The scientific conclusion is that the stable state of the Earth system is at risk.

The stable state of Earth is a common heritage of humanity and a common responsibility for all nations.

Now that we are so deep into the Anthropocene, the global commons can no longer be just "the systems *we all share* beyond national jurisdictions". The global commons must also include all the natural systems on Earth that *we all depend on*, irrespective of where they are located, because they regulate the state of the planet, and thus the basic liveability of any given location on Earth. Every generation has the right to a liveable planet. Therefore, these intricately interwoven Earth systems should be designated as a global commons.

2. SUPPORT AN EARLY WARNING SYSTEM FOR TIPPING POINTS

Stockholm+50 is a critical moment to support the need for an early warning system for Earth's tipping points and commit to identifying safe and just boundaries for people and planet.

Internationally coordinated research is urgently needed to help governments, businesses and investors understand how to effectively protect the global commons. Some building blocks are in place but greater international support is needed.

In 2022/2023, the Earth Commission, part of the Global Commons Alliance, will publish a peer reviewed international assessment to provide the first scientific framework defining safe and just boundaries and just transformation for people and planet. The Earth Commission assessment will identify the key global commons that are essential for a stable Earth and the safeguards needed to avoid crossing irreversible tipping points.

Building on this, we recommend an ambitious international scientific programme to identify tipping point risks and just solutions to protect the global commons in perpetuity.



3. EMBRACE A NATURE POSITIVE FUTURE

Stockholm+50 can call on the world to embrace and accelerate necessary urgent action across societies to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and achieve a nature positive world by 2030, and biosphere recovery by 2050.

The Stockholm+50 conference is a significant moment to remind the world of the interconnected nature of our social, economic and ecological crises and their solutions, and to catalyze urgent action at scale to protect the global commons in a way that is just and fair. This is a moment to support, amplify and accelerate the ongoing Nature Positive campaigns to halt and reverse the destruction of nature by 2030 - while ensuring the capacity of ecosystems to meet the needs of people - with a full recovery of a resilient biosphere by 2050.

4. SCALE SCIENCE-BASED TARGETS FOR THE GLOBAL COMMONS

Stockholm+50 can support the adoption and scaling of science-based targets for all global commons among nations, companies and cities. This must be accompanied by adequate accountability mechanisms.

The business and finance sectors have already established initial science-based targets for climate. Scientific advances in recent years means it is now possible (or will be within 1-3 years) to identify science-based targets, relevant for companies and cities, for all global commons including biodiversity and freshwater. In 2022, the Science Based Targets Network will release one of the first global commons' targets for companies - a science-based target for freshwater.

International support is urgently needed to scale the adoption of science based targets for all global commons among governments, businesses and cities. Allocating such targets among different actors would be best built on principles of equity and justice in order to ensure that the sum total of pressures on the global commons does not exceed safe and just boundaries. This must be accompanied by adequate monitoring and accountability systems. To that end, over one hundred organizations with expertise in data and standards setting, finance, benchmarking, campaigns and regulation are working together via the GCA Accountability Accelerator to build an architecture and system of accountability that supports companies and also holds them responsible for science-based targets for nature and broader environmental performance.

5. SHIFT COMMUNITIES FROM SILOED TO SYSTEMS CHANGE

Protecting the global commons requires systemic, not siloed, change in all sectors. Stockholm+50 can mark the end of a siloed approach to solving the climate, environmental and social crises, and acknowledge the interconnected nature of the necessary work ahead.

Prosperity for all on a stable planet requires a holistic view, systems thinking, a deep understanding of the drivers of environmental damage and vulnerability and the barriers that prevent transformation. Moving onto the better path will not be possible through incremental shifts in policy and behavior. Achieving net zero emissions by mid-century and shifting to a nature positive path, while delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals, requires transformations across all major economic systems: energy, transportation, the built environment, food and land-use, manufacturing, finance, and consumption, to name a few.

These transformations must scale together in a joined up manner. Each system is connected with another in a multitude of ways and will generally necessitate government, corporate, and citizen engagement to overcome entrenched and vested interests in the existing system and the status quo siloed approach. This will require massive reallocation of capital, technological progress, fair and equitable policy changes, including reforming the hundreds of trillions of dollars in environmentally harmful subsidies currently allocated to agriculture, construction, forestry, fossil fuels, marine capture fisheries, transport and water. We will also need to phase out the use of certain resources - such as fossil fuels - and assets, whose collective value is several hundred trillion dollars today.

The Global Commons Alliance's Systems Change Lab will provide policymakers with data and insights to drive fair and equitable systems change at scale and can support the Stockholm+50 agenda. It has three functions: monitoring progress made across 50 required transformations; distilling a rapidly evolving understanding of what constitutes and promotes systems change, and identifying critical gaps and mobilizing support for coalitions as they take action to deliver a more sustainable, equitable future.

We encourage Stockholm+50 to embrace and mainstream a systemic view towards driving the necessary transformations and recognize the role of key drivers that dictate the challenges we face today.

6. WIN HEARTS AND MINDS (1): CHANGE THE NARRATIVE

Change the narrative. Stockholm+50 is a moment to launch major collaborations with large media companies that bring together artists, writers and other creatives to tell the story of the global commons.

This is a decisive decade for humanity. Decisions about how we protect the global commons made this decade will have implications for life on Earth for centuries and millennia from now.

Five decades of economic growth has not led to greater economic security for the majority. The Stockholm+50 international meeting comes as humanity reaches a civilisational transition point. It also comes with a complex backdrop: about half the world lives on less than \$5,50 per day; the devastating COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing; terrorism is on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa Middle East and North Africa, and Afganistan; Russia has invaded Ukraine and most of the critical information about the destabilization of Earth's systems is hidden behind paywalls and not accessible for the vast majority of people.

All these factors have opened up the political and cultural space for a new narrative around valuing our common home and future.

We recommend Stockholm+50 launches a major collaboration bringing together artists, writers, film-makers and TV producers, musicians and influencers to connect with concepts like Nature Positive, the global commons, and a safe and just future, to inspire, entertain and educate people to respond to the crises in a urgent and just manner.

7. WIN HEARTS AND MINDS (2): EDUCATION

Stockholm+50 is a moment to challenge education systems to give the next generation a new worldview and the right tools to accelerate systems change that truly values our future on Earth.

Education systems are failing the next generation who will face more disruption than this generation and who will have to drive profound transformation of the global economy. How can we expect the system to change if people have the same worldview as this generation and the one before that? We recommend launching a new initiative for all undergraduates to leave education with a new world view: valuing our common future. With the right level of ambition, this could be operational within one year, globally.

Of course it is not just undergraduates, all levels of education must have a new compass and understanding of planetary stewardship, beginning in primary school and continuing through to higher education, but we believe the greatest impact in the shortest time will be to focus on higher education.