

Stockholm+50

A commemorative event to celebrate 50 years of global environmental work

A background note for Consultation 4 during the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders' Forum, the GMGFC, February 9 - 11, 2021, the online preparatory meeting for the first session of the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly, UNEA 5.1



A Paper by Stakeholder Forum

INTRODUCTION

This document has been written with the purpose of outlining a background to the consultation on 'Stockholm +50' which was organised during the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders' Forum, the GMGFC on February the 10th, 2021 as a preparatory meeting for the UNEA 5.1. The consultation, which was also referred to as Consultation 4, was organised by the Major Groups Facilitation Committee, the MGFC at the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP as a part of five thematic consultations in connection with UNEA 5.1

The programme for the consultation can be found at the end of this paper.

The presenters at the consultation were free to choose their approach emphasising the issues they felt were important. They were not to be bound in any way by the content in this document. As such, this document was and is not a policy document.

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Stockholm +50, a few thoughts |

There is a need and a plethora of reasons to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the world's environment organisation, UNEP. There is an equal need to commemorate and also celebrate the Stockholm meeting which, back in 1972, began the existence of this organisation. The 1972 conference was aptly named the "United Nations Conference on the Human Environment," herein referred to as the Stockholm Conference.

The Stockholm conference established an environmental process that has, through fifty years, had a ripple of advantageous effects, and there is an urgent need to strengthen these trends, and to diversify, intensify, and actualise them. The legacy of the Stockholm meeting should be clearly identified and viewed as a platform to spur environmental research, policies, and solutions to existing environmental problems. With the experience of fifty years of environmental work, this legacy should also be an incitement to develop systems to identify emerging issues and act on credible evidence predicting possible future environmental trends.

Two issues may sustain such an idea: UNEP identified the stability of climate as a future challenge in the 1970s and identified several possible scenarios to act upon most of which have played out in real life. Yet its warning about future climate problems went unheeded when it was highlighted back then.

In the run-up to the 1992 UN conference in Rio on the environment and development, known as the Earth Summit, as well as in the run-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the WSSD, in Johannesburg in 2002 as well as in the run-up to Rio+20 in 2012,

UNEP with the World Health Organization (WHO) presented serious and convincing reports about the interrelationship between nature and health, stating the necessity of maintaining a balance between these two worlds. The reports alerted the world to a possible unstable future wrought with difficulties if this precarious balance was jeopardized. This foresight was not acted upon, and the world is now struggling to fight off a global pandemic of devastating dimensions and consequences.

Thematic content for Stockholm + 50, at the moment, at the official level |

During his statement at the High-Level segment at the UN General Assembly session in September 2020, commemorating UN at 75, Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven invited Member States to a High-Level meeting in Sweden to be held on June 1-3 in 2022 to commemorate the Stockholm conference. He referred to four issues that could be discussed at such a high-level meeting with the purpose of accelerating development:

- Commemorating UNEP;
- The Green transition;
- Honouring the Paris Agreement; and
- Fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The Swedish government has established a secretariat in the Swedish Ministry of Environment to work on Stockholm +50. Headed by an Ambassador, they have proposed an overarching theme for the High-level meeting scheduled to take place on June 1 - 3, 2022, and have begun to further develop a thematic agenda. So far, the following themes have been identified.

The Swedish ministry has proposed that the overarching and official theme for the High-level meeting could be: “A healthy Planet for the prosperity of all - our responsibility, our opportunity,” and the additional themes are:

- Green transition in relation to sustainable consumption and production;
- Redefining the relationship to nature
- The Green recovery and transition
- Role of nature-based solutions.
- The role of youth

Stockholm + 50, Major Groups and non-state stakeholders |

The major groups and non-state stakeholders have engaged in the discussion about the Stockholm +50 conference. Already, during the Oslo June 2020 United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) Bureaux consultation, thematic input was discussed. The Swedish Ministry of Environment informed the Swedish non-state stakeholders in a consultation on December 16, 2020, about its work, and the Stockholm + 50 conference featured prominently on the agenda for the UNEP Major Groups Regional Consultation Meeting for Europe on December 16 and 17, 2020.

Stakeholder Forum has also engaged itself in both “UNEP@50” and “Stockholm plus 50,” and have informed the larger global stakeholder community through several of capacity- building webinar training sessions carried out on assignment for UNEP.

Among the more prominent themes discussed by the non-state stakeholders in relation to Stockholm + 50, have been:

- A Pact for the Environment - developing UNGA res 73/333 as a declaration from the Stockholm+50 meeting;
- Integrating Ecocide; and
- Expanding on issues relating to environmental law and environmental rights.
- The Major Groups and Stakeholder consultation during the UNEA 5.1 process will deal with the thematic input in the Stockholm + 50 conference, and there are at least two identified challenges in connection with the Stockholm Conference:
- To use the Stockholm + 50 Conference to highlight environmental challenges, strengthen UNEP, and further the environmental dimension of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - the SDGs.
- Find ways of connecting the Stockholm +50 in June 2022 to the proposed UNEP@50 conference scheduled to take place in February 2022 in connection with UNEA 5.2.

A brief overview of UNEP@50 |

UNEP's member states have expressed a strong interest in organising an event commemorating UNEPs' fiftieth birthday, UNEP@50.

After lengthy deliberations, UNEP's Committee of Permanent Representatives, the CPR, issued a statement on December 10, 2020, concerning UNEP@ 50 and the Stockholm+50 Conference:

§8. UNEP@50 is distinctly different from but closely interrelated with, a possible UN High-level Political meeting in Stockholm, that may take place in the second quarter of 2022, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (also known as the Stockholm Conference), subject to a possible decision by the UN General Assembly.

§9. The UNEP@50 commemoration and the offer by Sweden to host a UN High-level meeting, (Stockholm+50), can be mutually reinforcing and contribute to a reinvigorated and modernized environmental multilateralism and to a strengthened capacity by UNEP to support the implementation of the environmental dimension of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and United Nations reform.

The discussions which have taken place in the UNEA 5 Bureau and in the CPR, with input from the secretariat in UNEP, have resulted in a detailed list of possible items and themes to be discussed at UNEP@50, in the run-up to this conference including as outcomes from this conference. Among these are:

- Kick-off at the virtual session of UNEA-5 in February 2021.
- To be held in conjunction with the resumed session of UNEA-5 in February 2022, and then organized either as part of the High-level segment or as a back-to-back to UNEA 5, a two-day Special Session under the Presidency of UNEA 6.
- Take stock of, endorse, or adopt the outcome of the consultation process under General Assembly Resolution 73/333
- Focus on UNEP's core mandates (science-policy interface and international environmental governance).

- Different but interrelated with a possible UN High-level Political meeting in Stockholm in 2022.
- Reinvigorate environmental multilateralism and strengthen UNEP.
- Launch of the first UNEP “Global Assessments Synthesis Report” in advance of UNEA 5, as the substantive backdrop for outreach activities in 2021/22.
- Launch of a UNEP@50 communication initiative and visual identity video.
- Develop an outreach plan and campaign to commemorate UNEP@50.
- Support engagement by the civil society and the general public to feel ownership for UNEP@50.
- Solicit views for a new course for UNEP’s future, in light of current and emerging trends.
- Tailor UNEP flagship reports and initiatives to UNEP@50
- Develop a “legacy publication” to be launched at the conclusion of UNEP@50.
- The legacy publication will review the development of the global environmental science-policy interface since the creation of UNEP - including proposals on how to strengthen the environmental science-policy interface.
- These publications will build on:
 - the Ad-hoc Global Assessment Dialogue, bringing together all major global scientific assessments to enhance synergies; and
 - ongoing work on enhanced environmental governance, policy coherence, and synergy across multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

Process |

The timing of UNEP@50 will be agreed at during UNEA 5.1 in February this year. Because of the pandemic, UNEA 5 is divided into two sessions, the first session, UNEA 5.1, will be a two-day conference held on a digital platform. The second part, UNEA 5.2, will be an in-person meeting held in Nairobi at UNEP Headquarters at Gigiri during the latter part of February in 2022. The two first days of UNEA 5 will be covered during Monday, 22 February and Tuesday, 23 February 2021, constituting UNEA 5.1.

There are two suggestions for celebrating UNEP@50: Integrate UNEP@50 in the high-level segment on day three of the last part of UNEA 5.2 in 2022, or add a two-day conference back-to-back with UNEA 5.2. The rationale for the latter idea is, as the three days of UNEA 5.2 will be effectuated during a Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday next year, a UNEP@50 event could then fill the two remaining days of that week - Thursday and Friday. A decision will be taken during UNEA 5.1.

Whereas the Prime Minister of Sweden has already invited countries to a High-level meeting in June 2022, there are ongoing efforts to make this meeting into a High-level UN meeting. For that to happen, a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution is required. The Swedish government with the support of the Government of Kenya announced on February the 2nd to the member states of the UN at UN Headquarters that the two countries will begin to draft a resolution on February the 8th, this year, with the purpose of organising a UN High-Level Meeting on “Stockholm + 50” hosted by the Swedish Government. When the wording of the resolution is agreed upon, it will be tabled during the 75th session of the UN General Assembly.

A few considerations |

Rumour has it that organising two conferences have been a contentious issue. Rather than seeing this as a golden opportunity to make ‘UNEP and the environment shine’ in two conferences, several G-77 nations have been reluctant to agree to such an arrangement. Rather than promoting the occasions, several member states have expressed opinions considered by observers as political machinations serving obstructionist motives.

This struggle is, in a strange way, reminiscent of the political struggles that took place back in 1972, when the Non-Aligned Countries kept stating that environmental issues were problems that only existed in the developed and industrialised north and bringing the environment into the global discussion only served to distract attention from the real problems - engendering economic growth and fighting extreme poverty. According to the Non-Aligned Group, the environment was an aberration.

One might speculate that this political conflict is still reflecting the global political struggle between a far-right with a strong tendency to downplay the importance of environmental and systemic issues, pitted against a more progressive and environmentally conscious world. There is a feeling among civil society and other stakeholders that the Swedish government has been navigating this difficult and sensitive issue with utmost political care, and that Sweden’s normally creative and environmentally engaging approach has been held back in many ways.

How can civil society and the Major Groups contribute? |

Major Groups and civil society may be in an advantageous position when it comes to bringing an environmental focus to the Stockholm + 50 conference. Being not bound by an official delegate’s agenda and ideas, non-state stakeholders have often been able to add to a conference agenda as well as expand it and bring new aspects to the table. Mindful of the fact that an overarching and agreed imperative of the world is the implementation of the 2030 Agenda including the SDGs, and at the same time mindful of the fact that the overall focus of the Stockholm Conference in 1972 including the one to be held 50 years later is the environment. UNEP takes this very seriously, and being the global environmental organisation UNEA has emphasised the environmental responsibility of UNEP this way:

“Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” UNEA-5 provides Member States and stakeholders with a platform for sharing and implementing successful approaches that contribute to the achievement of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, including the goals related to the eradication of poverty and sustainable patterns of consumption and production. UNEA 5 will also provide an opportunity for Member States and Stakeholders to take ambitious steps towards building back better, and greener, by ensuring that investments in economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic contribute to sustainable development.”¹

This statement could be employed as a set of guiding principles for suggesting and identifying themes for the Stockholm +50 Conference. That thematic guidance could be summarised in the following way:

¹ From UNEA 5’s web-site

- Focus on the environmental dimension of the SDGs.
- Focus on poverty eradication within this context.
- Focus on sustainable consumption and production.
- Focus on an ambitious restructuring of society (building back better) and with a clear green profile.
- Financing should also be of a green kind, here reflecting what UNEP has done so far on greening the economy.
- Identifying and using nature-based solutions, ref the title of UNEA 5.

All of these elements also fall within the ideas outlined earlier in this document. The question we should ask ourselves as members of non-state stakeholders is - can we push the thematic limits further than this? And if we as civil society and major groups come up with themes and ideas that might sound even outlandish, should we not push for such ideas to be included if they are of importance?

By identifying themes that may serve to push the envelope, or the limits of what is deemed as acceptable political limits, stakeholders might inspire and contribute to a solidly progressive and forward-looking agenda, and thus also give legitimacy to a daring agenda that might be adopted for the Stockholm + 50 and UNEP@50 conferences.

The legacy of the 1972 Stockholm conference |

The 1972 Stockholm Conference agreed on 26 principles on environment and development, a detailed 109 paragraph action plan, and a couple of resolutions.

Knowing what we talk about today and looking at the 26 principles from 1972, we might ask - what is really a novel issue today? Talking a brief look at the principles will give us an insight into environmental policy thinking 50 years ago.

The 26 principles of the Stockholm Declaration²:

1. Human Rights must be asserted, apartheid and colonialism condemned.
2. Natural Resources must be safeguarded.
3. The Earth's capacity to produce renewable resources must be maintained.
4. Wildlife must be safeguarded.
5. Non-renewable resources must be shared and not exhausted.
6. Pollution must not exceed the environment's capacity to clean itself.
7. Damaging oceanic pollution must be prevented.
8. Development is needed to improve the environment.
9. Developing countries need assistance.
10. Developing countries need reasonable prices for exports to carry out environmental management.
11. Environment policy must not hamper development.
12. Developing countries need money to develop environmental safeguards.
13. Integrated development planning is needed.

² Please note - the 'headlines' for each of these principles are not by UNEP but based on a reading of the 26 Principles in an attempt to highlight the specific theme of each one of the principles deals with. For the complete text, see A/Conf.48/14/Rev.1

14. Rational planning should resolve conflicts between the environment and development.
15. Human settlements must be planned to eliminate environmental problems.
16. Governments should plan their own appropriate population policies.
17. National institutions must plan the development of states' natural resources.
18. Science and technology must be used to improve the environment.
19. Environmental education is essential.
20. Environmental research must be promoted, particularly in developing countries.
21. States may exploit their resources as they wish but must not endanger others.
22. Compensation is due to states thus endangered.
23. Each nation must establish its own standards.
24. There must be cooperation on international issues.
25. International organizations should help to improve the environment.
26. Weapons of mass destruction must be eliminated.

How many of these principles have guided our environmental policies up until today? Are they still valid? How many of these principles have been implemented? And of those that are not implemented, was that because they are now outdated, not accurate enough, in need of development, or simply not prioritised? History gives us reason to ask such questions, and we might ask some of them during the UNEA 5.1 deliberations.

The Stockholm 1972 legacy can be summed up in a few concrete issues. By founding UNEP in 1972, the world was given:

- A global institutional home for environmental law.
- The beginning of environmental governance.
- An institution to connect science with the environment.
- As the Stockholm Conference allowed civil society and NGOs to address the plenary on a regular basis, it created a precedence changing all subsequent UN conferences forever allowing greater participation from non-state stakeholders in intergovernmental meetings.
- Environmental diplomacy began.
- Environmental assessment and management began.

What themes can be identified and proposed by civil society and Major Groups? |

The first question non-state stakeholders must answer is - should they feel compelled to identify themes within the thematic elements that have been identified by the official processes so far, or should stakeholders be making efforts to propose radically new or different themes?

We might consider an outcome package from these meetings consisting of three elements: a Declaration, a Plan of Action, and a Series of Commitments. If this is the general outline, what will the content be?

As pointed to earlier, non-state stakeholders have been rather modest in engaging with the two upcoming UNEP events commemorating fifty years of environmental work. Three issues keep coming back in various formats:

- A Pact for the Environment - developing UNGA res 73/333 as a declaration from the Stockholm+50 meeting;
- Integrating Ecocide: and
- Expanding on issues relating to environmental law and environmental human rights.

A Pact for the Environment

There is a common denominator for these three areas of focus: they all fall within the area of environmental law. Responding to the work on a Pact for the Environment, the UN Secretary-General produced a Gap report, “Gaps in international environmental law and environment-related instruments: towards a global pact for the environment,” published in 2018. In its summary the UN notes³:

“The report reviews and analyses the corpus of international environmental law and environment-related instruments as well as the governance structure and implementation of international environmental law. It reveals gaps and deficiencies at multiple levels.”

The summary lists inter alia, five areas that need to be addressed⁴:

- First, there is no single overarching normative framework that sets out what might be characterized as the rules and principles of general application in international environmental law, even though such principles may help unify the current, sectoral, approach to international environmental law and help fill the gaps in the rules laid out in treaties.
- Second, international environmental law is piecemeal and reactive. It is characterized by fragmentation and a general lack of coherence and synergy among a large body of sectoral regulatory frameworks.
- Third, the articulation between multilateral environmental agreements and environment-related instruments remains problematic owing to the lack of clarity, content-wise, and status-wise, of many environmental principles.
- Fourth, the structure of international environmental governance is characterized by institutional fragmentation and a heterogeneous set of actors, revealing important coherence and coordination challenges. International courts and tribunals often stress the lack of international consensus concerning environmental principles.
- Fifth, the implementation of international environmental law is challenging at both the national and international levels.

Reading through the report, the impression is that working on such issues demands expert knowledge and insights. However, when has that ever stopped non-state stakeholders from engaging in an issue? Besides, there are numerous organisations with legal expertise that could be inspired to join this cause.

Non-state stakeholders have a long and well-respected track-record on dealing with governance issues, and legal matters are as much at the core of governance as policy issues are. A major challenge identified by the Gap report is making environmental law into a legally

³ <https://globalpact.informea.org/>

⁴ Ibid, the reference is here summarised.

binding system recognised by all member states. Could a declaration to this effect strengthen UNEP's work on environmental law?

The purpose of a Pact in legal terms must be to recognise the rights and duties of every citizen towards our planet. This was already explicitly stated in the Stockholm Declaration from 1972 - and we still have problems in accepting this principle. A Pact agreed globally, could also be a multilateral treaty endowed with legal force to guide environmental action. As such it should complement existing environmental treaties, most of which have been given birth by initiatives taken by UNEP. Several experts have said that such a Pact must also be given a normative methodology to enhance environmental standards with a view to developing a so-called "third generation of fundamental rights" - environmental rights.

The environment is under threat - everywhere - and needs legal protection. Those who forcefully work for the environment are often criticised and their efforts undermined. We also know that in several cases, the Environmental Defenders are killed while trying to do their job. Highlighting the work these individuals carry out would also fit into a declaration. A legal framework to defend them would perhaps also help save human lives as well as the life of the environment.

It would not be the first time that participants at a major conference on environment and development have tried to agree to a set of principles defending nature enshrined in a Pact. The most notable is perhaps Maurice Strong's efforts during the 1992 UNCED conference. The participating countries agreed to Agenda 21, no small feat, but Strong's efforts to develop the Earth Charter as an official element of Agenda 21 only ended up as a thoughtful NGO.

Another issue referred to by a growing group of non-state stakeholders is ecocide.

Ecocide

Addressing the Assembly of the International Criminal Court, ICC, in December 2019, H.E. Ambassador John Licht of Vanuatu said that: "Vanuatu believes that the ICC's Assembly needs to remain relevant in the face of the greatest threats to human rights in the history of mankind - it needs to seriously consider amendments to have ecocide as the fifth crime under the Rome Statute"⁵.

In his opening statement at the Stockholm Conference in 1972, the late Swedish Prime Minister, Mr. Olof Palme referred to massive environmental destruction as ecocide. Palme also inferred that countries were reluctant to discuss this item.⁶

Fifty years on, and the reluctance still exists. Moreover, as organisations and expert lawyers have begun to discuss the issue of ecocide in legal terms, several countries have hardened their opposition to such a term. And getting the issue discussed in an official forum is no easy matter. But as the issue was featured prominently in the Stockholm 1972 conference, maybe now is the time to revisit it, deemed controversial and contentious by a large number of states.

⁵ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/404921/vanuatu-calls-for-icc-to-include-crime-of-ecocide>

⁶ <https://endecocide.se/uncategorized/olof-palme-and-ecocide-law/#:~:text=In%201972%2C%20Olof%20Palme%20initiated,international%20conference%20on%20environmental%20damage.&text=In%20the%20field%20of%20human,Our%20future%20is%20common.>

When a country identifies a political issue as ‘controversial’ or ‘contentious’ what the country is doing is obfuscating the issue. Rather than having an honest, participatory, transparent, and fact-based discussion, countries stall the issue. Thinking that a subject will go away just because it is swept under a carpet is rather naïve. All you have to do is to lift the carpet to bring the issue back into the light. Today so many politicians, intergovernmental organisations, lawyers, and prominent decision-makers are making the art of obfuscation into a political art.

Pope Francis, the French President Macron, the two green parties in Belgium have all called for ecocide to be recognised as a crime by the international community.⁷

The Stockholm + 50 Conference can be an international opportunity to raise the issue, and perhaps proposing to include this in the Pact for the Environment discussion might be an opportunity to raise the issue and to further substantiate it.

Getting this issue right and finding a proper legal approach is no easy matter, but it is not impossible. And the more often we raise it and the deeper we dig, the more we understand it.

A few more themes identified

Hopefully, other crucial issues will be outlined between now and June 2022. Four may be easily defined, but not so easily implemented.

- Expanding the position of civil society and major groups, for instance with a focus on implementing the UNEP Medium-Term Strategy, the MTS and implementing it;
- UNEP’s Finance Initiative discussing what in lay terms is known as Green Finance - UNEP’s banking initiative and a financial taxonomy inspired by the EU financial taxonomy;
- Highlighting the connection between the environment and health in general, and in relation to zoonotic diseases in particular; and
- Upgrading UNEP to a United Nations Specialized Agency.

Civil society and the major groups

More than 500 non-state stakeholders are accredited to UNEP and on average some two to three hundred participate in the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi. Still, the amount of non-state stakeholders that take an active part in UNEP’s work is in effect much larger. Non-state stakeholders are also active in processes directed by the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, SAICM, by the chemical conventions, the BRS and Minamata, and in the various science-policy endeavours under the auspices of UNEP.

There is also room for wider engagement by non-state stakeholders, with a caveat - these stakeholders have to prove themselves to UNEP’s Member States, and thus will have to deliver quality, which by the way, is not always the case.

Civil society and major groups were, until 2015, not allowed to participate in the endeavours of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. After a successful lobbying effort, the CPR invited major group representatives to participate in the CPR meeting in September 2015

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20201105-what-is-ecocide>

preparing for the following UNEA. This paved the way for greater participation, and major groups were, during 2019, invited by the Bureaux of UNEP to actively engage in the development of the Medium-Term Strategy, MTS. Several participants felt the engagement was somewhat superficial, but a precedent was set. The MTS is at the core of UNEP's activities, and non-state stakeholders could easily be involved in implementing it in the future. Ideas on how to implement the MTS, how to monitor its implementation, research emerging issues and input these into new MTS proposals, and make sure the people's voices are brought into the continued discussions on the new MTS, etc., all this and more could be discussed and fact-finding committees or advisory boards consisting of official representatives from member states and of representatives from major groups could be established to do so. Such bodies could be developed to further implementation by major groups and stakeholders, monitoring implementation, and deliver reports to future UNEA plenaries.

Such ideas may be developed under the theme of environmental governance and the participation of major groups and stakeholders. In so doing, it is also important to state the necessity of strengthening UNEP's own capacity for serving the body of non-state stakeholders. The number of focal points for non-state stakeholders, including offices for these stakeholders, have seen their numbers being reduced over the past ten years in all parts of the large UN family. At the same time, the remaining offices have had their budgets dramatically reduced. Hence, strengthening the bodies dealing with civil society and stakeholders at the UN in general and in UNEP, in particular, must be given more resources. This point should also be featured prominently in our discussions. It is part of the Stockholm legacy from 1972 and it will be of necessity for the future of the global environment.

UNEP's Finance Initiative

In addition to environmental law, UNEP's Green Financing Initiative is a relatively novel one. Unfortunately, this theme seems to attract the private sector, but other non-state stakeholders should feel the urge to engage more actively.

Traditionally, the World Bank, the IMF, and regional banks have considered finance and banking as their prerogative. When UNEP initiated a green finance discussion in conjunction with Rio+20, the traditional finance entities inside the UN criticised it for entering a field outside its remit. UNEP may not be the obvious choice in redirecting monetary or fiscal policies, but in speaking about Building Back Better, maybe an environment organisation is sorely needed to challenge traditional economists who often seem to regurgitate old-fashioned and conservative solutions to financial crises.

UNEP writes: "Green financing is to increase the level of financial flows (from banking, micro-credit, insurance, and investment) from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors to sustainable development priorities. A key part of this is to better manage environmental and social risks, take up opportunities that bring both a decent rate of return and environmental benefit, and deliver greater accountability."⁸

In this connection, UNEP has developed Principles of Responsible Banking, which more than 200 banks have signed on to.

⁸ <https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/supporting-resource-efficiency/green-financing>

This entire theme warrants discussion, and it would be tragic if these important initiatives were not discussed in public and given proper oversight and monitoring. Strengthening initiatives pertaining to greening finance must be of importance, and this entire theme could be part of the agenda.

Highlighting the connection between the environment and health in general, and in relation to zoonotic diseases in particular

Last year, 2020, the general public was given a new concept in their expanding vocabulary - zoonotic diseases. They were also given a new scare - a global pandemic. The two are interconnected and well understood - by experts. They are however either not understood or ignored by a large number of decision-makers. Some even have implied that the concept represents a form of 'fake news' and have done their best to ignore serious warnings relating to this issue.

It should be clear to everyone that ignorance and lack of actions have caused the gravest social, economic, political, and health crises the world has ever seen. And no one can claim we were not warned. Some time ago, WHO and the World Bank began to co-convene the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, the GPMB. Their mandate states that:

“The mandate of the GPMB is to apprise key policymakers and the world of system-wide progress towards increased preparedness and response capacity for disease outbreaks and other emergencies with health consequences. It publishes an annual overview of the state of the world’s preparedness, monitoring progress, calling for leaders to take urgent action.”

Acting on this, the GPMB 2019 report published in September what was called “A world at Risk”.⁹ The report spells out the risk of a possible global pandemic. Too few heeded its warnings, no one listened, no one took action. We know what happened. The focus of the report may have been too much on health and the economy. The environment must be integrated into this work.

Today every responsible organisation, company, or intergovernmental body talks about the COVID-19 pandemic. A few specialised institutions also deal with elements of this issue. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCCC, the Convention on Biological Diversity, UNCBD, and the Convention to Combat Desertification, UNCCD, to mention but three, will scrutinize their mandated issues and establish how they are relevant to the pandemic.

WHO has, since day one, been working on the health and medical aspects of the ongoing pandemic. The reports of the GPMB also reveals this.

Other UN bodies have now been deeply engaged in analysing the socio-political and socio-economic aspects of the pandemic.

The question is - how will the understanding, research, and analysis of the health issues coming from WHO, the biological understanding of the reasons for the pandemic coming from CBD, and the economic understanding coming from the World Bank and the IMF be combined in a meaningful way and turned into a programme of action? Which institution if not UNEP could

⁹ https://apps.who.int/gpmb/annual_report.html

be given this assignment? UNEP already provides the secretariat for the 51 body strong Environment Management Group, the EMG.

Strengthened with resources and a mandate and pushed by decisions taken - at the latest in 2022, such an assignment should be proactive and long-lasting with a mandate for 2030 and beyond. And if not the EMG, then perhaps UNEP should be added as a third convenor of the GPMB?

Civil society and major groups impatiently demanding action now could also be promoting this idea.

Upgrading UNEP to a UN Specialized Agency

UNEP is still a subsidiary organ of the Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC. In reality, this means that ECOSOC can overturn any decisions made by UNEA, despite the fact that UNEA has universal membership and ECOSOC still has only 54 members elected by the UNGA on overlapping three-year terms.

During the run-up to Rio+20 in 2012, countries and non-state stakeholders were engaged in a drive to upgrade the status of UNEP to a Specialised Agency. The advantages of such a move would give the environment a higher political status, with a Director General at its helm on par with the other UN Specialised Agencies. “The United Nations Environment” as a specialized agency would entertain a more proactive role with more independence from the larger slow-moving UN bureaucracy. Those who worked against such an idea kept claiming that the UN’s environment organisation would lose its financial backing if it was turned into a specialised agency.

The result of the negotiations at Rio+20 was the hybrid solution arrived at - that UNEP is still a subsidiary body under the auspices of ECOSOC with a UNEA body taking place every two years and making decisions by universal membership. It became almost the same procedural solution as with the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, HLPF - a forum under the auspices of ECOSOC and the UNGA with universal membership. One of the main differences between these two bodies is that HLPF has no decision making power.

Perhaps the discussion about upgrading UNEP could be revisited, and kick-start a debate about the advantages and disadvantages of having a strong organisation with a strong mandate to work for, protect and defend the environment of the world. If that were to happen, that would certainly be a true birth-day gift for a fifty-year-old.

An epilogue with a foresight |

No doubt, the legacy of the Stockholm meeting in 1972, aptly named ‘The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment’ can and will be discussed for years to come. But one thing cannot be contested - the conference set something in motion, and that something was a desire to look at the world and its people with a quest for its well-being and a need to understand the environmental basis upon which well-being can and must be based.

The only head of state from abroad who participated in the Stockholm Conference in 1972 was Indira Gandhi of India. Her opening speech at the conference was deemed to be the most

significant one delivered. Mrs. Gandhi clearly saw the need to safeguard the environment. One of her passages came to be included among the 26 principles in the outcome Declaration. It reads as follows:

“Man has a special responsibility to safeguard and wisely manage the heritage of wildlife and its habitat, which are now gravely imperilled by a combination of adverse factors. Nature conservation, including wildlife, must therefore receive importance in planning for economic development.”¹⁰

The outcome from the conference inspired people to take a fresh look at development. At first, the environment was thought to be an aberration, a luxury item in development. Only slowly a realisation began to grow, a realisation that the environment was actually much more.

Maurice Strong began immediately after the conference to organise UNEP and, buoyed up by the outcome from the Stockholm conference, he initiated a series of conferences to take a fresh look at general development. One such conference took place during autumn of 1974 in the town of Cocoyoc in Mexico. Maurice Strong of UNEP, and Gamani Corea of UNCTAD, were the convenors of this conference which produced a critical analysis of development at the time. The Cocoyoc Declaration was the outcome document.

French writer and environmentalist, Mr. Aurélien Bernier writes about this document in 2011:

“Yet, forgotten treasures sleep in the archives of the United Nations (UN). Thus, the most radical declaration on the environment resulting from this institution is erased from the official history. Written in October 1974 in the Mexican city of Cocoyoc, it drew the outlines of a new international order at odds with the one currently imposed on us¹¹.”

The epilogue in this declaration illustrates well what historian Timothy Snyder has stated: “History does not repeat, but it does instruct.” The epilogue is actually a statement of foresight, and it contains almost every element of what we discuss today concerning the environment and sustainable development: the planetary boundaries, the doughnut economy, building back or forward, better, the struggle to defend nature. What follows is what was written nearly fifty years ago. Let us now take cognizance from this epilogue, and make sure the next Stockholm Conference can continue to inspire coming generations the same way it once did.

Epilogue from the Cocoyoc Declaration |

“We recognize the threats to both the “inner limits” of basic human needs and the “outer limits” of the planet’s physical resources. But we also believe that a new sense of respect for fundamental human rights and the preservation of our planet is growing up behind the angry divisions and confrontations of our day. We have faith in the future of mankind on this planet. We believe that ways of life and social systems can be evolved that are more just, less arrogant in their material demands, more respectful of the whole planetary environment. The road forward does not lie through the despair of doom-watching or through the easy optimism of successive technological axes. It lies through a careful and dispassionate assessment of the

¹⁰ <https://thewire.in/books/indira-gandhi-nature-pollution>

¹¹ <https://bsahely.com/2019/04/29/the-cocoyoc-declaration-1974-johan-galtung-transcend-media-service-international-organisation-le-monde-diplomatique/>

"outer limits", through a co-operative search for ways to achieve the "inner limits" of fundamental human rights, through the building of social structures to express those rights, and through all the patient work of devising techniques and styles of development which enhance and preserve our planetary inheritance."¹²

ANNEX - programme for Consultation 4 |

Consultation 4: Stockholm + 50, Facilitators: Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Teresa Oberhauser

14.30-14.40 Introduction, Teresa Oberhauser

14.40-15.00 From Stockholm 1972 to vision for the future? Presentation by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes

15.00-15.20 Stockholm + 50: a proposal from the Government of Sweden, Presentation by H.E. Ms. Johanna Lissinger Peitz, Stockholm + 50 Secretariat

15.20-15.40 Stockholm + 50: Expectations from Youth, Presentation by NN, Children and Youth Major Group

15.40-16.00 Stockholm + 50: Scientific Evidence that calls for action, Presentation by John Scanlon, CEO of the Elephant Protection Initiative Foundation, Chair of the Global Alliance to End Wildlife Crime, and Chair of the UK Government's IWT Challenge Fund

16.00-16.30 Input and Questions from MGS: Main expectations of Major Groups with the respect to the outcome of Stockholm + 50

16.30-16.40 Responses from the panel 4

16.40-17.20 Input and Questions from MGS: How to best engage Major Groups in the process leading up to Stockholm + 50 and the event itself

17.20-17.30 Responses from the panel

17.30-17.45 Conclusion: Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Teresa Oberhauser

¹² <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/160899?ln=en>

ABOUT STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future (SF) is a not-for-profit international organisation working to advance sustainable development at all levels. Our work aims to enhance open, accountable, and participatory decision-making and governance on sustainable development through enhancing the involvement of all stakeholders. We provide a bridge between those who have a stake in sustainable development and the international forums where decisions are made in their name. To this end, we work with a diversity of stakeholders globally on international policy development and advocacy; stakeholder engagement and consultation; media and communications, and capacity building - all with the ultimate objective of promoting progressive outcomes on sustainable development through an open and participatory approach. In consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1996, SF also works with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) under an MOU to expand the engagement and participation of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders in the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and HLPF processes.

Our current projects include 'Towards a Capacity Building Effort for Major Groups and other Stakeholders Affiliated with UNEP,' a series of online train-the-trainer workshops, in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme, to create capacity among Major Groups and Other Stakeholders on how to engage with UNEA and UNEP in a most effective and productive way. Another current project is the Global Forum for National SDG Advisory Bodies, developed and co-founded in partnership with the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). The Global Forum aims to support national councils for sustainable development and similar multi-stakeholder bodies in their efforts to deliver the 2030 Agenda.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Senior Advisor on Governance for Stakeholder Forum, debuted with the UN and the environment with the United Nations Conference on the Environment in Stockholm in 1972 and has stayed with this arena ever since. Working on disseminating information on and teaching about UN issues during the 80s and early 90s, he has followed and then worked with the UN Commission for Sustainable Development since 1997 when, that year, he was a liaison officer between the UN and the NGO community at the UN headquarters in New York. After his first assignments for the UN in Latin America in the 1970s, Jan-Gustav has worked and lived in Botswana, Uganda, the United States, Sweden, and his home country, Norway. He has extensive NGO experience developed through three decades in almost all continents, speaks several languages, and has lectured and delivered workshops all over the world on the UN, governance, the environment, and sustainable development. Jan-Gustav's work includes advising organisations and governments on relations with civil society, chairing UN meetings facilitating UN processes, has translated several books from English to Norwegian and authored two books and numerous articles on the environment and sustainable development.





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