

“Stockholm+50 in 2022 – a challenging conference with a forward-looking agenda”

Summary report of themes highlighted at Consultation 4 – of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholder’s Forum, the GMGSF, preparing for UNEA 5.1, 2021.

Introduction

In 2022, fifty years will have elapsed since the nations of the world agreed to recognise the environment as an important issue on the global political agenda. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment - The Stockholm Conference - in June 1972 was the occasion for this agreement, the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, was among the first tangible results emanating from this conference. With a growing interest from all stakeholders in the upcoming commemoration of UNEP, and in fifty years of global work on the environment, the Major Groups at UNEP had decided to focus two of its five thematic consultations during the UNEA 5.1 process on this issue. One of the two consultations concentrated on what is called “UNEP@50”, the other had as its theme “Stockholm+50”.

The “Stockholm+50” consultation dealt with which possible themes could and should be covered by the conference, which will be organised in June 2022 to commemorate the 1972 Stockholm Conference with a focus on its legacy and the future work on environmental issues.

Facilitated by Teresa Oberhauser, Children and Youth Major Group, and Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, the consultation dealt with the following themes:

- Introduction by Teresa Oberhauser
- “From Stockholm 1972 to a vision for the future?” by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes
- “Stockholm+50: a proposal from the Government of Sweden”, by H.E. Ambassador Ms. Johanna Lissing Peitz, Stockholm+50 Secretariat
- “Expectations from Youth”, Presentation by, Children and Youth Major Group
- “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

Acknowledgments and disclaimer -

This report was written by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Stakeholder Forum, with input from Teresa Oberhauser, Children and Youth Major Group at UNEP. The report aims to highlight key issues covered by the presenters including a summary of issues discussed during the panel and plenary Q&A sessions. The report is not designated as an official report, and its content, including any misrepresentation of the verbal presentation and discussion on-line is the responsibility of Jan-Gustav Strandenaes. He would however thank Teresa Oberhauser for her quality input and overviews. The presentations have been edited in an effort to highlight the key messages from each presenter. Hence the reports are not written down as ad verbatim versions. We have also asked each presenter to review our notes which they have all done. The entire consultation was, however, recorded and can be found on the following website: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/8080798449089306375>

Excerpts from the presentations:

1 - “Stockholm+50: a proposal from the Government of Sweden”, Ambassador Johanna Lissinger Peitz

Ambassador for Stockholm+50, Ministry of Environment of Sweden:

Ambassador Lissinger Peitz emphasised the present context of the upcoming conference by saying that Stockholm+50 will take place against a backdrop of the severe public health, economic and political impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, offering a chance for nations and stakeholders to work across siloes (climate, biodiversity, pollution and so forth) to develop synergistic “win-win” solutions to these intertwined challenges.

The UN resolution on Stockholm+50

Formally speaking, she pointed to the ongoing collaboration between the Governments of Sweden and Kenya to host a United Nations high-level meeting in Stockholm in 2022 to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Stockholm conference. The two governments began the drafting process in February on a resolution titled “UN high-level meeting Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”. The purpose is to have the UN General Assembly adopt a resolution through which it decides to convene Stockholm+50.

Sweden will function as the host country with the support of Kenya. Sweden and Kenya have agreed to join hands to ensure that these two important events, UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50 will contribute to a reinvigorated and modernized environmental multilateralism and complement each other and are mutually reinforcing.

Ambassador Lissinger Peitz also outlined elements of the resolution for the Stockholm+50 meeting being written in New York. Sweden and Kenya have proposed a short enabling resolution, containing only a few key elements, while further details and format of the high-level meeting would be elaborated in a modalities-resolution.

In the proposed resolution, the preambular part contains contextual references to the Stockholm Conference in 1972, the UN75 declaration, and the 2030 Agenda, expressing support for the commemoration of UNEP@50. It reflects the offer by Sweden to assume the cost and host the meeting in Stockholm between 1-3 June 2022, with the support of Kenya, and to ensure coherence and consistency in the preparation process, the proposed resolution welcomes UNEP’s offer to serve as the focal point for providing support to the organisation of the meeting. The proposed resolution also invites UNEA, at its fifth session in 2022, to provide input leading up to Stockholm+50, as appropriate. The high-level meeting would be further developed in a modalities resolution that is to be considered before the end of the 75th session. The last paragraph of the proposed resolution, Lissinger Peitz said, expressed the intent to involve a wide range of stakeholders in the preparations for the high-level meeting and the implementation of Stockholm+50.

The 1972 legacy with relevance for the 2022 conference

In her presentation, the ambassador underlined the importance of civil society and major groups, and their massive contribution to making the environment better and continually challenging UNEP to improve. Pointing to a key legacy from the 1972 meeting, that it was also a pioneer in including civil society and other stakeholders as active participants at the meeting, she also underlined that the government of Sweden sees an important role of Major Groups and Stakeholders in the run-up to Stockholm+50 and during the meeting itself. Furthermore, the Ambassador pointed out Sweden's experience in stakeholder engagement, especially with youth.

Another legacy of immense importance from 1972 was the collaboration between science and the multilateral organisation UNEP, a collaboration of lasting and necessary importance. She listed a number of key scientific challenges identified by science today that could help generate a productive and relevant outcome from the upcoming conference in 2022:

- Recognizing the scale and urgency of the climate and biodiversity crises, and taking action based on the linkages between them, has become critical to humanity's continued well-being - for ours and future generations;
- Policy debates about this complex and interlinked set of issues;
- reducing biodiversity loss;
- mitigating and adapting to climate change;
- achieving sustainable economic and social development;
- sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- a circular economy; and
- recovering and rebuilding from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The focus of the 2022 Conference

The title proposed for the Stockholm 2022 conference is: "A healthy Planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity"

Illustrating the need to think out of the box, Lissinger Peitz said that dealing with these issues is all-too-often conducted in "siloes", even sometimes working against each other. We need new approaches, was her message.

Science has, all through these fifty years and key UN conferences, time and again pointed to our unsustainable way of living and concluded today that the planet – and thus the economies, societies and people that depend on it – is under severe and growing pressure. Referring to the UN-75 Declaration promising the world that we will protect our planet, Lissinger Peitz said that the proposed conference theme for Stockholm+50 would allow focussing on a set of interlinked themes, such as:

- *A healthy planet* because it is interconnected, and it will ensure the wellbeing of future generations;
- *Shared prosperity* is essential in our path to the full implementation of the 2030 agenda and ensuring that we leave no one behind;
- We have *a common responsibility* to keep the average global temperature from increasing, to reduce biodiversity loss, transform consumption and production patterns for a just and inclusive transition that leaves no one behind; and

- As we are rebuilding from the severe public health, economic and political impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic *we have an opportunity* to reset the global economy and to build forward better and greener.

We must make sure the conference is not only going to be a stand-alone conference. It should inspire us to work across siloes, redefine our relationship with nature, focus on the SDGs and implement the 2030 Agenda as an interlinked, integrated and global agenda, and mobilize the global community behind strengthened actions.

During the presentation, the ambassador pointed to youth and their participation being of particular importance. She quoted the UN-75 Declaration which also lays out a commitment to listen and work with youth, stating that: “For too long, the voices of youth have been sidelined in discussions about their future. This has to change now through meaningful engagement with youth.” Lissinger Peitz stated: “Young people are our change-makers, identifying solutions on how we can build back better and greener. Including youth in policy processes and conversations is essential if we are to build a better tomorrow.”

2 - “Stockholm+50: Scientific Evidence that calls for action”, by John Scanlon

CEO of the Elephant Protection Initiative Foundation, Chair of the Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime, and Chair of the UK Government’s IWT Challenge Fund

John Scanlon gave a challenging overview of possibilities for the Stockholm+50 Conference. Based on his long experience from environmental work, spanning the summits in 1992, 2002 and 2012, representing civil society (1992), IUCN (2002), and then the UN system (2012), he took his examples regarding the science-policy interface largely from the world of biodiversity.

Taking as his point of departure, the Stockholm 1972 conference, calling it a watershed moment in the history of working for the global environment, John Scanlon said we should use the occasion of Stockholm+50 in 2022 to create another watershed occasion with positive consequences for the environment for the next 50 years. Back in 1972, the UN had to consider a number of principal questions, and one was whether it should take the lead in global environmental affairs. Several countries had voiced tangible opposition to such a move, and Scanlon gave kudos to the Swedish government for having hosted the Stockholm 1972 Conference. He pointed to one issue that was as relevant in 1972 as it is today – the need to change and improve our relationship to nature. These links are obvious, he claimed.

The Stockholm 1972 Conference spawned a host of national and international institutions, laws, and declarations on the environment. This also contributed to a substantive change in the way we all looked at the environment. It boosted scientific research on the environment, expanded our knowledge of the environment, which in turn made subsequent policy decisions based on better and more reliable facts emanating from this scientific research, which in the end also led to the adoption of a plethora of Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the development of the body of environmental laws we have today.

Another point of departure Scanlon took for his presentation, was the dire straits the world is in today: Since 1972 the population has more than doubled, the extraction of finite resources has tripled, and the global GDP has quadrupled. This trajectory is not sustainable. And despite the commendable work carried out by and inspired by UNEP's work, we are going backwards. Despite noble efforts, the state of biodiversity keeps declining; the recent IPBES¹ report shows that more than 80% of all wetlands have been lost, and the last WWF report, 'Our Living Planet,' demonstrates that two-thirds of vertebrates have become extinct since 1972. But – the IPBES claims – it is not too late to rectify the situation if we change our course of development. Stockholm+50 could be inspiring a change of direction.

Science and laws

Basing his examples on the development of science for biodiversity with subsequent regulatory practices, Scanlon stated that through combining environmental science, institutional development and environmental law, it would be possible to develop a platform upon which a forward-looking outcome from the commemorative Stockholm conference could be founded.

Looking back to the three sustainability summits, UNCED, WSSD and Rio+20, Scanlon showed that science had always played an important role in informing the deliberations and subsequently guiding policy decisions and the further development of environmental law. The three Rio-Conventions², UNFCCC, UN CBD and UNCCD are points in case.

UNEP's initial work on the ozone layer led to the Montreal Protocol, and perhaps one of the most important results of UNEP's initiatives was its work on climate change and the establishment of the IPCC³. Another milestone was the establishment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, IPBES.

From silos to convergence and coherence

Until now, the political response has always been slower than science. With this realisation, perhaps now is the time to take preventative measures rather than mitigate negative impacts. Critical science can and should be used today to shape policies and enact environmental laws.

Beginning with the 1972 conference, the approach to research, decisions and law was at first fragmented. Rather than having a holistic approach, the different thematic areas were treated as separate entities: decisions were made on trade in wildlife, migratory species, world heritage places, wetland areas of importance, and so on.

From the 1990s, clustering related elements became the trend. Everything that had an organic connection was clustered under one umbrella. For instance, all elements considered to be related to biodiversity were clustered under the CBD; climate, atmosphere, global warming, etc. under UNFCCC, and so on.

¹ The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, IPBES, is an independent intergovernmental body established by States to strengthen the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development. It was established in April 2012. While not being a UN body, UNEP provides secretariat services to IPBES.

² The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UN Convention on Biodiversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification

³ UNEP with the World Meteorological Organisation, the WMO, founded the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, in 1988

This created unforeseen problems. Clustering all elements that belonged to biodiversity meant that all institutions, science or otherwise, advocacy and policy organisations, would be discussing and negotiating among themselves, developing a greater understanding for issues but with little consequences for those forces that actually caused the destruction of biodiversity.

The approach so far, while being based on developing expert knowledge, has also been too siloed. Looking toward the future, we need to see where there is coherence.

Connecting the dots in holistic manners without losing the expert basis is the way forward. The Sustainable Development Goals have done so to some extent. 80% of the SDG complex is reliant on the environment and seeing this interconnection with its interlinked nature is a serious attempt to leave silo-thinking behind.

The interconnection is obvious: if we protect the protected area, we protect biodiversity, which is contributing to creating clean water and keeping wetlands alive; which is sequestering carbon, which stabilises the climate, which is providing security, which is preventing wildlife-related pandemics. Bio-diversity and climate change are two sides of the same coin. The paradox here is we cannot do one without the other, and yet the issues have also to be kept and treated separately.

Stockholm+50, the way forward and public health

A recurring theme for the conference next year should also be – what will the planet look like in 50 years, and how do we want it to look like? And this can be complemented by considering what tangible milestones there could be along the way.

A reorientation to a new relationship with nature means refocussing on GDP as an exclusive measure of growth. A new economic model is needed. Accounting for nature must be an integrated element of future economic development. How are consumers consuming and how is the private sector producing - these issues must be subject to governmental regulation, national and local.

“Follow the money” may be a cliché, and we should address the question of how to intersect with and access global value chains in order to influence them, so they are not drawing down our global, natural capital. The pattern of consumption and production is an indicator of excessive exploitation of finite and renewable resources. In this context, we need to take a close look at the corporate and finance sector and look at the global value chains. Nearly half of the global output stems from these value chains. Of particular interest should be the value chains related to forestry, fisheries and fashion. Sectors like the fashion industry, is one that youth may strongly influence. Fast fashion and single-use fashion need to come to an end.

The present pandemic may have taught us in a lasting way to cooperate better. It has also demonstrated how the world is interconnected. Protecting nature will provide security and well-being and also prevent future wildlife-related pandemics. Zoonosis and COVID-19 have become threats to global well-being. The last IPBES report has estimated that there are around 1.7 billion undiscovered viruses in animals, and that half of these could easily spill over into humans. Climate change, biodiversity, and public health have come together in a dramatic way to open up new modes of understanding and cooperation. This should be an integrated element of Stockholm+50.

The celebration of the two milestones, UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50, must be mutually reinforcing. Organising these conferences must incorporate challenges based on the same courage as our predecessors showed 50 years ago. Youth should definitely be prioritised, but not in a way where generations are pitted against each other. It should not be youth versus non-youth. We need the creativity and innovation of the youth and to blend it with the wisdom of elders, and we all should be able to say after the Stockholm conference is over – this was a defining moment.

3 - “Expectations from Youth”, Presentation by Zahra Abu Taha

Zahra Abu Taha – Children and Youth Major Group

With a solid background of more than 15 years in working on environmental issues, Zahra Abu Taha, also introducing herself as a climate campaigner, gave the Stockholm+50 a perspective from the Children and Youth Major Group.

From Stockholm in 1972 to Stockholm in 2022.

Zahra said youth are well aware of all the scenarios that had been presented at the Stockholm conference in 1972, which in dramatic ways clearly demonstrated what might happen if the world at the time did not change its course of action and development. Unfortunately, a majority of these scenarios heralding a troublesome future back in 1972, had been played out in real life. As has often been stated by youth, they feel they have been handed a world rife with problems to solve, which have been created by past generations. Quoting from the key 2030 Document, Zahra said: “We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet.”⁴

And now, in the midst of the worst global crises which the world has been thrown into, caused by a sinister pandemic, it is well worth remembering a few key UN conferences of historic importance.

Mindful of post-war history, Zahra referred to the three major UN conferences dealing with the environment – Rio UNCED and Agenda 21 in 1992, WSSD and the Johannesburg Plan of Action in 2002, and the Rio+20 Conference in 2012 from which the outcome report was titled “The Future We Want.” UNEP and WHO presented reports at these conferences demonstrating the links between nature and public health and the need to maintain a balance between these two worlds. Environment and public health represent major concerns for young people today, and youth have made efforts to advocate for a larger understanding and commitment to these issues. But global public health, now devastated by a zoonotic pandemic is closely connected to two globally overarching environmental problems – climate change and environmental degradation. They both need immediate attention and immediate solutions. We have all contributed to creating the first, the attention, we are also acutely aware of the second problem, how to solve environmental degradation. But decision-makers do not seem willing to implement the necessary solutions. Referring to a CPR subcommittee meeting in

⁴ From paragraph 51, UNGA Ares/70.1 “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

October 2020, Zahra pointed to what the youth had stated: “Let’s be clear, we will have a vaccine for COVID-19, but we will not have a vaccine for the climate crises and environmental degradation we are facing, and as young people we are not only demanding solutions, but we also need to lead these solutions.”

A crucial question to be asked is – how can we design the Stockholm+50 conference in such a way that it really contributes to accelerating change? To accomplish this, environmental policies must be much more ambitious. Several themes should be discussed, and two themes must be in focus next year at the conference – environmental degradation and climate change. Ways must also be found to seriously discuss how to leave the linear economy behind. A just and green transition to circular economy, an economy based on decarbonised non-fossil fuel energy, new, relevant and strengthened environmental laws – these are also elements of crucial importance to be included in the agenda for the conference.

Youth believe in intergovernmental, multistakeholder work and can upgrade it.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown that global problems need global solutions. Youth are therefore firmly committed to supporting and strengthening intergovernmental, global platforms as these are key to advancing solutions. The Stockholm Conference in 2022 will be a perfect example to demonstrate the efficacy and necessity of an intergovernmental, multilateral and multistakeholder participatory process that can produce a relevant outcome with solid solutions, and which can be immediately implemented to create a world based on sound environmental policies and sustainable development. But it can only do so if the outcome is courageous and ambitious. And implementation must be carried out at all levels, local, national, regional and global. To do this, new ways of deliberations and connecting people and venues should be tried.

We, therefore, believe that the Stockholm+50 conference can be the venue where new ways to intergovernmental negotiations and deliberations could be tried out. My generation, the youth of today, is the most skilled and efficient one to understand and handle the field of modern technology. We can handle the internet as well as anyone – often better. By using our skills, we can add to the upcoming conference, and bring a youth audience from every country in the world to Stockholm in real-time at the same time. With equal speed, urgency and accuracy we can disseminate the outcome and inspire its implementation to thousands of young people. We can in seconds augment the participation at the Stockholm conference with tens of thousands of motivated young people in every country in the world – by using the technology we know so well. We did this in 2019 at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development. We can do it again at Stockholm+50. Because of this, we are an essential part of today’s and tomorrow’s solutions.

Science, the environment and youth

Youth should be encouraged and inspired to work on science for the environment and science for the climate. As scientific reports played an important and integral role in motivating participation and inspiring the outcome in 1972, science symposia producing background papers researched and written by young scientists could play the same role in making the outcome report forward-looking from the upcoming conference. The need for environmental education is another theme that should be on the agenda, for two reasons:

- Environmental education is often referred to but never taken seriously by the so-called political agendas and their decision-makers. Therefore, at this conference to which Heads of States will be invited, environmental education should be given a prominent space;
- Discussing environmental education and education in general is all about youth. This is the vehicle through which one can reach the entire new global generation. Thus, environmental education should be given a prominent space in the outcome document and governments should commit to giving environmental education the highest priority backed by solid resources.

As youth today are the carriers of environmental work everywhere and every day, recognising environmental education would be a prescient message for the next 50 years.

Who are these young people?

The students of today are tomorrow's teachers, instructors and scientists researching ways to solve environmental problems and designing new economic systems, such as a circular economy with the purpose of safeguarding the environment.

The young interns of today are tomorrow's decision-makers in business and finance, implementing plans and projects based on circular economy with a complete understanding and commitment to preserving the environment.

The activists and volunteers of today working on environment and climate change are the politicians and political decision-makers of tomorrow fighting for well-being for all in a just and green world.

The girls and boys of today, given equal opportunities, are the innovators of tomorrow with a view to create a better world for tomorrow.

What kind of 2022 Conference?

We no longer live in a world where young people fail to understand complex issues, analyse problems or define solutions. Young people are now both aware of and acutely involved in these matters. In their own way, they are also implementing solutions. And now they must be involved in defining them as well.

A key set of expectations of the youth concerning the Stockholm+50 conference is that we are taken seriously, are given a prominent space in the conference and in eventual deliberations, and that, whatever the outcome document contains, it sends strong and solid messages to all, that youth represent a serious and creative resource and are an integral part of all civil society and non-state stakeholders and that good, accountable participatory and just governance and democracy are essential elements of any future if we are to build a better and environmentally sound world. This must be clearly shown and stated at Stockholm+50. Thus, can we also honour the legacy of Stockholm 1972 and the courage of those who made that conference happen.

4 - “From Stockholm 1972 a to vision for the future?” by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes

Senior Adviser on Governance for Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future

Jan-Gustav based his presentation on a PowerPoint Presentation that can be [downloaded from the Stakeholder Forum website](#).

These are the main points in his presentation.

The logistics of the Stockholm 1972 Conference

Beginning with a historical reference to the logistics of the Stockholm conference in 1972, he pointed out that the “United Nations Conference on the Human Environment” – which was the formal name of the conference, agreed to establish the United Nations Environment Programme which was subsequently headquartered in Nairobi and began its operations in 1973. Since then, it has had seven Executive Directors, the current one being Ms. Inger Andersen of Denmark.

In 1972, 113 countries were present, more than 10,000 non-state stakeholders participated in three different stakeholder venues, the outcome consisted of A Declaration with 26 Principles, A Plan of Action consisting of 109 paragraphs, and in addition 5 resolutions.

A few of the 26 principles reflected the political issues of its time, others were focussed on the future. Strandenaes highlighted a few of the principles:

Some of the principles were to a large degree remarkably forward-looking and at the time these represented a novel thinking and a radical agenda. Principles 1 and 2 focussed on intergenerational obligations, principles 3, 5 and 6 opened the way for an understanding of the concept of sustainable development⁵. Principle 11 stated that national environmental policies should enhance and not adversely affect the present or future development potential of developing countries. Principle 12 dealt with the concept of “additionality” in development assistance, which meant that donors would earmark additional funds for environmental protection measures. And Principle 21 said that States have the sovereign right to exploit their own resources within their own environmental policies, but with the responsibility to ensure activities do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

The action plan embraced largely 6 areas: human settlements; natural resource management; pollution of international significance; educational and social aspects of the environment; development and environment; and international organizations.

⁵ The first time Sustainable Development as a concept which related to environment issues was used in a publicly accessible and globally relevant document, was the 1980 “WORLD CONSERVATION STRATEGY - Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development,” Prepared by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) with the advice, cooperation and financial assistance of UNEP, WWF, and in collaboration with UN FAO and UNESCO.

The five resolutions were about: A ban on nuclear weapon tests that may lead to radioactive fallout; an international databank on environmental data; the need to address actions linked to development and environment; international organizational changes; and the creation of an environmental fund.

The 1972 Legacy

Strandenaes pointed to six elements as the key legacies from the 1972 meeting:

- A global institutional home for environmental law;
- The beginning of environmental governance;
- An institution to connect science with the environment;
- The Stockholm Conference was historically the first UN Conference to allow members of the NGO community and civil society to report regularly to the official plenary. As such it created a precedence changing all subsequent UN conferences forever allowing greater participation from non-state stakeholders in intergovernmental meetings;
- Environmental diplomacy began; and
- Environmental assessment and management began.

Strandenaes also stated that the conference came as a reaction to a set of severe environmental disasters that had taken place during the post-war era, and also showed that the Swedish government used updated science about the state of the world to convince member states of the necessity to participate. In many ways, this also created a precedence.

Having given substantive examples from the six legacy areas, he gave special emphasis to the new institution as a home for environmental law. Building an institution for Environmental law has also led to:

- The Prevention of Environmental Harm
- The Right to Development in an Environmental Context
- Precautionary Action
- Procedural Safeguards
- Public Participation
- The Interface of Trade and Environment
- Indigenous Peoples
- Women in Development
- Environmental Liability and Compensation

The legacy lives and inspires.

Summing up this legacy he listed the following as important elements: The Stockholm Conference inspired numerous summits and their outcomes, such as – the Rio Conference in 1992 and Agenda 21; the WSSD in 2002 and the Johannesburg Plan of Action; and the Rio+20 Conference that led to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. These and other declarations serve as basic normative frameworks for subsequent global environmental gatherings. And they reinforce the normative significance of the concepts common to these instruments; these declarations and documents represent major milestones in the evolution of international environmental law in what may be called the “modern era” of international environmental

law; by building on each other, and expanding the understanding, the concepts attain a wider significance – such as expressed in the UN Convention on Bio-Diversity, the CBD, of 1992 - whose principles of conservation are informed by the “intrinsic value” of every form of life regardless of its worth to human beings.

The Stockholm Declaration also tried to include an unambiguous reference to an environmental human right, but it was rejected by the majority of the participating nations.

On the legacy of science and UNEP, numerous examples were referred to, and the high-quality scientific reports which UNEP today produces can trace their origins back to 1972. In this context, national reporting on the state of affairs in countries was also initiated in 1972. Back in 1972, Acid Rain was devastating forests. It was a transboundary issue, and its solution became a first test concerning transboundary cooperation. At the time, there were few national reports assessing the environmental situation in a country, and to produce a meaningful outcome document from Stockholm, preceded by substantive and scientifically sound deliberations, each country had been asked to prepare national scientific reports – now a standard procedure at UNEP and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development – the HLPF. 80 national reports were submitted in 1972 – a first at any conference.

Strandenaes also detailed the successful work of UNEP during its nearly 50 years of existence. UNEP initiated work on climate issues, the ozone layer, chemical pollution and many more.

The Stockholm conference was also the first to allow civil society to address the official plenary on a regular basis. This also led to numerous partnerships between UNEP and non-state stakeholders and changed the relationship between the entire UN and non-state stakeholders. This also had normative consequences, and Strandenaes traced the development from the Stockholm conference to the Rio principles and the 2030 Agenda with their strong references to civil society participation.

An important legacy and future inspiration

50 years of existence and people are likely to forget accomplishments during these fifty years. Strandenaes pointed to an often ignored or unknown fact during the time the Stockholm conference was prepared. There was a connection between what the UN was doing back then on engaging public opinion and the modalities, procedures and outcomes from the Stockholm 1972 conference. Initiatives were obviously mutually influencing each other. The UN had in the latter half of the 1960s begun to seriously work out a strategy to engage and interest the general public in the works of the UN. On December 13, 1969, the UN General Assembly adopted UN GA Resolution 2567 on “Mobilization of Public Opinion”. The resolution addressed the need to consult with NGOs through a newly established UN entity – the Centre for Economic and Social Information, CESI. CESI would come to be working closely with UNEP in engaging the public. There are direct connections between this work and Principle 10 on the right to participation and information from the Rio principles in 1992 and to the many MEAs that UNEP has since been pioneering, emphasising the rights of the environment and connecting this to human rights issues. Strandenaes highlighted the normative elements of Principle 10 as another legacy:

- Principle 10 sets out three fundamental rights: access to information, access to public participation and access to justice, as key pillars of sound environmental governance.
- The “access rights” have emerged to be very important in promoting transparent, inclusive and accountable environmental governance.

Based on the Legacy of the Stockholm meeting as a background, he identified the following as future challenges that could be used as a foundation for the Stockholm+50 outcomes:

- Compose a strong + 50 declaration that can guide us forward;
- Continue developing environmental rights and human rights for the environment;
- Upgrade UNEP to a Specialized Agency with sufficient resources;
- Upgrade UNEP’s efforts to contribute to a green and just transition;
- Strengthen UNEP’s research and science base; and
- Strengthen and further develop environmental governance and environmental diplomacy.

5 – Summary of issues identified through the Q&A session.

The presentations were all followed by an opportunity for listeners to ask a few direct questions to the presenters in order to clear up possible misunderstandings. The entire Consultation was concluded with an hour and a half long Q&A, where participants were allowed to present thematic ideas that could be included in the agenda for the upcoming Stockholm+50 meeting in June 2022.

It is fair to note that none of these interventions made spoke against the issues or themes that were identified during the presentations.

A general overview:

All commenters stated they were looking for, either in a declaration or in an outcome document, a strong and action-oriented outcome document. “We should make sure we make a document with relevance for the next 50 years”, as one stated. The document should include -

- A content that would allow us all to stay ahead of the curve;
- A declaration that would redefine our relationship with nature and animals;
- A move away from voluntary initiatives to binding decisions and commitments;
- A focus on developing an environmental code of conduct; and
- An ambitious timeline that does not only aim for another 50 years but begins action now.

On institutional issues related to governance

- Strengthen UNEP and give it more authority allowing it to make decisions with an impact;
- Upgrade UNEP to a UN Specialised Agency;
- Strengthen UNEP’s work on environmental law;
- Expand on the issues of environmental rights and the rights of the environment;
- Include human rights in environmental laws;

- Use UNGA 73/333 to continue and strengthen the process to develop a Global Pact for the Environment (a complete declaration with principles, targets, monitoring, means of implementation and more) as an integrated part of the outcome document;
- Include the entire issue of Ecocide in the discussion, possibly in the Pact for the Environment;
- Build a judicial narrative around Ecocide and have it recognized as a legal concept;
- Develop and integrate the rights and welfare of animals and their position as an integral part of species, and have a better understanding in differentiating between the different species and their part in nature;
- Develop and include processes of due diligence based on environmental concerns;
- Use the institutional discussions to further develop and promote work on a convention on plastics as well as further strengthen work on chemicals, including lifecycles of the products and their impact on the environment;
- Use new technology to seek new ways to develop intergovernmental negotiations;
- Have a clear and strong focus on gender issues;
- Develop greater coherence between environmental laws, declarations and decisions on sustainable development including with their related institutions;
- Intensify work on wildlife crime at the import level and make the import of any species of wild fauna and flora a crime in the destination country, when it has been taken without the authority of the source country; and
- Making exploitation of endangered species, plants, trees, etc. illegal.

On a green and just transition

- The theme was widely discussed, and most people were speaking about a just and green transition to build forward better and the need to regulate the present growth motivated money/financial paradigm;
- See the relationship between green investment and its work to expose the money flow that kept subsidizing fossil fuels;
- With a view to protect and safeguard the environment, follow money streams and expose and stop investments that endanger the environment;
- Emphasise the need to have strong and binding regulations for businesses – as the business community is more ready to be regulated and guided towards environmentally sound behaviour than politicians and delegates are aware of;
- Upgrade UNEP’s work on green finance and scrutinize banking and investment industries and their understanding, practice and relationship with nature and the environment;
- Investment should align with constructive behaviour towards environmental protection;
- Prosperity without growth must be explored more seriously and with consequences for teaching on finance and economy at universities and business-school MBA courses including other types of education and research on economy and finance;
- The concept of prosperity without growth should also be better reflected in the taxonomy and with serious consequences on future investment regimes;
- Environment and sustainability assessments have to be streamlined across global/national/local procurement; and

- Be inspired by the environment and its variety of species to seek innovative ways of developing new and renewable products – which will be impossible if nature is not preserved so we can learn from it.

On relationship with nature

- Discussion around this theme was rich, and nearly everybody touched on the issue, directly or indirectly. There were also frequent references made to the latest IPBES report;
- Nature-based solutions must be upgraded, studied, better defined and used;
- Redefine our relationship with nature and animals and move from our present extractive relationship with the earth, which is now seen merely as a resource for the sake of humans;
- Referencing the latest IPBES report, develop a further understanding of differentiating species so inaccurate clustering is avoided – for instance, deepen the understanding and differences between vertebrates, plants, sentient beings, etc. (this issue was also touched upon in a few comments relating to the need for upgrading environmental education);
- Support the global work on oceans, make sure UNEP does not lose track of this issue making sure there are integrated, consistent and continued interinstitutional collaboration, and in this context look at environmental consequences from industrial fish farming and deep sea mining;
- See the interrelationship between nature, soil distribution and use and climate change; and
- Be proactive and with regard to the ongoing pandemic, use scenario-building to develop a proactive approach to environmental issues, meaning – we should treat the pandemic but also develop an understanding and work on how to avoid it.

On general governance

- Make sure that all the defined nine major groups are seen as individual groups representing specific constituencies and not lumped together as ‘civil society’ and that each of them is allowed to play important roles in the planning and lead up to the Stockholm+50 Conference, through the conference and in its follow-up;
- Seek to avoid creating unnecessary gaps between the major groups – as the recent development of the business-science forum, to a perceived exclusion of the other major groups;
- Give Indigenous peoples and their approach to Mother Earth improved opportunities to bring their skills and culture, into the nature discourse;
- Make sure ethics and value-based issues, including culture, are given serious consideration and integrated into all above discourses;
- Increase participation of non-state stakeholders in UNEP and UNEA and work to strengthen the position of the civil society and stakeholder office at UNEP and develop new ways of integrating non-state stakeholders in the various elements of UNEP and UNEA; and
- Give youth a prominent position in their own right in the Stockholm+50 process.

Oslo, March 8, 2021 - Writing and edits by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes