Summary for policymakers

Stockholm+50: Unlocking a Better Future
Key messages

**The legacy we leave behind:** Fifty years after Stockholm 1972, we live amid entwined crises, both planetary and human. Humans are causing unprecedented change to our climate and ecosystems, and those who contributed the least to the planetary crisis are suffering its worst impacts. The planetary crisis and the extreme inequality require transformative action and addressing our economic systems as the core driver of many of these problems. The growing inequalities extend to future generations and the quality of their lives, with accelerating environmental change and risk of tipping points being breached.

**The ‘action gap’ is significant.** We do not have a gap in policies and aspirations, rather in actions. Since 1972, only around one-tenth of the hundreds of global environment and sustainable development targets agreed by countries have been achieved or seen significant progress; it is not enough. The knowledge and the means of solving our problems are known and available; implementation is missing.

**We are better equipped for change than ever.** By harnessing momentum for change – the growing public support, faster uptake of clean technology, inclusive and innovative finance, and the robust scientific evidence on positive co-benefits of acting now – 2022 can be a new watershed moment for pursuit of our sustainable future on Earth.

**Bold and science-based decision-making is needed to accelerate the pace of change.** Decision makers at every level will need to simultaneously compress timescales for decision-making in this decade to be transformative, and extend time horizons to avoid lock-in, accommodate time lags and reduce intergenerational discrimination.

**We have keys to unlock a better future.** Our synthesis of scientific research and new ideas points to three broad shifts that require immediate actions now, to redefine our relationship with nature, ensure prosperity that lasts for all and invest in a sustainable future. If these actions are initiated now, they can seed transformative change.
Our relationship with nature needs redefining, from one of extraction to one of care. Human-nature connectedness should be strengthened in our social norms and value systems, and in how we live our everyday lives, by integrating nature in our cities; protecting animal welfare and shifting to more plant-based diets; increasing nature-based education for children and youth; and recognizing and drawing on indigenous local knowledge.

It is only possible to ensure prosperity that lasts for all by completely rethinking our way of living, and by creating the enabling infrastructures and inspiring new supportive social norms. Transformative change can be unlocked by making sustainable lifestyles the overwhelmingly preferred choice; scaling business models that focus on services delivered, not on products made; making supply chains better for both humans and the environment; aligning national statistics with sustainability goals; and shaping our innovation system after sustainability criteria.

We must invest in a better future, with the strongest support of our governments. More private capital is available today than ever for sustainability investments, yet funding gaps persist in low- and lower-middle income countries. To invest in a better future, we must recognize and enhance governments’ foundational role in innovation; incentivize private finance to bring innovation to the market and raise it to the needed scale; and reduce the risks to sustainability while also raising the costs of unsustainability.

The conditions for change must improve. The institutions and governance system that solved the challenges of the past may have contributed to creating the challenges of the present. There are ample opportunities for leaders to tackle structural barriers that hold back effective action, by improving policy coherence and ensuring strong and consistent incentives for action; renewing multilateralism by rebuilding solidarity for the common challenges we face; and by creating a culture of accountable promises.

If we unlock transformative action now, we won’t need a Stockholm+100.
Looking back at the past 50 years, the world has changed in many ways – but not in the direction called for at the UN Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972.

Today we commemorate that conference at the UN international meeting ‘Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity’. The context in which the Stockholm+50 international meeting takes place is alarming: we face intertwined crises of the state of our planet and extreme inequality among people and societies. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to slow or reverse progress. And geopolitical shifts highlight our interconnectedness and vulnerabilities more than ever.

The future, 50 years ago

At the 1972 gathering in Stockholm, heads of state committed to taking responsibility for protecting and promoting human and environmental health and well-being.

Today, we can see that the track record to deliver on the ambitions of half a century ago has been poor. Our assessment of the framework for environmental action conceived in 1972 shows that, while knowledge, goals and agreements have only increased, international supporting measures – financing, technical cooperation and organizations with strong mandates – remain too weak to deliver on the goals and lead to actions in accordance with our knowledge. So far, only about one-tenth of global environmental and sustainable development targets have been achieved, and outcomes and impacts for a healthier planet remain insufficient.

Humans are causing unprecedented change to the global environment and are risking major and irreversible changes in our lifetimes. Climate change has already caused widespread adverse impacts to nature and people, and limiting global warming to 1.5°C is beyond reach without immediate, rapid and large-scale reduction of emissions. Biodiversity and ecosystems are deteriorating worldwide, and goals for conserving and sustainably using nature cannot be met by current trajectories.

Unsustainable production and consumption patterns put a healthy planet and sustainable development at risk. The use of natural resources has more than tripled from 1970, and continues to grow. The use of these resources and their benefits is unevenly distributed across countries and regions. The poorest half of the global population owns barely 2% of the total global wealth, while the richest 10% owns 76% of all wealth. Compared to 1972, overdevelopment and affluence, rather than underdevelopment and scarcity, are the drivers of unsustainable resource use. Currently, no country is delivering what its citizens need without transgressing the biophysical planetary boundaries.

The inequity among people and places in both causing deterioration and suffering from its impacts is high. The poorest half of the global population contributed 10% of emissions; the richest 10% of the global population emitted more than half of the total carbon emissions during 1990–2015. Meanwhile
climate disaster–related death tolls of potentially exposed populations during 2000–2017 indicate 16 deaths per million for high-income groups, compared to 60 per million for low-income groups. The social and economic costs of inaction are predominantly borne by the poorest and most vulnerable in society, including Indigenous and local communities, particularly in developing countries.

The coming decade is crucial for a sustainable and just future.

High-income countries must drastically reduce their footprints, especially in light of their cumulative footprints over time, to avoid closing development pathways for low-income countries and future generations. A person born today may live in a ‘4°C world’, several degrees warmer than today, in which 16% of species would be at risk of extinction, and their exposure to heatwaves during their lifetimes may be up to seven times that of a person born in 1960.

Today, our modes of consumption, production and finance are leading to environmental changes that undermine hard-won development gains. But a ‘low-carbon life’ can and should be a good life – and one that is easily accessible to all. The coming decade is crucial to redirecting our trajectory toward a sustainable and just future.

From urgency to agency

The framework for environmental action conceived in 1972 has delivered political and scientific activity, but the outcomes remain insufficient. The world has already agreed on a vision for sustainable development and common future – Agenda 2030. This vision still needs to come to fruition.

There is growing momentum for change. Public opinion reflects the sense of urgency and indicates willingness to change lifestyles. Youth worldwide are both exercising and demanding more agency to fight climate change, environmental degradation and inequity. Key technological development and uptake have occurred faster than anticipated, and evidence builds of the many wins and co-benefits from taking climate and sustainability action at a policy level.

We need to compress timescales for decision-making and implementation of key investments and infrastructure, without compromising values of democratic legitimacy and inclusiveness. Simultaneously, timescales must be extended in decision-making to avoid intergenerational discrimination and committing ourselves to unsustainable infrastructure, and to enable bold, long-term transformation.

We have the means to act; we need incentives that favour actions over commitments. We are better equipped than ever to make 2022 a new watershed moment for pursuit of our sustainable future on Earth. If we unlock change now to enable delivery on a compelling post-2030 vision, we won’t need a Stockholm+100.
Keys to unlock a better future

With Stockholm+50, we must unlock change that is substantial and systemic. A sustainable world should provide a good quality of life that is broadly shared and can be maintained indefinitely into the future.

Based on a synthesis of scientific evidence and ideas, we identify concrete actions under three broad shifts that would take us to a more sustainable development. If they are initiated now, they can accelerate change, large and small, for the long term.

Redefine the relationship between humans and nature

The past 50 years – and even the past 5 years – have seen huge losses and degradation of nature globally. Humans have altered 75% of the planet’s land surface, impacted 66% of the ocean area, and destroyed (directly or indirectly) 85% of wetlands. Many societies value nature as an instrument, something to be used for resources; that perspective has driven the ecological decline of the past half-century and beyond. An instrumental valuation often underpins policies and economic structures that in turn shape behaviour and social norms at the individual level.

Repairing the relationship between people and nature will require redressing this imbalance, by placing more emphasis on the intrinsic and relational value of nature. Such a shift would be transformative, requiring deep changes across societies, economies and communities: how we live in our cities, how we produce food, how and what we learn, and the knowledge and rights that inform our choices.

Calls to action

• **Integrate nature in cities and urban areas** – Local governments can promote human-nature connectedness through green architecture, infrastructure and access to nature in the towns and cities where most people live and work, as a way of both seeding transformative change through shaping values and providing immediate climate, biodiversity and health benefits.

• **Protect animal welfare by mainstreaming it in sustainable development governance** – Animal welfare matters morally, but many of the ways in which we currently interact with animals also limit our ability to achieve sustainable development goals and impact the environment. Stronger protection of animal welfare will help build human-nature connectedness, and can also directly or indirectly benefit many other societal goals.

• **Expand and invest in nature-based education** – Through education policy and school curricula that connect children with nature, education authorities and teachers could contribute to a long-term, catalytic effect on repairing our relationship with nature. Inspiration can be taken from Indigenous communities’ nature-based education.
• **Recognize Indigenous local knowledge and the Rights of Nature** – Greater recognition of indigenous local knowledge can make nature conservation more effective and support indigenous rights. Assigning legal rights to nature can be a way of limiting extraction of resources but can also lead to recognition of nature’s intrinsic values and changed behaviour over time.

**Ensure prosperity that lasts for all**
The amount of natural resources extracted by humans globally each year has tripled since 1970. High-income countries have consumed most of these resources, with carbon dioxide consumption footprints that are more than 13 times the level of low-income countries. Ensuring lasting prosperity for all and bringing emission and resource footprints within ecological limits requires a complete rethink of our ways of living, and a shift in social norms and values that drive human behaviour. It requires redefining prosperity at all levels in society and economy.

**Calls to action**

• **Make a sustainable lifestyle the easy choice** – We are now at a point where efficiency-oriented options and nudging measures for making lifestyles more sustainable are insufficient; systemic and transformative measures are needed. These should actively create enabling infrastructures, reconfigure systems and amplify social norms around sufficiency, as well as new global governance initiatives to address equity in these transitions. In order to change lifestyles, governments must consider alternatives ways to price consumption-related resource footprints.

• **Purchase function, not product** – Material throughput can be substantially lower if households, businesses, and government agencies switch from purchasing products to acquiring functions of products. Supportive regulatory frameworks and changed social norms on ownership and reuse could have a transformative effect on scaling such business models and reducing material throughput.

• **Make supply chains better for both humans and the environment** and ensure that integrated supply chains bridge the technology and economic gap between developed and developing economies. Sustainable patterns of production should include prospects for new jobs and skills, scope for additional investment, higher interdependency in co-creating and sharing prosperity, social safety nets for the vulnerable, and environmental integrity.

• **Align national statistics with sustainability goals** – It is time to move beyond GDP as the single metric and adopt indicators that help measure progress towards the vision of sustainable development, such as indicators on inclusive wealth and indicators recognizing the caring economy. Global governance and convergence on alternative metrics are needed to reduce the risk for first-movers.

• **Change the selection environment for innovation** – The upstream selection environment for innovation has a cumulative impact on technological
development. Common sustainability standards and principles should be applied to guide innovation, international organizations should work to harmonize these and publicly funded innovation should adhere to these.

**Invest in a better future**

To ensure prosperity for all and redefine our relationship with nature, investing in a better future is necessary. Today, we have the paradoxical situation of a massive amount of capital ready for sustainability investments, yet persistent funding gaps in low-income countries.

The funding gap for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) globally has been estimated at USD 2.5 trillion by the OECD, while UNCTAD estimates that the value of sustainability-themed investment products in global capital markets increased by more than 80% from 2019 to 2020. Action is needed not only to mobilize capital for sustainability, but to ensure sufficient levels at lower costs, supporting allocation to places and sectors in need, and transitioning out of unsustainable practices and capital goods.

**Calls to action**

- **Recognize and enhance public funding of innovation and co-development for technology** – Mission-driven public investment can contribute to sustainability-oriented innovation systems. These efforts are promising for both high-income and low-income countries. To bridge the technology gap between rich and poor countries we need a *new paradigm of ‘co-development of technology’*, particularly in critical areas of clean energy, health, and sustainable agriculture. This requires jointly designed research and development programmes, pooling of resources, co-owned and shared intellectual property, local adaptation, and equitable voice in the governance of emerging technologies.

- **Incentivize active engagement in private finance** – Private finance has a critical role in bringing innovation to market, and investors should engage more actively to ensure sustainable finance becomes the norm. At a global scale, private investors are increasingly interested in monitoring the environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance of their investments, but through shareholder initiatives or direct engagement with the firms in which they invest they have much more power to transform sectors or industries.

- **Raise adequate private finance** – We need to address scale, regulation, balance and risk for emerging markets to access investments for sustainable infrastructure. Creating multi-risk, multi-country hedging platforms can lower the cost of capital and crowd in more private and institutional investment into developing countries and emerging economies.

- **Reduce risks to sustainability, enhance risks of unsustainability** – One key to increasing the scale of private finance for a sustainability transition is to alter the perceived riskiness of investments. This includes both reducing the perceived risk of sustainable investments and raising the perceived risk of unsustainable investments, for example through allocation mandates.
on lending portfolios. Many low-income countries cannot de-risk financially underserved sectors and technologies. To overcome this barrier, risks can be pooled across countries and then de-risked through a common fund.

Improving conditions for change

Progress in these action areas are steps on our path to sustainability that would activate and accelerate the three shifts we urgently need now and hopefully lead to systemic changes. At the same time, we also need to address the systems and infrastructures we have inherited, in processes that will unfold more slowly. The governance context in which we understand these barriers has changed since 1972. Our world today has shifted even more toward multi-level, polycentric governance, where we have a complex set of actors, institutions, and sources of agency.

Decision makers and policymakers, at all levels, should dismantle barriers of political incoherence, weak multilateralism, limited accountability, and unreformed international finance, which prevent our acceleration towards sustainable and equitable societies.
Calls to action

- The structural barriers of policy incoherence, weak multilateralism and lack of accountability must be decisively tackled to enable effective action on redefining humans’ relationship with nature, ensuring lasting prosperity for all, and investing in a better future.

- With more actors and stakeholders participating in global governance today, many more routes are available to taking action. However, conflicts of interest and uneven power relationships must also be recognized.

- Governments and international organizations must make their policy mixes coherent and consistent towards sustainability goals, in order to increase incentives for action, by adopting new practices and tools for more integrated and systemic policymaking.

- The gap in trust and solidarity between countries acts as a barrier to new agreements, to raising ambition and to accelerated national implementation. Opportunities exist to renew multilateralism, to more effectively tackle environment and development crises and to rebuild solidarity: developing multilateral responses to chronic risks, replacing technology transfer with a new paradigm of ‘co-development of technology’, and setting norms for the global financial system.

- Countries, companies and citizens have to be held accountable for their actions and their inaction. We need new imaginative mechanisms for nurturing constructive accountability, which incentivizes and leads to bold action and change, rather than threatens and leads to pre-emptive action and reduced ambition.

Accelerating change

We hold keys that can unlock opportunities for change. Setting small and large processes in motion today can allow us to progress on the goals that we have committed to in the past 50 years, since the first UN meeting to bring together humans and the environment.

For a new watershed moment in 2022, we repeat the same call made in the 1972 UN Stockholm Declaration:

*A point has been reached in history when we must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences. Through ignorance or indifference we can do massive and irreversible harm to the earthly environment on which our life and well-being depend. Conversely, through fuller knowledge and wiser action, we can achieve for ourselves and our posterity a better life in an environment more in keeping with human needs and hopes.*
Recommendations for unlocking a better future
Redefine the relationship between humans and nature

Integrate nature in cities and urban areas

- Local governments and architects should apply biophilic design principles in new and retrofitted urban architecture and housing policy, to enable human-nature connectedness as well as provide direct climate, biodiversity, and health benefits.
- Local planners should ‘green’ urban infrastructure such as water treatment, for example by learning from biomimicry and smallholder practices.
- Access to nature in urban areas should be promoted through empowered local communities and national accessibility standards and higher economic valuation of green space.

Protect animal welfare by mainstreaming it in sustainable development governance

- Governments should elevate the importance of animal welfare for sustainable development, and sustainable development for animal welfare, in international instruments.
- Support policies that benefit humans and non-human animals alike, particularly policies that use informational, financial and regulatory measures to benefit animals more and harm them less. Animal welfare impact assessments can play a valuable role here. Governments could phase down public subsidies for animal products and harmful agriculture, and increase support for plant-based food production, in a way that avoids regressive effects on low-income households. Governments should require or encourage voluntary action on disclosure of animal welfare, health and environmental risks by food companies to investors.
- Researchers, experts and policymakers should expand the interpretation of the One Health framework to recognize animal health and welfare as an end in itself, and not just instrumental to human health outcomes.

Expand and invest in nature-based education

- Education authorities and Indigenous communities should collaborate on weaving in Indigenous principles of environmental education into modern educational systems.
- To build a deep relationship with nature, education authorities and teachers should not just focus on ecological knowledge but also include practical skills, learning about local environmental issues and taking ownership, through hands-on engagement in community projects.
- UN organizations, such as UNESCO and UNEP, should start a global campaign to promote development of more diverse educational materials, and include practical skills, drawing more on cases from the Global South.

Recognize Indigenous local knowledge and the Rights of Nature

- National policies related to nature conservation should more strongly include
the role of traditional and Indigenous knowledge, in line with international agreements.

- National legislative and judicial bodies should consider whether establishing Rights of Nature will help protect nature in specific contexts, based on comprehensive consultation with stakeholders and analysis of what capacities and resources would be needed for effective enforcement.
- The Human Right to clean, safe and sustainable environment should incorporate a Rights of Nature rationale, whereby human responsibility and interests for the protection of Nature as a legal entity with personhood are clearly articulated.

Ensure prosperity that lasts for all

Make a sustainable lifestyle the easy choice
- Transformative change requires a long-term vision, but it can be enabled through near-term actions: local and national governments should identify the barriers in infrastructure that prevent individuals from shifting to more sustainable lifestyles and begin to remove them, combined with more effective and ambitious mixes of policies that edit out unsustainable choices, in order to accelerate change.
- The use of local policy labs and learn-by-doing experiments for sustainable lifestyles should be scaled up, where the individual is an active co-creator and network influencer.
- A regular UN forum on sustainable lifestyles should be established, to enable international peer learning and elevate action on SDG12. A collective global exercise to co-develop pathways for sustainable lifestyles and parameters that can measure progress should be convened.

Purchase function, not product
- Businesses should shift to offering functions and services rather than products as much as possible.
- Government should adapt legal frameworks to remove bias against business models that switch from selling products to functions.
- Governments should help create and expand markets for use-and-result-oriented product service systems through public procurement.
- Government and businesses should pioneer more neutral language around consumption and reuse, to enable new social norms to develop around the status of ownership and new products.

Make supply chains better for both humans and the environment
- The UN Global Compact and its members should consider increasing the level of ambition of the environment-related Ten Principles, to more actively demote unsustainable options and practices.
- National governments and international organizations should consider more binding due diligence requirements and greater harmonization, but with aim of bridging not widening the technology divide.
- Relevant international organizations, supported by member states, business,
Recommendations for unlocking a better future
trade unions and youth organizations, should consider co-developing more knowledge and best practices for maximizing synergies between green jobs, decent work and youth employment.

**Align national statistics with sustainability goals**
- Global leaders must collectively recognize the need to redefine prosperity through alternative indicators, to generate buy-in and not deter ‘first movers’.
- Governments should mainstream the narrative of redefined prosperity within countries through consultative approaches, including with subnational government.
- National statistics offices should more widely adopt consumption-based accounting and life-cycle accounting, and national governments should set goals and strategies for reducing footprints, with support for low-capacity institutions from relevant UN bodies.

**Change the selection environment for innovation**
- Businesses should adopt voluntary sustainability standards and principles so that they become market-leading and influence innovation and product development.
- Governments should develop binding standards and classification schemes when voluntary standards are not aligning with sustainability goals or they are not sufficiently influential.
- International organizations should seek to harmonize standards, with special concern to entry requirements for low- and middle-income countries, so that they can access new markets for sustainable products and align their innovation systems to ambitious selection environments.
- Publicly funded innovation should demand adherence to standards.

**Invest in a better future**

**Recognize and enhance public funding of innovation and co-development of technology**
- Increase public research and development funding to missions co-defined with stakeholders (industry, civil society, local communities affected, academia) to achieve sustainability goals.
- Target international finance to low- and middle-income countries to develop and implement green industrial strategies, as well as their co-defined and nationally owned missions and innovation systems, especially countries faced with a phase-down of fossil fuel production.
- Replace ineffective technology transfer mechanisms with a new paradigm of ‘technology co-development’.

**Incentivize active engagement in private finance**
- Financial actors and investors should engage more in active approaches to investing to support rapid action on climate change, especially with high-emitting sectors.
• Governments should provide enabling conditions for viability of sustainable investment at early stages of commercialization or start-up.

**Raise adequate private finance**

• Multilateral climate finance institutions should substantially enhance grant finance, to support capitalization of catalytic instruments that help make available domestic credit to sustainable investments in developing countries.

• Governments should coordinate to harmonize financial regulation frameworks (e.g. taxonomies, disclosure standards) in developing countries with international frameworks, to remove barriers to mobilising and accessing finance internationally.

**Reduce risks to sustainability and raise the costs of unsustainability**

• Governments should reduce investor risk by providing a stable policy environment with long-term goals set in key areas of sustainability. International agreements are an effective way of setting shared long-term, binding goals.

• Governments and international financial institutions should consider joint de-risking initiatives to meet the sustainability investment needs in low-income countries and emerging markets, where domestic credit to the private sector is insufficient.

• Educate investors on novel and emerging sustainability technologies and solutions, to enable accurate assessments of risk.

• Regulators should consider mandates for minimum allocation of lending portfolios to sustainable assets, in order to enhance the perceived risk of unsustainable investment portfolios.

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**Improve conditions for change**

**Ensure stronger and more consistent incentives for action**

• Incoherent policies with a bearing on sustainability goals must be better mapped, analysed and addressed, by many societal actors, to unlock effective action.

• National governments and international organizations should only use integrated and systemic approaches to policymaking. They should use tools for systematically analysing SDG interlinkages (synergies and trade-offs), apply wider system boundaries and extended timescales to account for future generations, and use frameworks for sequencing policy interventions to trigger positive tipping points.

• National governments and international organizations should set and enforce higher standards for transparency and public participation in the procedures for policymaking, to enable multiple perspectives on the resolution of goal conflicts and pursuit of synergies. This includes perspectives of future generations.

**Foster renewed multilateralism**

• International organizations, in collaboration with national governments, should develop new ways of communicating about procedure and performance to build trust with citizens, and engage specifically with sceptics.
• New multilateral initiatives and mechanisms should be developed for dealing with chronic global risks and especially for protecting the vulnerable who lack social safety nets.
• A new paradigm of ‘technology co-development’ should replace ineffective technology transfer mechanisms; Stockholm+50 should provide a first UN platform for exploring it.
• Multilateral institutions should use their norm-setting power to make sustainability a customary practice for private finance and international harmonization efforts of financial regulations, and standards for sustainable finance should be inclusive of developing countries.
• High-income countries should deliver on climate finance goals as an essential means of rebuilding trust.

Ensure a culture of accountable promises
• Multilateral agreements and processes (UNFCCC, CBD, etc.) should strengthen systematic tracking of action and progress on multi-stakeholder pledges. Tracking should be simultaneously conducted by secretariats and by independent third parties, drawing both on official data submitted through national reporting and other data sources.
• Develop proxy indicators of progress to measure the pace of transformation, if and when the target is far in the future and ultimate indicators will take time to show progress.
• Convene a UN Climate Accountability Summit at the UN General Assembly or at COP meetings or other major meetings, start with an accountability forum to give a dedicated and high-status platform for follow-up and review of performance to date, before announcement of new pledges and commitments. Set criteria where high achievers – in terms of demonstrating effective action or demonstrating high ambition in relation to starting point – are given a platform to inspire and incentivize accelerated action and implementation.
• Build a community of practice within (and across) environmental domains around tracking progress and convene diverse actors who can build the knowledge bank, e.g. national statistics offices, academia, civil society and philanthropic organizations. Research and philanthropic funders should invest more in datasets and evaluation methodologies to enable accountability mechanisms to be effectively used.