

OUR GLOBAL COMMONS

Assessing the pressures on the global environment and disrupting the systems that drive them

An International Dialogue

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The Challenge

There is mounting evidence of unprecedented, and interconnected, pressure on the global commons. This ranges from a polluted atmosphere and a rapidly changing climate, to deteriorating ocean health, freshwater stress, retreating ice caps and collapsing glaciers, mounting land use change and overall pressure on the biosphere—among many other challenges.

If urgent action is not taken, the basic operating condition—the Holocene equilibrium—that has enabled human activity to expand so successfully over the past 10,000 years, will be radically changed. Non-linear and thus difficult to predict negative economic, social and environmental consequences are likely to happen in the not too far future. It is not too dramatic to say that this generation will be the one that must navigate the global commons crossroads.

Through the plethora of existing multilateral environmental agreements, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement, the world has established targets to aim for by 2030. If met, these can help secure our global commons within the context of sustainable and inclusive development. However, given the scale and urgency of the pressure our global commons are facing, a “business as usual” incremental approach will not be sufficient to achieve these targets. Some form of rapidly scaleable movement, momentum or impulse is needed; more disruptive, “systems change” leapfrogging models are arguably required.

The Opportunity

Across our world’s economic and social systems, profound advances in digital processing power, technology capabilities and ubiquitous connectivity are taking place. At the same time, global power is rebalancing and becoming more distributed, away from national governments and international organizations. These shifts are in confluence with a rise in various global /local “non-state actor” initiatives, alliances and collaborations, including those in the environmental and natural resource area, as manifested at Rio+20 and more recently in the Paris climate COP.

Can these various movements in digital transformation, multidimensional cooperation and new models of finance and risk pricing, distributed power and networked leadership, be harnessed to help transform the key human-driven systems—such as urbanization, land use, energy production, food production and industrial manufacturing—that are currently placing intolerable pressure on our global commons? How might the various levers of systems change be identified, designed and catalyzed through a suite of strategic initiatives, and how could we trigger “tipping points” for such systems to change? What kinds of international platforms and multi-actor collaboration would be required to achieve such systems change by 2030?

The Dialogue

This unique Dialogue is convened by the Global Environment Facility and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, in partnership with the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, the Stockholm Resilience Centre, the World Resources Institute and the World Economic Forum Environmental Systems Initiative. Preceded by a Science Day on October 11, 2016, the Dialogue will be held at the prestigious National Academy of Sciences in Washington DC, and will engage leading environment, innovation and system design thinkers and analysts from across sectors of society in an unprecedented, informal and engaging strategic discussion to (i) assess the latest evidence as to the pressures our global commons face, and (ii) discuss how best to disrupt the systems that drive these pressures.