



## Letter to HofS and Ambassadors/signatories and the Secretary General

Your Excellency #Name#,,

September 2014

The upcoming General Assembly debates are pivotal. They will be one of the last opportunities to significantly influence the Post 2015 global agenda that will help to determine whether and how humanity will be able to come to grips with the increasing numbers of economic and environmental crises that are causing social unrest and threatening lives and livelihoods worldwide.

The Commons Cluster is a network of individuals and United Nations ECOSOC accredited organizations that are dedicated to finding sustainable ways to develop that enhance the well being of all people and nature. We have worked with Governments since 2009 and most recently on the Sustainable Development Goals, the work of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing and the Technology Facilitation Mechanism. While much has been achieved by these bodies, there is still much to be done if we are to meet challenges - the nature and magnitude of which we can not possibly yet foresee or comprehend.

Here are some ideas for your consideration and possible inclusion in the upcoming General Assembly High Level Segment and General Debate. Please feel free to use them in any way you see fit.

We also enclose a 70-page listing of financing mechanisms for sustainable development entitled: ***Unleashing Financing and Other Resources for A World that Works for All People and Nature.***

Yours respectfully,

Lisinka Ulatowska, Coordinator of the Commons Cluster

The following organizations are members of the Commons Cluster requesting a special mention:

The All-Win Network  
The Institute for Planetary Synthesis  
Association of World Citizens  
Africa America Alliance, Inc  
Earth Rights Institute  
Center for Global Community and World Law  
Institute for Global Leadership  
Next Level Productions  
Active Remedy Ltd.  
Institute of Global Education  
Center for Global Community and World Law  
Institute for Global Leadership  
International Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IPA)  
Earth Condominium Initiative  
World Sustainability Fund

**IDEAS WHICH SHOULD BE URGENTLY CONSIDERED FOR CONSIDERATION DURING THE UPCOMING ASSEMBLY**  
**(Please feel free to use them as you see fit):**

**Values**

- .....In this era it is essential that the deep conscience of all people must be revived so that we can once more live in harmony with nature and respect the dignity of each human being and all forms of life.
- .....Humanity has already crossed 3 planetary boundaries and is beginning to exceed several others. We continue to fight over, while we are also rapidly depleting, the natural resource base and other shared resources. This is increasingly threatening lives and livelihoods and destabilizing governments. We must therefore put in place the steps needed to transition as rapidly as possible to full sustainability. This will require that all people and all Governments become accountable for their impact on one another and the Earth System as a whole.

**Recognizing and Respecting the Earth System as One Interconnected Whole**

- .....Governments are expected to be accountable to their people for the well being of the people and nature. Since the Earth System is one interconnected whole, in which all parts affect all others in unpredictable ways, it is essential that we recognize and respect it as a global commons and a natural heritage that rightfully belongs to and should be protected and managed by all people. The international community should also adopt a convention to protect the Rights of Mother Earth; and we thus call on Heads of State and Government and UN Ambassadors to make a pledge to do these things.

**Implementing Sustainable Development and the SDGs in an Integrated, Cohesive Manner**

- .....We agree with our Governments that all of the international agreements made to date can and must be implemented together with the Sustainable Development Goals and together these should form an integral part of each Nation's National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS).

In the 1990s most of the developing world participated in an excellent Capacity 21 program to develop national sustainable development strategies and plans. Efforts were made to establish a Capacity 2015 program that would focus on increasing the level of implementation during the run up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Now a Capacity 2030 program is needed to support all countries and communities in carrying out all of the agreements and commitments that have been made in a fully integrated manner. This could be done through and in collaboration with the [Global Network of National Sustainable Development Councils \(NSDCs\)](#).

In an increasingly interdependent world those in leading political positions must pledge to work with the emerging and seasoned leaders of other countries to ensure that such a global program and process are established.

At the same time, no world leader can achieve this goal alone. Global interdependence means that we must all be involved. Here are some means of achieving this:

- o Each of the Goals, along with its associated Targets and Indicators, should be linked with the relevant international and multi-lateral agreements and conventions that have already been agreed to dealing with the same subject matter. Indeed the SDGs should be used as a means to quickly and succinctly tell the world's people what has been agreed to and what is expected of government and the world's people at all levels.
- o The SDGs, Targets and Indicators should then be used to provide a foundation for the further development and implementation of the Local and National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS), along with the Action Plans on Sustainable Consumption and Production, that the UN Member States have repeatedly agreed to develop. And a global process should be put in place to ensure that the strategies and action plans are used to develop a comprehensive framework and to fulfill and achieve the SDGs
- o Since it is the sum of all actions of all people which determines sustainability, all must be involved in bringing about a sustainable world and in implementing NSDSs. Where Governments provide members of each community full access to the Internet they are providing their citizens with the means to work at every level of NSDS implementation. For the rapidly developing sharing economy on the Internet provides billions of dollars of free goods, services and educational modalities. All who have access to the Internet can work together across national borders as they participate in their

own NSDS implementation: citizens exchanging best practices, goods, services, technical know-how with citizen in their own or other countries; cities helping cities and Governments working with with Governments with like challenges.

- o Such a potentially global effort would firmly root the implementation of the NSDSs in a mammoth global collaboration rooted firmly in the values of the rapidly growing **sharing economy**. Such collaboration would then quite naturally also be brought to bear on the full implementation of the SDGs, Targets and Indicators in a fully integrated manner. And also on Summit outcomes and Plans of Action and Implementation, MEAs, Conventions and Protocols, Local and National Sustainability Strategies and Councils, and Action Plans on SCP in a fully integrated manner, across all levels of government and society and across all sectors and issue areas.

➤.....Another thread to tackle and consider in addressing highly diverse and complex issues across sectors and scales, in addition to cultures and languages, is that of looking into the frameworks or superstructures and conceptual scale-models needed to outline and develop "[common frames of references](#)" as Noel Brown, then the Director of UNEP North America, requested after Rio '92.

We suggest that you could look at the following webpages for more information about this:

1. "[Configuring Strategic Dilemmas in Intersectoral Dialogue](#)" for the Earth Summit 1992
2. Contextualizing, sharing, negotiating Meta-information – later called meta-data in projects under the auspice of UNEP-HEM. GeoJournal: [HARMONISATION](#) 1990 (original [UNEP expert meeting](#) and 1992 [Access and Assimilation: Pivotal environmental information challenges](#) 1992. See also: "[Pointers to Possibilities](#)"
3. Revisit [Structured Dialogic Design](#) and the [21st Century Agora](#) approaches from the 80's to explore interlinkage between problems and issues, recognize deep drivers, and leverage points = where to intervene in systems.
4. See the [UN-AMR 2008](#) recommendations for additional information.

In a nutshell: we recommend some old approaches and concepts translated into the new media, internet, visualisation, modelling, and deliberative processes to link and strategise the Millennium Development along with the Sustainable Development Goals and to make use of their supporting qualities to harness "win-wind-win" approaches.

### **People's Individual Responsibility for Their Impact on the Earth System**

➤.....It is essential to enable all people to become conscious of their impact on the Earth System by developing a personal relationship to the earth and learning to calculate their global/water/carbon/ecological/biodiversity footprints. The resulting awareness will help to conserve valuable natural resources and spur on innovation to do more using less destructive means. Most Governments will want to introduce such a system step by step:

- o First all citizens will be required to learn more about their connections with nature and how to make the necessary calculations.

The combination of what each has learned about their personal relationship with the Earth System and which actions create an unacceptable impact is bound to have an impact. Corporations are likely to use a small footprint as a way of gaining clientele. Availability of resources, decrease in pollution and health benefits are likely to become apparent.

- o Once the advantages become clear, Governments will be able to require citizens to submit the size of their individual footprints together with, say, their tax returns for tax benefits and other incentives and disincentives to bring down the national footprints.

➤.....Universal access to ICT and the Internet is a most effective first step as a way of empowering individual people, closing the gap between rich and poor and leaving no one behind:

This would involve providing access to the Internet to each community in each nation with one or more people in each community who are Internet savvy and can help others to locate goods, services, educational opportunities, best practices and technology transfer, including ways of installing renewable energy that can generate cheap or free energy as soon as the hardware is installed.

The Internet is one of the largest social commons in existence and it provides access to the sharing economy where increasingly access to goods, services, culture, knowledge and knowhow is seen as more important than ownership. UN studies state that universal access is technologically possible no matter how isolated the region. Countries such as Rwanda in Africa are leading the way in the developing world.

## **Financing Sustainable Development: Capturing and Sharing the Value of Land and Natural Resources**

➤.....The international community needs to **provide sufficient funding to support the increased participation of civil society in implementation** and to provide all of the capacity development that is needed to meet the agreed goals. Financing should therefore be included as a primary target to support implementation of the SDGs.

Innovative means of finance need to be agreed to and developed to ensure that new means of funding are provided that are sufficient for achieving the goals that are being set. For example, **taxes could be shifted off of wages and the purchase of basic goods and services and placed instead on the ownership and use of land and natural resources**. This would then provide the incentives needed to encourage sustainable development and ensure that the benefits from the gifts of nature are shared equitably among all peoples.

➤.....Fair share rights to the commons of land and natural resources can be secured through sharing the "rent" (the surplus value via rent-based taxation) in lieu of taxes on the real economy of labour and production. The following Recommendation is for National Action and was agreed to at Habitat II, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements:

### **Recommendation D.3 Recapturing plus value**

"Excessive profits resulting from the increase in land value due to development and change in use are one of the principal causes of the concentration of wealth in private hands. Taxation should not be seen only as a source of revenue for the community but also a powerful tool to encourage development of desirable locations, to exercise a controlling effect on the land market and to redistribute to the public at large the benefits of the unearned increase in land values."

The unearned increment in value resulting from the rise in land values, accruing as a result of a change in the use of land due to public investment or decision or to general growth in the community, should thus be recaptured by the community and can then be used to provide funding for sustainable development and/or social services or be shared among the community members as a whole, etc.

➤.....People living in poverty should not be considered beneficiaries of SDGs but active participants in the development and implementation of SDGs. This can happen only when there are sufficient forums at the local community levels where their capacity and voices are strengthened and opportunities for participation are provided. Equipped with enough knowledge and resources and an integral vision, Local communities will take care of the earth's resources in a more sustainable way than the private sector whose main motive is profit. Hence instead of public private partnership, National governments must strive to enter in to greater partnership with local communities and local self governments. This is possible through neighborhood community networks, peoples' cooperatives and other community based enterprises. Universal Social protection floor is one way to ensure this. This way we can make sure that no one is left behind.

➤.....It will be necessary to find funds for the restoration of the Earth System. It will also be necessary to discourage destruction of depletable natural resources. This can be done by taking the following steps:

1. Strictly cap the use of completable natural resources
2. Sell permits annually for the use of those resources that are below the cap. Those buying the permits and using the natural resources will pass on the costs of the permits to those using the resources they sell down the line.
3. Income from the permits is placed in a fund for restoration of natural resources or compensation of those local communities affected through mining and the remainder can go to a global fund for a basic income for all people.

## **Supporting Rural and Impoverished Urban Development**

The Millennium Villages in some twenty African countries, thousands of Ecovillage communities, and the UN's own Small Grants Program have shown repeatedly how effective and productive an integrated, multi-sectoral community based approach to sustainable rural development is and can be.

It is just as important to provide and support such an approach in rural communities, towns and villages and in impoverished urban neighborhoods as in cities as a whole. After all, this is indeed where most of those living in extreme poverty live.

We thus ask you to call on the UN Member States and the United Nations General Assembly to include a target on the need for the development of an integrated multi-sectoral community based approach to sustainable rural as well as impoverished urban development to ensure that all people's basic human needs can be met. Such an approach would involve participation in decision making and in all benefits that result by all stakeholders. This will both create more cohesive communities and result in careful stewardship of resources since all benefit directly from this.

### **Water**

➤.....**Water** is a community good and as such ensures Communities' Human Right to water as opposed to privatization of Water. Use the Litmus test provided by the [Mining Working Group](#).

➤.....Within the water, food, energy nexus being debated, little focus if any is being given to the water cycle itself. The global water cycle is akin to a lynch pin. If it's healthy functioning is continually ignored it will reach a tipping point and all will be lost. Safeguarding it is a critical and urgent issue and underpins virtually all global issues. It is unsustainable to ignore the infinite regenerative nature of the water cycle and use existing time and resources in managing ever-decreasing water resources, whilst in the meantime allowing the natural water cycle to degenerate.

*"The understanding of linkages between ecosystems, water, and food production is important to the health of all three, and managing for the sustainability of these connections is becoming increasingly necessary. In many places, changes in the global water cycle, caused largely by human pressures, are seriously affecting ecosystem health and human well-being". (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005)*

Unlike finite resources such as coal, oil and gas the fresh water system is a renewable and regenerative one. It is dependent upon ecosystems and can be replenished. Aquifers and watersheds can be regenerated and glacial retreat can be minimised, but only if the global water cycle is safeguarded.

*" Progress in many of the future post-2015 goals will be determined by how governments respond to the water crisis and whether they value water-related ecological services and incorporate these services into decision-making and development strategies (UNDP, 2006)." (U.N Analytical Brief, 2013)*

In 1982 the World Charter for Nature was endorsed by world governments and it's principles state:

1. Nature shall be respected and its essential processes shall not be impaired.
2. The genetic viability on the earth shall not be compromised; the population levels of all life forms, wild and domesticated, must be at least sufficient for their survival, and to this end necessary habitats shall be safeguarded.
3. All areas of the earth, both land and sea, shall be subject to these principles of conservation; special protection shall be given to unique areas, to representative samples of all the different types of ecosystems and to the habitats of rare or endangered species.
4. Ecosystems and organisms, as well as the land, marine and atmospheric resources that are utilized by man, shall be managed to achieve and maintain optimum sustainable productivity, but not in such a way as to endanger the integrity of those other ecosystems or species with which they coexist.
5. Nature shall be secured against degradation caused by warfare or other hostile activities. (A/RES/37/7. World Charter for Nature)

The global water cycle is an essential process which supports all other natural processes.

## **Building the Necessary Infrastructure for a Global World**

While each Nation and community has its own characteristics, needs and contributions to make, sustainable development requires recognition that we are all inextricably interlinked parts of the Earth System. It is therefore essential to have some body that can make recommendations to the High Level Political Forum and others for coordination and possible emergency action at the global level. Since it must take account of happenings worldwide and best practices that can be applied, this must have the **input of all stakeholders**.

This could take the form of an **ongoing** High Level Panel of Experts or Commission of Eminent Personalities which could foresee and make recommendations for dealing with upcoming threats to the High Level Political Forum. This Panel or Commission would adopt a participatory, inclusive commons based approach to sustainable development where-in all people and stakeholders would be encouraged to participate actively in managing or stewarding our commons resources in a collective manner.

We suggest that the Trusteeship Council be re-purposed and used to set up a global resource agency to collectively manage our Global Commons - as discussed in the UN Task Team Report on the Global Commons. The Earth System would also be administered as a global commons.

### **Indigenous Peoples**

Indigenous Peoples have much to offer both in terms of their capacity to steward Mother Earth and in caring for the plants and animals that make her the home on which human beings depend. Their form of communal decision making also contributes to more harmonious communities. It is being used by many groups and even cooperatives dedicated to sustainability, since their inclusiveness and sharing of benefits makes for social cohesion and the caring stewardship of natural resources. Indigenous Peoples have much to teach the world in terms of sustainable living.

Yet indigenous people appear overlooked in the SDG only briefly mentioned in goals on hunger and education. But indigenous people make up 5% of the world's population, and anything from 10% (according to the World Bank) to 30% (says the UN) of the world's poorest people. By most accounts, they have been the group least well served by the MDGs – despite plenty of progress on achieving the goals, the most excluded sectors of society have not generally reaped their rewards.

Indigenous people are marginalised, both politically and often geographically with their lands threatened as a potential source of income generation by colonial powers. Indigenous people principle focus is on land and territorial rights and protecting their ways of life rather than simply ending poverty.

Indigenous peoples remain under continuing threats highlighted by documentation of the rapid extinction of tribe after tribe as "development" continues unabated and without consideration of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples rarely benefit from the exploitation of their resources.

The slow erosion of indigenous people is one of the world's greatest ongoing tragedies, and for all the shifting paradigms evident in the new set of goals, the clash between so-called development and dignity for indigenous people appears to be continuing previous failed approaches.

After centuries spent on the underside of history, indigenous people deserve a duty of care from the international community, and recognition of what they offer. The upcoming World Conference of Indigenous Peoples in September 2014 provides the opportunity to put them at the centre of international development efforts.

### **Other initiatives proposed by civil society in the run up to the Rio +20 Conference that we suggest be considered and supported:**

- .....Ombudspersons and a High Commissioner for Future Generations,
- .....Corporate Social Responsibility and Extended Producer Responsibility,
- .....Living within the carrying capacity of the earth and planetary boundaries that can support human life,
- .....the Access Initiative,
- .....Adoption of a Convention on EcoCide;
- .....A World Environmental Court.