

“Ideal Model” World Commons

Principles, Funding and Methods, for Empowering a Multi-Stakeholder Commons
to create and follow an SDG Dashboard for the Earth



The ideal

It would be ideal if the UN, mandated by the world governments, facilitated the creation of communication networks so everyone would get good information on their choices for making the earth sustainable. Stakeholder communities would work together following global principles to create value by finding their own sustainability solutions,

helped by “Information Dashboards” with coordinated scientific, economic, cultural and strategic screens, showing benefits and liabilities for all to see. It would bring funding to all levels of sustainability, as the best source of information on which governments, individuals and institutions could base their investment policies and decisions.

That approach would “put the ball in the right court” and let the UN do more of what it does best, as host and facilitator for the stakeholders of the world solving their own problems. Perhaps the world’s governments would give the UN that mandate, to facilitate stakeholder collaboration involving all of civil society. For the SDG’s it favors 1) goals that fit local talents and problems 2) solutions that can be implemented efficiently in the self-interest of the participants, 3) coordinated with the needs of of society, 4) avoiding intractable wrangling between people with different ideas, and 5) as only possible when keeping the focus on everyone’s common interests.

SDG’s for transforming how we use the earth could start, as they have, with the UN leading a world dialog seeking “great global principles” to follow. Regional “learning commons” for stakeholders would be assured access to solid information and be assisted in using it, as the nations of the world are assisted in following the communal societal process. Formally organized stakeholder communities might only be organized by region, developing regional SDG’s within the global principles for local conditions.

Other learning commons would emerge “top-down” and “bottom-up” from today’s wide variety of knowledge sharing networks. The networks of both formal and informal commons would have access to high quality global information resources, and so be in a position to call for prompt action when clear solutions are found, as publics that are both efficient and able in decision making, with little old style politics involved.

The real motivation seems to be in many places at once. The bottom line, from every perspective, is still how extraordinarily costly it would be not to act and succeed. What works in the end might not be this “ideal commons approach” but whatever works in the end will need to operate somewhat like it.

The plan

Many pieces of the new kind of professional combined scientific, business and financial information are already beginning to come together. As they compare notes how unsustainable it is to keep using wealth to multiply our uses of the earth, and multiply unmanageable liabilities too, will become self-evident. That would lead to consensus on providing sufficient funding for investments in real sustainable development to keep the earth economically viable.

The more successful stakeholder commons would set the example and demonstrate how diverse stakeholder groups can focus on their common interests to work together solving big problems. The other formal and informal learning commons would follow the leaders in finding collaboration with others having different ways of understanding the world is the solution not the problem.

How this new transparency of the earth would take lasting effect is through consumer, investor, financial and business market choices, reflecting the new quality of information on the true impacts of their choices, so the actual decision making at every scale would come from its grass roots.

The strategy

From a natural system design view, this approach alters the “push” and a “pull” balance for institutional designs. You need both controls (pushes) with openings (pulls) when working with self-motivated people, and have the right balance. Providing better information, and facilitating its exchange, aims at allowing self-interests to again make the economy more self-regulating than now, or ever before.

An SDG choice between two paradigms, pushes and pulls for societal decision making

| | | | | | |
|----|------------------------|----|-----------------------|----|---------------------|
| 1. | Science informs | -> | Government imposes | -> | Laws and Regulation |
| 2. | Government supports | -> | Science enables | -> | Self-Organization |

It would provide a way for the world economy to steer itself toward the kinds of farseeing objectives discussed in many sustainability communities these days. Good examples are found in the recent report of the UN's Independent Research Forum (IRF), Post2015 - Framing a new approach to SD¹

Global principles

The global SDG's could be simple; defining minimum standards for human life, respect for nature and the places of the earth. That could be paired with simple obligations to respond to unsustainable change in our natural, social and economic environments.

Global minimum standards for human life would include access to knowledge and equitable treatment, with standards of accountability, living sustainably and forming cultures of responsibility, for things such as having children with the intent to care for and teach them to live well too.

How it might overcome what stalled UN efforts in the past

The UN has often tried to get the national governments to “do what's right” in the past. Today we have greatly changed circumstances, both in the urgency to act and the new quality of scientific information:

- it addresses many of the problems noted in the draft UN CSD study of 21Feb13
- the overwhelming costs of inaction are clear, and clarify the need for the effort
- commitment to goals like the MTG's would become national policies
- the financial community already sees the need to invest to keep the earth viable
- informal networks are gaining the ability to independently make able decisions

Advantageous General Properties of the ideal model

- it would be flexibly responsive to new and emerging issues
- It uses the natural organization of human society as its main steering mechanism
- it integrates environmental, social and economic dimensions
- it is systemic by nature and enables mutual reinforcement of initiatives
- it operates at multiple levels and scales, in awareness of interrelations and dependencies
- it is based on multi-stakeholder dialogue, that is coordinated and participatory
- it builds lasting capacity & resilience, responsive to the insight of its close observers
- it would grow directly from prior SDGs and Agenda 21 items according to place
- it would greatly aid the financial markets in finding new ways to invest

¹ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1690IRF%20Framework%20Paper.pdf>

-- See Blog post for current appendix & addenda¹ --

Brief Appendix of Technical Notes:

An organization chart

The United Nations

| Develops General Principles | | Facilitates Information flow and processes | | |
|---|---|--|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Minimum standards of human welfare and accountability | Standards for reaching lasting resolution to unsustainable trends | Coordinating sources of knowledge | Facilitating stakeholder partnerships | Monitoring the process and adherence |

The Stakeholders

| Institutional Communities learn to speak in common languages to share their knowledge | Natural Cultures and Communities learn to speak to each other about their common interests |
|--|--|
| Financial Community Business Community Natural Sciences Management Sciences (among others) | The Global commons Regional Commons National Commons Sub-regional and Demographic Commons (among others) |

Why we haven't acted before

During two centuries of rapid economic growth our remarkable gains in human welfare also relied on ever faster depletion of natural resources. It's been an intoxicating experience, but our enormous gains in cultural development have become unsustainable, and our failure to create great wealth without great poverty too remains totally unacceptable.

It's the overwhelming financial costs of change that, ironically, first seemed to be a barrier and now with better information exposes the complete financial necessity. Living unsustainably becomes highly unprofitable. If the fortunes earned in the past are held accountable for the liabilities caused for our future, as common law was interpreted for the US Superfund sites, the wealth of the past will be held liable correcting its environmental damages.

The enormity of these costs has only been hidden from view, largely by people not thinking of how to measure the whole system impacts of their financial choices investment strategies. For example, even the most economic way of removing our yearly addition of CO2 to the atmosphere, burying bio-char, would cost about \$.15 or more per pound of CO2. That a pound of CO2 is what is generated by one dollar of GDP³ would make paying to "clean up" our CO2 pollution like a new annual global income tax of 15% or more. That itself might consume all the profits of all investments on earth!

The issue is that it would also definitely NOT be cheaper to let rising ocean levels and climate change disrupt the earth's ecosystems and globally flood our historic coastlines and coastal developments. It would also NOT be cheaper to continue depleting our resources till they're too expensive for us to use,... That's the real financial motivation; our lack of information on what we've been doing is financially unsustainable too.

³ Based on world annual GDP, CO2 and estimates of the price of bio-char from multiple sources.

It's quite possible the scientific, business, cultural and financial communities would all be drawn to the same surprising consensus. It seems clear scientifically, at least, that it would be "a better bet" for the money, i.e. much more profitable, if investors preserved their financial capital by using it to help our economies learn how to prosper without growth, rather than with it. It parallels a simple natural principle of development. You first use profits to build things up, and at a point change to using it to care for what you built.

Special Conditions: There seem to be reasonable instruments available to insure change if the need can be reasonably demonstrated.

1) A juridical structure has long existed in common law. It's been long established that there is ***a fiduciary obligation*** for the directors, managers and regulators of trusts held in the name of others, to honor their prudent self-interests. Recent precedent is not consistent with that, but the original principle can be reasserted, now having better information on our prudent self-interests.

2) A major correction is needed for our familiar measures of externalities. We've been using economic accounting of impacts, not ***environmental systems accounting***. Our familiar measures count only the "consumption for production" of technology, and ignore the "consumption for production" for the human services needed to operate the technology, a BIG omission for a physical measure of total impacts. The present LCA and Scope 3 GHG metrics leave uncounted commonly 80-90% of the real environmental impacts for delivering business goods and services!

The principle author of this draft collaborative proposal of Commons Action for the UN (CAUN)⁴ is Jessie Henshaw. Jessie's related work includes peer-reviewed scientific research exposing and partly solving the problem of measuring whole system impacts⁶. Her work also shows in the *CAUN Proposal for the UN to Adopt the Commons Approach Post2015*⁷ Her attached *Models of Commons Interests*⁸ for using whole system measurement methods would provide much firmer data on the true costs of economic choices, and so long term profitability too, needed for self-regulating and sustainable financial systems.

Jessie is a natural systems scientist who since the 1970's has used her original physics research methods for studying the local emergence of organization and its developmental processes in readily observed self-organizing human and natural systems. [idealmodelsdgs4.4.docx]

- Archive of research notes & comments: [Synapse9.com](http://synapse9.com). <http://synapse9.com/>
- Blog for the new viewpoint "[Reading Nature's Signals](http://synapse9.com/signals)" <http://synapse9.com/signals>

⁴ [Commons Action for the UN](http://www.commonSACTIONfortheunitednations.org/), CAUN - <http://www.commonSACTIONfortheunitednations.org/>

⁶ "[System Energy Assessment \(SEA\)](http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/3/10/1908/)" - <http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/3/10/1908/>
& [SEA reference Slides & notes](http://www.synapse9.com/SEA) - <http://www.synapse9.com/SEA>

⁷ [Proposing the UN to Adopt the Commons Approach](http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/274168#comment-41782) –Thematic NGO Consultation on Sustainability <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/274168#comment-41782>

⁸ [Models of Commons Interests](http://www.synapse9.com/CAUN/ModelsOFCommonsInterests.htm) - <http://www.synapse9.com/CAUN/ModelsOFCommonsInterests.htm>