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International Environmental and Sustainability Policy During and After the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Federal Environment Agency
Wörlitzer Platz 1
06844 Dessau-Roßlau
Phone: +49 340-2103-0
Fax: +49 340-2103-2285
buergerservice@uba.de
Website: www.umweltbundesamt.de

 /umweltbundesamt.de

 /umweltbundesamt

 /umweltbundesamt

 /umweltbundesamt

Authorship

Harald Ginzky
Jan Kosmol
Kathrin Schwirn

Editors:

Harald Ginzky, Jan Kosmol, Kathrin Schwirn

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Juliane Berger, Kerstin Gebuhr, Anne Klatt, Katja Kraus, Hans-Joachim Hermann, Anja Klauk, Carsten Neßhöver, Nadine Pauly, Frederic Pischke, Almut Reichart, Catharina Rubel, Dana Ruddigkeit, Arn Sauer, Anja Schwetje und Hans-Christian Stolzenberg

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Summary

The Coronavirus pandemic has changed the world. Geopolitical tensions, for example between China and the USA, as well as existing conflicts between EU states appear to have intensified. The pandemic has significantly intensified the crisis phenomena in the Global South, while countries of the Global North have often been able to withstand the impacts of the crisis through government interventions. The gap between the countries of the Global North and the Global South threatens to widen even further. The pandemic could also lead to fundamental political instability in countries in both the South and North (e.g. the USA, Brazil and some other countries in the global south).

In particular, the pandemic has highlighted how fragile global interdependence is as a result of globalisation and international hypermobility. The only way to successfully and competently deal with the crisis is through good governance on all levels. One factor of success seems to be the confidence of citizens in the state and its institutions. This seems to apply worldwide, especially in the Global South. Furthermore, countries with efficient (public) health systems are generally more successful at managing the crisis. Well-developed digital communication can support the fight against the disease.

Environmental and sustainability policies are tackling major issues in difficult conditions such as climate change, biodiversity and international chemicals management. Large conferences were and are still not possible, at least during the ongoing pandemic.

With this in mind, the following four recommendations should be taken into account as new guiding principles for developing international environmental and sustainability policy:

- ▶ The One Health approach is ideally suited to align environmental, health and climate policies with the 2030 Agenda. It requires effective and coherent cooperation between states and international organisations.

- ▶ The overarching guiding principle of the environmental and sustainability policy must be to ensure that societies as a whole and their respective economic and social subsystems become more resilient.
 - ▶ These subsystems need to be able to withstand external shocks (ability to absorb and adapt) and, if necessary, to evolve (ability to transform).
 - ▶ Resilience can only be achieved if the requirements of the sustainable development goals to “leave no one behind” are taken into account.
- ▶ In order to guarantee and maintain resilience, competent state and international institutions that citizens trust need to focus their governance on public welfare.
- ▶ If used wisely, digital technologies are an important tool which can help us understand and manage the manifold crisis phenomena.

Countries in the Global South must be supported directly in addressing the challenges of the pandemic – in both health and economic policy. Countries in the Global North carry great responsibility because of international economic interdependence, structural inequalities and the need to build resilience.

Furthermore, measures must also be taken wherever possible to reduce the risk of future zoonoses and pandemics spreading. The One Health approach must be implemented and the applicable management standards reviewed accordingly. Dense surveillance networks and adequate information systems must also be set up effectively in all countries. International cooperation between the FAO, the WHO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) as well as the CBD and, where necessary, the IMO and/or fisheries organisations (RFMOs) is strongly recommended for this purpose.

Finally, the following measures are recommended:

- ▶ Strengthening the nexus of health and environmental protection in all sectors within international environmental and sustainability policy

- ▶ Juridification of the above-mentioned guiding principles either through soft law instruments, the Global Pact for the Environment or the “New Global Deal” proposed by UN Secretary-General Guterres
- ▶ Use of virtual formats to increase participation, to ensure all perspectives are taken into account and to promote scientific exchange
- ▶ Institutionalised form of collecting, processing and providing knowledge on the guiding principle of resilience e. g. through IPBES
- ▶ Promoting international cooperation between cities and communities and their institutional foundations
- ▶ Adding environmental and climate protection aspects to corporate due diligence obligations in the human rights sector

These are just initial ideas. What is clear is that international collaboration must be strengthened and consolidated. This is because economic globalisation requires a framework of international agreements that guarantee the resilience of globalised economic activity and the transformation to environmental and climate compatibility.

1 Introduction

2019 was marked by a growing global climate and environmental protection movement. 2020 saw important courses set in international environmental and sustainability policy, in particular with regard to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and global chemicals management. The spread of COVID-19 and the global response to the pandemic have been setting the political agenda since the beginning of 2020. The shutdowns that sought to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have in most countries around the world resulted in unexpected, drastic and unprecedented changes to economic and social life.

International climate diplomacy and development cooperation could only be continued under very restricted conditions. Furthermore, current debates are increasingly focussing on some of the fundamental issues of financial and social life. The pandemic is in part being seen as a turning point. This may also have consequences for international environmental and sustainability policy.

This paper attempts to outline the implications of the pandemic for international environmental and sustainability policy and to formulate approaches to readjusting said policy.

Firstly, the foreseeable consequences and impacts of the pandemic on the following areas will be analysed:

- ▶ The global economy and power-political frameworks
- ▶ The countries of the Global South¹
- ▶ International cooperation with regard to the environment, climate and sustainability

In the second section, the results of this analysis will be summarised and approaches to further developing the international environmental and sustainability policy will be identified. The third section will include recommended measures based on these approaches.

¹ The term "Countries of the Global South" refers to low and middle income economies in line with the World Bank's classification. <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>

2 International impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

2.1 Global economy and world order

The United Nations is predicting that the global economy will fall into the biggest recession since the Great Depression of the 1920s and 30s. It is predicting a decline in economic output of 3.2 % and a decrease in world trade of 15 %. Most economies have seen a rise in unemployment as a result of lockdown; in the USA alone, 40 million people have registered as unemployed so far (early June 2020).² Given that low-paid jobs have been particularly badly affected, it can be assumed that income inequality both within and between national economies is increasing. The massive losses of employment and income are predicted to push another 34.3 million people into poverty around the world, the majority of them (56 %) in African countries. This could affect up to 160 million people by 2030. The fundamental elements of globalisation – international trade, commercial and financial integration – have created a situation in which the financial impacts of regional infection prevention measures quickly affect other countries as well. Many countries have moreover restricted the export of essential goods, which other countries urgently require in order to combat the pandemic. If countries now primarily perceive global integration as a danger to public health and the stability of their economy, it may cause a partial retreat from globalisation.³

In debates it has been suggested that the pandemic and its socio-economic impacts could trigger large-scale and irreversible structural changes in international politics and global power configurations. Some more radical predictions describe an inexorable power-political decline of the USA, the accelerated rise of China as a ‘global governor’ or even an apocalyptic new world order characterised by a separation of great power blocks with their own expanding military apparatuses, isolated supply chains, protectionism, autocracy, polarisation, nationalism, nativism and populism.⁴

Most countries took a unilateral approach to tackling the pandemic. Border closures brought the movement of people and goods to a standstill in some places. This isolationism strengthened nationalist and racist tendencies in some regions.⁵ Individual countries are faced with the considerable challenge of striking a balance between infection prevention and health protection, economic activity, civil liberties and the quality of life of their citizens, whereby they must develop the optimal strategy for their needs to combat the pandemic in an iterative, reciprocal learning process. These countries have achieved varying degrees of success in flattening the curves of new infections and deaths.⁶ According to analysts, the decisive factors for success seems to be not the type of regime, but the capacity of public health services and the extent to which citizens trust their governments.⁷ It is to be expected that the countries which have managed the crisis most effectively, in other words those with the least health and socio-economic impacts, will be able to expand their global leadership role.

The extent to which the European Union can be counted in this group is unforeseeable at present. Initially, the EU could not play a role in the acute phase of combating the pandemic due to a lack of the necessary authority. The pandemic heightened latent conflicts within the EU, whether it was the dispute over democracy and rule of law between the East and West or that between the North and South over economic solidarity. The border closures within the EU to protect against infection temporarily suspended in places some of the key elements of the European Treaties such as freedom of travel, freedom of movement for workers and the single market. The pandemic is the latest in a series of crises that began more than ten years ago and poses a huge challenge to European integration.⁸ The European debate

² <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/arbeitsmarkt-usa-corona-101.html>

³ https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/WESP2020_MYU_Key-messages.pdf

⁴ <https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/china-oder-der-westen-geopolitik-in-zeiten-von-corona-ld.1549297> <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/the-guardian/go-east-und> <https://www.woz.ch/-a77f>

⁵ https://www.rbb24.de/politik/thema/2020/coronavirus/beitraege_neu/2020/04/deutschland-berlin-brandenburg-coronavirus-corona-covid-19-asien-community.html und <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/05/china-covid-19-discrimination-against-africans>

⁶ <https://www.ft.com/content/a2901ce8-5eb7-4633-b89c-cbdf5b386938>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/11/coronavirus-who-will-be-winners-and-losers-in-new-world-order> und <https://voxeu.org/article/coming-battle-covid-19-narrative> und <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/ist-china-uns-tatsaechlich-ueberlegen-der-trugschluss-dass-autoritaere-regime-corona-besser-bekaempfen/25881256.html>

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/may/10/elites-failed-create-european-republic-pandemic-eu-citizens-democracy-equals>

over a supportive, European solution to the crisis is in full swing; the proposal put forward by France and Germany for a 500 billion Euro coronavirus recovery fund and the even larger proposal of the EU Commission of 750 billion were the subjects of a contentious debate between the northern and southern member states. A compromise was reached at the European Council following tough negotiations.⁹ The EU Commission and individual member states are moreover increasingly engaging in multilateral vaccine research and procurement, whereas the USA, Russia and China are relying on national solutions.¹⁰ There is a possibility that the EU will come out of the pandemic as a strengthened world player if the member states use the pandemic to consolidate European integration. A further prerequisite is that the recovery funds would have to be invested with a focus on sustainability as part of a comprehensive reconfiguration of economic structures as set out in the European Green Deal.¹¹

The long-running conflict between China and the USA was also exacerbated by the pandemic. China is attempting to portray its management of the pandemic as a success of its superior, centrally controlled system and takes a repressive approach towards all domestic critics of this interpretation.¹² It is emphasising its claim to global leadership with soft power by providing material aid to Italy, Serbia and Iran.¹³ The American government, on the other hand, is withdrawing its support for international organisations, has even pulled out of the WHO and refuses to relax sanctions against Iran, for example, on humanitarian grounds. It is endeavouring to shift the responsibility for its less successful response to the pandemic onto China and the WHO.¹⁴

In contrast to the global financial crisis of 2008/09, the political reaction of the G20 to the pandemic has been restrained thus far. The announcement in March 2020 that whatever it takes would be done has been

followed by huge national packages of measures in individual G20 states, principally in the traditional industrialised countries, but no concrete international commitments. China has been very cautious when compared with the financial crisis; other emerging countries can only implement very limited fiscal measures due to the severe capital flight since the start of the pandemic. Analysts are of the opinion that this is the reason for the reserved reaction thus far: there is no consensus about how emerging and developing countries that do not have sufficient resources to manage the crisis by themselves should be helped. Under pressure from the IMF, the G20 has now issued a debt moratorium for 77 countries until the end of 2020, although the use of debt relief as a solution to the debt crisis remains contentious within the G20.¹⁵

The political impacts of the coronavirus crisis will occupy the international community for a long time. It has exposed crises, inequalities and conflicts, heightened some of them and made public health a key issue of international politics. The nation state takes centre stage in crisis management, whereas supranational and international institutions initially played only a subordinate role. The framework for the international environmental and sustainability policy will probably not shift in any one clear direction – inconsistent and contradictory developments are much more likely. The coronavirus crisis therefore does not mark the beginning of a new epoch but rather falls in the middle of an ongoing transitional phase. What the new era will look like has not yet been decided and depends less on exogenous influences than it does on actors, their political will, their ability to cooperate internationally and their support for international organisations. Whether multilateralism and the focus on public welfare will be consolidated or not and whether more stable and solidary social and economic systems will arise will largely be negotiated in political debates and elections at the national level.¹⁶

2.2 Countries of the Global South

It is to be expected that the countries of the Global South will be particularly badly affected by both the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19

9 <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2020-07/eu-gipfel-einigt-sich-auf-1-8-bil-lionen-euro-schweres-finanpaket>

10 <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-plans-coronavirus-vaccine-development-eu-alliance-report/a-53681991>

11 <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/internationale-zusammenarbeit-in-der-corona-krise-chancen-fuer-europa-gefahren-fuer-die-welt/>

12 <https://nyti.ms/3bfqmHE>

13 <https://www.blaetter.de/ausgabe/2020/mai/china-versus-usa-corona-und-die-neue-weltordnung>

14 <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/usa-who-101.html> and <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/20/rethinking-international-security-for-post-pandemic-world-pub-81584> und <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/vereinte-nationen-im-kampf-gegen-die-pandemie-die-coronakrise-ist-ein-fall-fuer-den-un-sicherheitsrat-geworden/25787614.html>

15 <https://www.vorwaerts.de/artikel/g20-corona-doppelte-krise>

16 <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/the-corona-crisis-and-international-relations-open-questions-tentative-assumptions/>

pandemic. The following statements constitute merely a general overview. A closer analysis would have to examine the respective conditions in individual countries.

The health implications have already been dramatic in some countries, for example Brazil. In other countries, such consequences most likely still lie ahead. In some countries and regions (Africa, India), the total numbers of infections and deaths are still relatively low in comparison with European countries or the USA. It can be assumed that the dark figures will be considerably greater than the official numbers and even higher than those in developed countries. This is principally because countries of the Global South have less testing capacity at their disposal. Furthermore, the connection with COVID-19 will not have been identified and/or reported for many of the deaths. Despite having taken measures to protect against infection, many countries in the Global South are currently reporting higher levels of infection than countries of the Global North.¹⁷

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) conservatively estimates¹⁸ a total of between 550,000 million and 1 billion infections and between 1.7 and 3.2 million deaths in 34 war-affected and/or fragile states.¹⁹ It can be assumed that women and children have been particularly affected. The health implications for particularly vulnerable groups, such as indigenous populations²⁰ or refugees, and particularly those in refugee camps in countries of the Global South, have to date only been recorded in a rudimentary fashion.²¹

The degree to which countries of the Global South have been particularly affected with regard to healthcare implications principally comes down to the following reasons:

- Health systems are often inadequately equipped due to limited funding, a lack of expertise, short-ages of personnel, an insufficiently developed

health system and mismanagement.²² Large distances and lacking or poor infrastructure in some regions also make it difficult to provide medical care.

- People living in slum areas and workers in the informal sector are scarcely able to protect themselves from infection because measures such as physical distancing cannot be implemented fully or sometimes at all for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, many of the people in this group are forced to return to work at once for financial reasons.²³
- One significant factor is the level and distribution of digital infrastructure in state and economic institutions and among the wider population.²⁴ It is moreover often possible to detect a sizeable urban-rural gap.²⁵

It is assumed that countries of the Global South will be particularly hard-hit economically by the crisis. The effects cannot be generalised, but the trend is clear. International organisations are working on the assumption that significantly more people will be affected by extreme poverty in these countries.²⁶ The decisive reasons for this are:

- As a consequence of the economic shutdowns in the countries of the Global North, according to UNCTAD there was a significant reduction in the export of raw materials and therefore in export revenues.²⁷

17 <https://www.ft.com/content/a2901ce8-5eb7-4633-b89c-cbdf5b386938>

18 The study points to various reasons for this, including that amplifying effects such as hunger were not taken into account following the introduction of restrictions.

19 <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/irc-world-risks-1-billion-cases-and-32-million-deaths-covid-19-across-fragile>

20 38 indigenous populations in Brazil alone had already been affected by the pandemic by mid-May 2020. <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/brasilien-coronavirus-105.html>

21 For more information about disproportionately affected indigenous populations, visit: <https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/blog/2020/impacto-y-situacion-de-la-poblacion-indigena-latinoamericana-ant.html>

22 Schlindwein, *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 5/2020, p. 72: "According to the WHO, there are currently five intensive care beds per one million inhabitants in Africa at any one time, compared with 4,000 in Europe. 41 African countries currently have 2,000 functioning respirators between them at any one time, and there are none at all in the remaining 13 countries – or the electricity supply is too unreliable to keep the devices running."

23 Only 17 % of employees in Africa and 34 % in Asia have social security. The equivalent figure in Europe is approximately 84 %. See Paasch, *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 5/2020, p. 19.

24 UNDP page. For more on the consequences, see: <https://medium.com/data-policy/a-widening-data-divide-covid-19-and-the-global-south-f8d44c7a3b50>

25 Digital saturation is not by any means an absolute precondition as the successful crisis management of Ebola in Africa demonstrated. <https://www.die-gdi.de/die-aktuelle-kolumne/article/was-wir-in-der-corona-krise-von-und-ueber-afrika-lernen-koennen>

26 <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/covid-19-pandemic-response/socio-economic-impact-of-covid-19.html>

27 The structural dependency of Africa as a raw material supplier for the developed economies of the West and Asia doubled the negative impact. For as long as production is at a standstill, developed countries will buy less oil, minerals or materials such as cotton for the textiles industry from African countries. According to UNCTAD, a downturn in export revenues of USD 800 billion (e.g. due to falling prices of raw materials) and a devaluation of many currencies against the US dollar should be expected in 2020.

- ▶ Countries of the Global South have witnessed an unprecedented capital flight since the start of the coronavirus crisis.²⁸
- ▶ Employees working for foreign companies are often laid off without sufficient protection.
- ▶ Payments from expatriates to their families in their country of origin have diminished significantly during the pandemic.²⁹
- ▶ Many people's low incomes do not allow them to put aside any savings.
- ▶ Social security systems such as unemployment benefits and pension schemes are insufficient, again because of the large numbers of people in the informal sector.
- ▶ Government support measures are hardly possible due to the limited financial room for manoeuvre.

At the same time, the countries of the Global South are also heavily in debt. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the G20 countries decided to cancel some of the debts of the poorest countries in the world and to defer debt services.³⁰ In addition, special financial aid programmes were set up to support countries of the Global South with their measures against the pandemic.³¹ Nevertheless, there is a consensus that these aid programmes will not be sufficient to adequately counteract the extreme financial impacts.³²

International organisations are working on the assumption that the pandemic may trigger a food crisis. The already fragile food supply in crisis and war-torn areas above all, as well as in certain sections of the population including migrants working in the informal sector, could be weakened even further

by the pandemic, the crisis measures implemented to combat it and increasing poverty. The number of people threatened by extreme hunger could double to 270 million within a few months.³³

The pandemic is significantly inhibiting opportunities for development cooperation, which further exacerbates the situation. Firstly, many aid workers returned home due to the risk of infection where they were working. Secondly, work on the ground, which is often based on advice and therefore involves direct contact with people, can only be carried out to a limited extent due to the shutdown. There are currently even limitations on aid consignments, such as those to help combat the locust infestation in East Africa.³⁴

It is not yet possible to make a reliable prognosis for the medium and long-term effects of the pandemic in the countries of the Global South. This is purely because it is not possible to predict either the force with which the first wave of the pandemic will hit these countries or whether there will be further waves, and if so how many, and consequently what support measures will be available in these countries depending on the local management of the crisis. It is also conceivable that these upheavals will lead to political destabilisation in some countries.

The medium-term impacts of the pandemic will also determine the framework for future environmental and sustainability policy in individual countries. Depending on their institutional, financial and personnel resources, the countries of the Global South will be able to take part in international negotiations.³⁵

It is very likely that the crisis will consolidate the dependencies and inequalities between countries of the Global South and the Global North. This will be because companies in industrialised countries will doubtlessly exploit any competitive advantages over their already disadvantaged competitors in developing countries, not least by making the most of their

28 UNCTAD states that between 21 February and 20 March, USD 59 billion flowed into supposed "safe havens" – more than double the amount in the comparable period after the Lehman collapse in 2008.
https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/Briefing_Corona_Weltwirtschaft-Update.pdf

29 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/freyindsay/2020/04/22/world-bank-global-remittances-set-to-decline-sharply-as-a-result-of-coronavirus/#3c71491660ab>

30 <https://www.rnd.de/wirtschaft/iwf-gewahrt-25-staaten-wegen-corona-krise-schuldenerlass-CFQGX3TDNMIORN4O3UJT5CTLLQ.html>

31 See also <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/260231584733494306/pdf/Proposal-for-a-World-Bank-COVID-19-Response-under-the-Fast-Track-COVID-19-Facility.pdf> und <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2020/02/28/how-the-imf-can-help-countries-address-the-economic-impact-of-coronavirus>

32 <https://www.die-gdi.de/die-aktuelle-kolumne/article/so-reagieren-die-internationalen-finanzinstitutionen-auf-die-pandemie/>

33 See <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/poverty-and-food-insecurity-could-grow-dramatically-covid-19-spreads> and <http://www.fao.org/2019-ncov/q-and-a/impact-on-food-and-agriculture/en/>; <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/entwicklungsminister-mueller-corona-hunger-101.html>; <https://www.wfp.org/news/world-food-programme-assist-largest-number-hungry-people-ever-coronavirus-devastates-poor>

34 <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/heuschrecken-ostafrika-105.html>

35 In part, the new virtual format also creates the opportunity to play a more active role in the debates, at least on the working level.

massive stimulus packages. Furthermore, the fiscal and monetary policy measures in high-income economies will effectuate capital outflows, an increase in the price of government bonds and more stringent lending conditions for countries of the Global South.

2.3 International environmental and climate policy

With high numbers of cases and deaths, frequently overloaded health systems and severe economic impacts, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fragility of globally interconnected economic structures and the different degrees of resilience to this pandemic among the various countries affected by it. It also became clear that pandemic preparedness has presented many countries with similar complex challenges as taking effective environmental protection measures.

The shutdown initially caused a global decline in greenhouse gas and nitrogen oxide emissions.³⁶ These decreases boosted worldwide efforts to significantly reduce emissions that damage the environment and the climate with the ultimate goal of carbon neutrality.³⁷ However, these effects will likely only be of a temporary nature because the decreases are not the result of structural changes towards more sustainability in the economy or the energy and transport sector. The unsustainably designed economic recovery following the financial crisis, for example, resulted in a large increase in emissions.³⁸ In its analysis, the WWF moreover reported that the global deforestation of tropical rainforests increased by 150 % on average during March 2020 in comparison with the 2017–2019 period due to the limitations imposed by pandemic-counteracting measures on monitoring as well as the loss of earning opportunities for parts of the population (e. g. the legal lumber trade, tourism and food markets).³⁹ Further negative

effects caused by the overuse of natural resources as a consequence of the shutdown are expected but have not yet been investigated.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a consequence of unsustainable production and consumption patterns, just like the global environmental crises such as biodiversity loss, climate change, accumulation of plastic in the world's oceans and the build up of nutrients and pollutants in environmental compartments.⁴⁰ Based on our current understanding, the COVID-19 pandemic can be traced back to an animal infection that was transferred to people (a so called zoonosis), which then spread rapidly along international travel routes. The likelihood of zoonosis occurring is in turn closely linked to increased human intervention in nature, climate change and inadequate consideration being given to animal welfare and health.⁴¹

As with many other global environmental problems, it appears that countries have been affected differently and were prepared to manage the crisis to varying degrees. Just like solving global environmental problems, combating a pandemic and its impacts demands international cooperation, although local measures must generally be implemented by state institutions. Science-based and timely action is required on both a national and international level to keep the consequences under control.

There is also an important difference, however: the measures needed to solve the climate crisis are firstly not limited in time, and secondly, they require permanent and fundamental changes to our way of living and our economic system.⁴² The impacts of the pandemic cannot yet be assessed conclusively. It is currently unclear whether the infection will largely disappear after the first or potentially a second wave, or whether it will recur seasonally in the long-term.⁴³ It cannot not be assumed, however, that the

36 LaQu  r   et al. (2020) "Temporary reduction in daily global CO2 emissions during the COVID-19 forced confinement" *Nature Climate Change*; https://www.esa.int/Applications/Observing_the_Earth/Copernicus/Sentinel-5P/Air_pollution_remains_low_as_Europeans_stay_at_home; https://www.esa.int/Applications/Observing_the_Earth/Copernicus/Sentinel-5P/Air_pollution_drops_in_India_following_lockdown; <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/146362/airborne-nitrogen-dioxide-plummets-over-china>; <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2020/drop-in-air-pollution-over-northeast>
37 UNEP Emission Gap Report 2019 <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019>
38 <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-energy-review-2020/global-energy-and-co2-emissions-in-2020>
39 WWF Analyse (2020) "Waldverlust in Zeiten der Corona-Pandemie Holzeinschlag in den Tropen" <https://www.wwf.de/fileadmin/fm-wwf/Publikationen-PDF/WWF-Analyse-Waldverlust-in-Zeiten-der-Corona-Pandemie.pdf> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-nature-environment-green-stimulus-biodiversity/>

40 <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6>

<https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>

41 <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

42 https://www.webcitation.org/5nCeyEYjr?url=http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sternreview_index.htm

Watts et al. (2019) "The 2019 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate" [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)32596-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)32596-6/fulltext)
Human Impact Report Climate Change of the Global Humanitarian Forum Geneva 2009 "The Anatomy of A silent crisis"; WHO (2014) Quantitative risk assessment of the effects of climate change on selected causes of death, 2030s and 2050s https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/134014/9789241507691_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

43 Kissler et al. (2020) "Projecting the transmission dynamics of SARS-CoV 2 through the postpandemic period" *Science* 368 (6493), pp. 860–868; <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/368/6493/860>

COVID-19 pandemic will cause irreversible changes in natural systems that will fundamentally alter the living conditions for human civilisation as should be expected with the climate crisis.

As a result of the measures introduced to combat the pandemic (e.g. travel restrictions, social distancing), international negotiations over dealing with environmental and climate problems (e.g. UNFCCC COP 26, UN Biodiversity Conference, UN SAICM ICCM5) were postponed, some of them indefinitely. As a consequence, important decisions to be made by relevant international regimes were postponed for the time being (e.g. provisions for implementing the Paris Agreement of 2015, global strategic framework for protecting biodiversity until 2030 and international chemicals management post-2020).

All the same, this new situation seems to be giving rise to new (temporary) forms of international cooperation. For example, far more international conferences and meetings are now taking place online as web conferences, such as the Petersberg Climate Dialogue, working group meetings of the Environment Programme of the OECD and most recently the annual meeting of the WHO. This does, however, necessitate adequate technical equipment to allow for participation in such formats. The extent to which these altered forms of working will endure in the long-run and how far international working culture will be structurally altered remains to be seen.

As mentioned earlier, owing to the social and economic impacts of the pandemic in countries of the Global South in particular, given their already often deficient institutional capacities, it is possible that even less resources will be available to them that would allow them to participate effectively in international discussions and negotiations. At the same time, specific interests of these countries are at the risk to be pushed to background (e.g. transboundary movement and management of waste as well as environmental justice), and there is a danger that measures will be introduced which prioritise short-term national economic interests and threaten to push back environmental and sustainability policy in general.⁴⁴ The economic, social and political upheav-

als caused by the coronavirus could have significant negative impacts on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is possible that the majority of global sustainable development goals (SDGs) could be missed, and there may even be regressions. Even if the status quo of existing agreements and instruments of environmental and climate policy are retained due to the pandemic, the advances in environmental and climate protection will be very inconsistent and fragmentary, or there may simply be no advances at all.⁴⁵ For example, if climate protection efforts are not stepped up, compliance with the 1.5° target will not be achieved. The ever-increasing extraction of raw materials, the predicted doubling of chemicals production by 2030 and other global growth dynamics will further increase the pressure on the environment and health.

At the same time, the coronavirus crisis also offers the opportunity to shine a light on the structural weaknesses and consequences of existing unsustainable consumption and production patterns, to learn lessons from them and to tackle the causes of environmental and climate problems together. This is of particular relevance given that the societal experience of the crisis has made the global consequences of the environmental and climate crisis more tangible also in the Global North. The process of financing aid packages and the financial recovery will offer the momentum for expand multilateralism and globally coherent cooperation in order to promote global, regional and local structures with a view to sustainable development.

This recognition seems to prevail internationally despite contradictory statements. Many international organisations, politicians but also representatives of civil society and industry as well as investors have highlighted the coronavirus crisis as a decisive moment in our history. This offers a huge opportunity for the global community to reflect on the economic activity to date and the social and environmental consequences thereof, in other words to use the crisis

44 <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2020-03/donald-trump-coronavirus-usa-anthony-fauci-wirtschaft>; <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/bolsonaro-wirtschaft-wichtiger-als-covid-19-bekaempfung-16762055.html>

45 Global Chemical Outlook II, Part 1 (2019) <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/global-chemicals-outlook-ii-legacies-innovative-solutions> WHO (2016) Public health impact of chemicals: knowns and unknowns <https://www.who.int/ipcs/publications/chemicals-public-health-impact/en/>

to transition towards greater sustainability.⁴⁶ Various countries furthermore want to link their government assistance for companies with measures to protect the climate and those that will help achieve sustainability targets.⁴⁷ It is nevertheless to be expected that due to the differing attitudes and lines of conflict outlined in Section 2.1, international environmental and sustainability policy will not develop consistently towards transformative sustainability.

- ⁴⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/timmermans/announcements/introductory-remarks-frans-timmermans-european-parliaments-envi-committee-meeting-21st-april-2020_en; <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/coronavirus/petersberger-klimadialog-1748020> <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/223671586803837686/Sustainability-Checklist-for-Assessing-Economic-Recovery-Investments-April-2020.pdf> <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/coronavirus/petersberger-klimadialog-1748020> <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/223671586803837686/Sustainability-Checklist-for-Assessing-Economic-Recovery-Investments-April-2020.pdf> <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/coronavirus/petersberger-klimadialog-1748020> <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/223671586803837686/Sustainability-Checklist-for-Assessing-Economic-Recovery-Investments-April-2020.pdf> <https://unric.org/en/petersberg-climate-dialogue-the-highest-cost-is-the-cost-of-doing-nothing/> https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=131_131302-h3nkdr9t7n&title=Ein-inklusive-umweltfreundlicher-Wiederaufbau-ist-moglich%E2%80%93es-ist-Zeit-zu-handeln; <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j54QxE-QjhrEHjGb5LrKsHuDAKvv8LUq/view>; http://theinvestoragenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/THE_INVESTOR_AGENDA_A_SUSTAINABLE_RECOVERY_FROM_COVID-19.pdf <https://www.afr.com/companies/financial-services/recovery-must-be-green-say-big-banks-20200515-p54tc2>; <https://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/medizin/corona-40-millionen-pfleger-und-aerztinnen-fordern-nachhaltige-subventionen-a-b0ac8906-0190-4984-9de6-bf70809e9bb1> <https://www.c4o.org/other/covid-task-force>; https://www.bmu.de/fileadmin/Daten_BMU/Download_PDF/Klimaschutz/declaration_meseberg_2020_bf.pdf; <https://asiatimes.com/2020/05/korea-positioned-for-green-future-post-pandemic/>
- ⁴⁷ <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/corona-kanada-wirtschaftshilfen-101.html>, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/finanzen/massive-staatshilfen-fuer-air-france-klm-16741361.html>

3 Learning from the pandemic – what has changed for international environmental and sustainability policy?

An analysis of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy, geopolitics, the countries of the Global South and international environmental and sustainability policy allows the following

conclusions to be drawn:

- ▶ The cause of the pandemic is very likely to have been a zoonosis⁴⁸. Although the exact transmission route from animal to human has not yet been identified conclusively for COVID-19, scientists are in agreement that there is a heightened probability of zoonosis occurring due to the increasing breakdown of buffer zones between humans and animals. This can happen through livestock farming, the wild life trade and the penetration into unexploited territory for the purpose of agriculture, logging, mining or infrastructure development.⁴⁹ Human-driven climate change is reinforcing these effects.⁵⁰
 - ▶ The pandemic has underlined the mutual dependencies of countries and economies and the vulnerability of the global economy. The virus was able to spread very quickly because of high global mobility. Crisis management in countries of the Global North can moreover have far-reaching consequences for the economies of countries of the Global South. Neither for the countries of the North or the South it can be predicted the progression of the pandemic with any certainty, for example whether there will be a second or any further waves.
 - ▶ It has become apparent that geopolitical balances of power could shift, also depending on the quality of national crisis management. The influence of countries such as the USA and Brazil, whose crisis management has been found wanting on a national level and who are refusing any international cooperation, could diminish. There is also
- a risk of short and medium-term destabilisation in geopolitically important countries (G20), e.g. India, Chile, Russia or Brazil.
- ▶ There is a danger that the economic inequalities between countries of the Global South and North will deepen. New tensions may arise, caused by, for example, the economic or political destabilisation of countries or new migration flows.
 - ▶ The pandemic has brought new issues to the forefront of international politics. In addition to public health care provision and pandemic preparation, this principally includes the need for resilient economic and societal structures. Questions of fairer global trade, protecting human rights and more effective environmental and climate protection are also addressed against this backdrop.
 - ▶ Competent and successful crisis management calls for good governance on every level. The public sector (government, administration departments, parliament, scientific institutions) and with some limitations international organisations too have proved themselves as vital powers in organising effective crisis management. Acceptance of government-decreed infection prevention measures and the populace's trust in their government appears to be another important factor in successful crisis management.⁵¹
 - ▶ Countries with efficient (public) health systems can contain the pandemic better even when large numbers of cases are reported due to other circumstances.⁵² Efficient social security systems and any additional financial resources provided can lessen the socio-economic impacts.

48 P. Zhou et al. (2020) "A pneumonia outbreak associated with a new coronavirus of probable bat origin", *Nature* 579, 270–273

49 IPBES Global Assessment (2019)

50 <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/science-points-causes-covid-19>

51 See also https://www.diw.de/de/diw_01.c.793750.de/nachrichten/die_deutschen_sind_zufrieden_mit_dem_krisenmanagement_der_politik.html

52 <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/corona-krise-in-grafiken-so-sind-gesundheitssysteme-weltweit-auf-pandemien-vorbereitet-a-906a0530-3f59-4bef-bbfc-d863d0a7efb1>

- A further factor in successful crisis management seems to be the degree to which a society is digitalised – both in urban and rural areas. This applies all over the world and particularly in countries of the Global South.

The following **starting points** for a future international environmental and sustainability policy can be identified based on these summarising conclusions. The principal aims are to manage key challenges such as the climate and biodiversity crises in addition to social inequality, as well as reducing the overall susceptibility to crises.

A nexus of health and the environment as the nucleus of sustainability policy

In 2015, the UN General Assembly accepted 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) with 169 targets as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 17 SDGs, which apply to all countries, take into account all three dimensions of sustainability – social, environmental and economic – in equal measure. They should be viewed as integrated and inseparably linked so that the success of one goal is often dependent on progress towards other goals. For example, the quality of the environment has a significant influence on the health and well-being of human beings.⁵³ Conversely, both human's ever greater penetration into natural areas and climate change have negative impacts on ecosystems and their services for human well-being.⁵⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic as probable consequence of a zoonosis underlined this connection in several dimensions. In addition to the consequence of insufficient consideration being given to animal welfare and health, the increase of human intervention in nature plays an important role in an occurrence of zoonosis. Zoonotic diseases are central to issues such as poverty and inequality. These diseases disproportionately affect people in the Global South⁵⁵. If an epidemic or even a pandemic develops from an instance of zoonosis, this also has social, health and economic impacts for the Global North. According to UNEP, three new infectious diseases emerge every

year on average. 75 % of all emerging diseases arise from zoonosis.⁵⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic therefore exemplifies the need for an integrated global health and environmental policy⁵⁷ if the goals of the 2030 Agenda are to be achieved.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the potential consequences when this nexus is given insufficient attention.

Making resilience a guiding principle of environmental and sustainability policy

The pandemic has exposed the vulnerability, in other words the lack of resilience, of the globally connected and hyper-mobile modern world. Resilience means the ability of a society to cope with external incidents in such a way that their vital system functions are not affected.⁵⁸

Resilience therefore also aims to avoid damage through systemic and preventative measures. It has already been shown in the Stern Review on climate policy⁵⁹ and explanations of the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative⁶⁰ that this preventative approach makes good economic sense, in other words that avoiding environmental damage is more economically advantageous than repairing it once it has occurred. There is now a general consensus among economists with regard to climate protection.⁶¹

According to the approach of “transformative resilience” developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Center (JRC), a resilient society is capable of managing ongoing structural changes and reacting to them by either resisting a shock (absorptive capacity) or showing a certain degree of flexibility and adapting to minor changes to the system (adaptive capacity). If an incident can no longer be managed, the system must be able to reflect on itself and make larger-scale changes that could result in a transformation in an extreme case (transformative capacity). The

53 WHO (2015) “Connecting Global Priorities: Biodiversity and Human Health – A State of Knowledge Review” <https://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/biodiversity-human-health/en/>

54 OECD 2012: OECD-Umweltausblick bis 2050 DIE KONSEQUENZEN DES NICHTANDELNS <https://www.oecd.org/berlin/publikationen/umweltausblick.htm>

55 German Network against Neglected Tropical Diseases DNTD (2019) “The One Health Approach as a key function to combat neglected tropical diseases”; BMBF “Globale Gesundheit im Mittelpunkt der Forschung – Förderkonzept: Vernachlässigte und armutsbegünstigte Krankheiten”

56 <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/science-points-causes-covid-19>

57 The term environmental policy encompasses various aspects. It comprises nature and biodiversity conservation and climate protection, as well as measures aimed at reducing pollutant inputs.

58 Sabine Blum, Martin Endreß, Stefan Kaufmann, Benjamin Rampp: Soziologische Perspektiven. In: Rüdiger Wink (Hrsg.): Multidisziplinäre Perspektiven der Resilienzforschung. Springer VS, Wiesbaden 2016, ISBN 978-3-658-09623-6, pp. 151–177.

59 https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+tf_/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_index.cfm

60 <https://www.eld-initiative.org/>

61 <https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/expertconsensusreport.pdf>

resilience of a society comprises the resilience of its capital stocks (nature, people, society, technosphere), the resilience of its “engine” (ecosystem and social system services, institutions, production processes) and the resilience of its outputs (quality of life of its people) (JRC 2020).⁶² It is vital to realise this need for resilience for, if possible, every societal and economic subsystem.

The resilience of one system must not be to the detriment of the resilience of other systems. Societies and their subsystems (e. g. health systems) can therefore only be resilient if they reduce structural inequalities and systematically take into account the demands of the “leave no one behind” sustainable development goals – both internally and externally. There is an urgent need to support the countries of the Global South in this respect so as to enable them to establish resilient systems that are appropriate for their local needs despite the impacts of the coronavirus crisis and to be able to develop them continuously.

An overriding focus on economic cost efficiency in political decisions while suppressing externalities is not compatible with this new principle. This is because resilience requires redundancy, the non-usage of exploitable resources (“buffer”), which represents a wastage from a predominantly economic perspective.⁶³ Resilience also makes inefficiencies in the use of natural resources necessary, which could give rise to a trade-off with existing environmental policy objectives (e. g. resource efficiency).

Resilience requires governance for the common good through strong governmental and international institutions

The crisis has underlined the need for governmental institutions that are capable of acting on a national level. This also applies on an international level, however. The pandemic has shown that focussing solely on national interests is a hindrance to crisis management. There is a sizeable need for international cooperation due to international economic and financial ties and the dependencies that arise from such interrelations. The same applies to combating the global climate and environmental crises effectively. The various crises have illustrated that globalised markets without sufficient governance for the common good have tended to produce fragile systems.

Digital techniques as a problem solving factor for global environmental problems

If used wisely, digital technologies are an important tool which can help us understand and manage the many different aspects of a crisis. It has become apparent that countries of the Global South with a well-developed IT infrastructure appear to be in a better position to cope with the COVID-19 crisis than those with less comprehensive digitalisation. In this sense, a digital culture is an important problem solving factor for global environmental problems.⁶⁴ The risks of digitalisation for the environment and society, for example the exploitation of digital opportunities by the private sector, certainly must not be overlooked.⁶⁵

⁶² <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/building-scientific-narrative-towards-more-resilient-eu-society-part-1-conceptual-framework>

⁶³ <https://www.metropolis-verlag.de/Endlich-im-Endlichen/796/book.do>

⁶⁴ As with every technological innovation, there are also risks associated with digitalisation. Its usage must therefore also be conceived with resilience in mind.

⁶⁵ <https://netzpolitik.org/2019/umweltgutachten-digitalisierung-ist-heute-brandbeschleuniger-fuer-ressourcen-raubbau-und-ungleichheit/>

4 Measures for the ongoing development of international environmental and sustainability policy

The section below contains recommended measures as to how international environmental and sustainability policy should react to the pandemic and its impacts. This relates first of all to the current fight against the pandemic and its socio-economic impacts, secondly to the immediate prevention of further pandemics⁶⁶ and thirdly to the main features of a future international environmental and sustainability policy.

The current fight against the pandemic and its socio-economic impacts

It is increasingly clear that the countries of the Global South – due to structural handicaps and global economic ties – have only a limited capability to manage the crisis effectively and to deal with the economic impacts of the pandemic. The countries of the Global North have an obligation to support the countries of the Global South in handling the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in line with their solidary contribution to achieving the goals of the 2030 sustainability agenda, but also purely out of economic self-interest with regard to resilient supply chains, (future) sales markets and combating the causes of flight.

The goals for sustainable development are integrated, indivisible and global in outlook. Short-term crisis management support for the countries of the Global South and assistance with combating hunger and poverty are therefore also needed from an environmental viewpoint, as are long-term aid programmes. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have already taken the first measures, yet neither organisation estimates that these will be sufficient.

Immediate prevention of further pandemics

Scientists believe that the occurrence of zoonosis can be traced back to the increased demand for animal proteins, the intensification of agriculture, the unsustainable use of natural resources, the exploitation of wild animals, changes to food supply chains and

climate change.⁶⁷ The increase in travel and transportation further raises the risk of spreading diseases. These drivers now regularly feature simultaneously, which intensifies their impact.

In order to avoid zoonosis and their pandemics spread, the One Health approach⁶⁸ must be given greater international attention. As an integrative approach to sustainable health management, this strategy takes into account the close relationships between human and animal health, a healthy environment, food security and agriculture. The drivers of zoonosis mentioned earlier are strongly linked to environmental and climate issues. This is why the One Health approach must give closer consideration to these aspects in the future in order to avoid as far as possible further conceivable pandemics that may entail even more dramatic consequences⁶⁹. The One Health approach is ideally suited to aligning important overarching spheres of activity within environmental, health and climate policy in keeping with the 2030 Agenda. It requires effective and coherent cooperation between states and international organisations (above all between the OECD and the UN system, e.g. WHO, FAO, UNEP, ILO, UNDP). The spheres of activity within such a cooperation include interdisciplinary research into the causes and drivers of zoonosis, the creation of structures for data collection, observing and monitoring, information gathering, capacity building in organisations, informing and involving the various stakeholders (including indigenous and local communities or local decision-makers) as well as the development of prevention measures.

It is important for there to be a cooperation between the CBD and the FAO, also involving the WHO and UNFCCC, with regard to habitat encroachment and climate-change related spread of pathogens.

66 This includes climate protection and nature conservation.

67 UNEP 2020, "Preventing the next Pandemic – Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission" <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and>

68 <https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/Infekt/Antibiotikaresistenz/One-Health/One-Health-Konzept.html>

69 CBD/SBSTTA21/9 (2017) "Guidance on integrating biodiversity considerations into one health approaches" <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/8e34/8c61/a535d23833e68906c8c7551a/sbstta-21-09-en.pdf>

The WHO and UNFCCC should be involved firstly because the health dimensions must be given adequate consideration, and secondly because climate change is contributing to a reduction of habitats. It is evident that the CBD, supported by the IPBES⁷⁰, can make important contributions in this respect.⁷¹

The latest science shows that zoonosis cannot be completely prevented, which makes a close network of monitoring and information all the more necessary.⁷² The WHO, FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) have drawn up standards and recommended actions with a view to implementing the One Health approach.⁷³ The Codex Alimentarius is one such document that applies in this respect.⁷⁴

The prevailing standards for preventing zoonosis, including beside others health and hygiene standards and management measures in livestock farming, should be reviewed in order to ascertain whether these standards require updating in order to prevent future zoonoses and/or be able to identify and contain it as early as possible. In the interests of all, it must be ensured that these standards and particularly the monitoring and information systems are actually implemented. In this respect, in addition to a cooperation involving the FAO, the WHO and the OIE, an interaction with the CBD and, where appropriate, the IMO and/or fisheries organisations is to be recommended. The International Labour Organisation, which is responsible for protecting employees, should also be involved.

Measures to preserve the climate and biodiversity make a considerable contribution to preventing the occurrence of zoonoses and the spread of disease-carrying organisms at an early stage. Concrete political measures that create incentives and provisions concerning that matter are therefore extremely important in preventing zoonoses and the

pandemics that result from them. Specific examples include promoting the sustainable use of land and sea areas, conservation, renaturation, joining together wild habitats and suitable climate protection measures.

Main features of a future international environmental and sustainability policy

International environmental and sustainability policy must focus more on the connection between environmental, climate and health policy in its analyses and programmes as well as its communication. This applies not only to the aforementioned pandemic prevention but also to other fields of environmental conservation that have a direct or indirect influence on human health, including the effects of climate change, air pollution and the use of chemicals. Health problems associated with environmental and climate change are by their very nature not contained by national boundaries. They also occur in identical or similar forms in different countries. The international exchange of scientific findings and joint action to protect humans and the environment is required in order to minimise the global impacts of environmental and climate-induced damage (to health).

There should furthermore be international cooperation in the interest of effective political coherence (SDG Target 17.14) so that environmental and climate-related aspects of any future health and economic policy will be given full consideration.

Moreover, the aforementioned approaches, in particular the nexus of health and environmental policy, resilience principle and governance for the common good, should be embedded as guiding principles through political decisions or even through legally binding agreements. These starting points would provide the necessary reinforcement for a future international environmental and sustainability policy. They should apply generally and be taken into account as part of sectoral policies at an international level. This could be achieved through a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations – even if only in the form of a so-called soft law. It would also make sense if these guiding principles were to be included in the Global Pact for the Environment proposed by French president

70 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) <https://ipbes.net/about>

71 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) <https://ipbes.net/about>

72 https://www.openagrar.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/openagrar_derivate_00029962/FAQ-Zoonosen_2020-05-14.pdf

73 <https://www.oie.int/en/for-the-media/onehealth/oie-approach/>

74 The complexity of the task is illustrated by the graphic published on the website. The Codex Alimentarius is a collection of more than 300 standards, guidelines and codes of practice for international food security. It is based on estimates provided by and decisions made by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a joint body of the FAO and the WHO of the United Nations. <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/en>

Emmanuel Macron in 2017.⁷⁵ Another possibility is the New Global Deal suggested by the UN General Secretary in mid-July 2020.⁷⁶

Future environmental and sustainability policy must give greater consideration to the interconnectedness of the global economy. The following two measures should be implemented in the short-term, even though aspects such as export subsidies in the countries of the Global North, investment protection agreements and illegal or illegitimate land appropriation must likewise be discussed further: Firstly, a footprint perspective, in other words a consumption-based consideration of imported and exported environmental impacts in addition to the usual territorial perspective, should be incorporated in national and international environmental reporting⁷⁷ in order to highlight displacement effects of unsustainable production and consumption patterns (burden shifting). One challenge lies in connecting the steadily improving availability of data about the environmental impacts that are generated through trade flows with findings about local and regional consequences, and converting that data into political action. Following on from the consideration of the footprint of the Global North, the second measure is for global supply chains to be designed to be more eco-friendly, to which end potential conflicts of interest with resilience need to be addressed. Governments should now use the opportunity⁷⁸ to align the extensive concepts, guidelines and regulations in corporate due diligence from the field of human rights more strongly with environmental and climate protection. This demands constructive interaction between national governments, companies, civil society and international organisations such as the UNEP, OECD and UN Global Compact. Legal frameworks such as a European supply chain law⁷⁹ can create a level playing field which helps responsible business conduct to penetrate the market. In the interests of sustainable

development, laws covering corporate due diligence for global companies must be combined with effective and intelligent regulation in host countries in order to have the necessary effects, which need to be supported by public and, increasingly, private-sector development cooperation.

International institutions and organisations are places where countries and stakeholders discuss and address global threats together and develop goals, contributions and measures for a global transformation toward greater sustainability. As the coronavirus crisis has shown, they are of vital importance in preventing pandemics as well as with managing other crises, such as the climate or biodiversity crises. International organisations and programmes looking to deal with global and cross-border environmental and climate problems must continue to function effectively and expand their activities, coherence and collaboration in the interests of a sustainable transformation.

To this end, Germany and the EU must increase their financial support and commitment in order to compensate for the loss of funds from other countries and to make up for the setbacks caused by the coronavirus crisis. This will allow them to seize potential opportunities for transformative processes. Efforts should also be made to reduce the partly considerable backlogs in institutional capacity, thereby helping to ensure and strengthen the full participation of countries of the Global South in international processes despite the global post-coronavirus recession. Doing so will moreover allow their interests and needs to be taken into account with a view to successfully implementing the 2030 Agenda.

The crisis has led to new forms of communication and cooperation being tested on a large scale. They can help to relieve the burden on the environment by reducing the use of transport and can improve the transfer of knowledge. International conferences and negotiation processes can be simplified, strengthened and be designed to fairer and more inclusive by means of digital forms of communication. In securing or establishing the necessary capacity, they offer the opportunity for experts from countries of the Global South, for example, those who cannot benefit from traveling cost assumption, to participate appropriately. Nevertheless, successful agreements and the preparation of viable draft resolutions of, for

75 <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/climate-and-environment/sustainable-development-environment/events/article/environment-global-pact-project-24-05-19#:~:text=In%20September%202017%2C%20the%20French,working%20group%20in%20May%202018.>

76 <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/guterres-un-grundsatzrede-101.html>

77 <https://www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/de/home/themen/wirtschaft-konsum/publikationen-studien/publikationen/umwelt-fussabdruecke-der-schweiz.html>

78 A breakthrough in this field came ten years ago in the form of an article in a piece of US legislation that was passed in response to the global financial crisis of 2008/09: the Dodd-Frank Act, Section 1502. It triggered a dynamic political debate, in the aftermath of which wide-ranging standards and guidelines were developed, diverse voluntary initiatives concerning the certification of sustainable supply chains emerged and various laws were passed around the world with innovative approaches to regulation.

79 Cf. Chapter 3.3.1 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1590574123338&uri=CELEX:52020DC0380>

example, international negotiation processes such as those mentioned earlier, can only be achieved through physical meetings of all the participants. Face-to-face activities can be reduced to a minimum in bilateral collaborations and development cooperation work too, and can be organised to be both more substantial and more flexible through digital forms of work and meetings. The prerequisite for this form of cooperation is the impetus towards the sustainable establishment of the necessary infrastructure, both for international organisations and for countries of the Global North and South.

The strengthening and results-oriented organisation of the science-policy interface, as well as interfaces between science and the public, is particularly important in enabling decision-makers in politics and the sciences to justify environmental, health and climate protection measures on scientific findings. At the same time, this allows the public to better understand and accept correlations and necessary measures.

There appears to be a need for scientific clarification with regard to the new guiding principle of “resilience”, particularly in relation to what the implementation of this guiding principle means in tangible terms both in national contexts as well as in individual economic and societal systems. An institutionalised form of collecting, processing and provision of knowledge in relation to the guiding principle of resilience would therefore be extremely useful. The work of the global biodiversity council, the IPBES, in the course of its agenda for 2019–2030 could make a meaningful contribution.⁸⁰ This panel addresses questions on the significance of biodiversity for the goals of the 2030 Agenda, the causes of and measures that combat biodiversity loss as well as the reciprocal influences of biodiversity and business.

The coronavirus crisis has also shown that governmental institutions can indeed provide a framework but that it is decisive in whether social institutions will contribute and innovate in their own right⁸¹. Voluntary civil-society and private-sector initiatives with clear objectives and as concrete action plans as possible are playing an increasingly important role in implementing sustainability requirements. In

the interests of sustainable development, all actors should therefore, through their own activities and initiatives, also encourage other relevant actors to take action and bring them together. This can be done through (dialogue) platforms, for example, which act as interfaces between the sciences, the private sector, politics and civil society. Connecting the various institutions and individuals facilitates the joint development of new transformative solutions. Examples of this on an international level include the International Sustainable Chemistry Collaborate Centre (ISC3) and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC).⁸²

Towns and municipalities which determine the framework for local environmental and sustainability policy have a special role in the transformation. They are the problem solvers in every conceivable crisis in their respective communities. International cooperation between towns and municipalities should be supported and given institutional backing where appropriate in order to strengthen their position and promote the exchange of experiences.⁸³

80 https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/decision_ipbes-7_1_en.pdf
81 <https://voxeu.org/article/coming-battle-covid-19-narrative>

82 <https://www.isc3.org/en/home.html> und <https://ccacoalition.org/en>
83 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/05/cities-post-pandemic-world-order-multilateralism/>

5 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly plunged the world into a deep crisis. It has exposed the existing problems and challenges in international cooperation, and sometimes exacerbated them. This turning point also offers the opportunity to pause, to rethink previous approaches to solutions and to realign international environmental and sustainability policy.

A key realisation is that economic and societal systems are fragile and vulnerable due to their international ties and the high mobility of people. The necessary response is to demand and organise greater resilience and to make this demand a new starting point for international environmental and sustainability policy.

International cooperation must moreover be strengthened and consolidated. Economic globalisation demands a framework, created through international accords and agreements, that safeguards the mutual interests of all countries of the Global North and South, derived from the self-interest of a globally connected human race. Fundamentally, this is not a new realisation, but it has been spectacularly confirmed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is not yet possible to predict where this journey will lead. This pandemic is not the only threat that requires intelligent and decisive action on an international level – we must face up to climate change together if we wish to avoid the disastrous consequences that the IPCC has predicted.



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