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| Global catastrophic risks mitigated | Risk multipliers managed | Implementation timeframe |
| Climate change | Institutions that lack inclusivity or accountability | Short |
| Eco-system collapse | | |
| Unknown risks | | |

Accountability for state violations of planetary boundaries

Our international institutions are the creation of sovereign states. As such they are rarely able to hold states to account. And yet so many of the global problems we face are the result of state action. How can a system designed by states hold states to account? This question is particularly pressing when it comes to threats to the very fabric of our ecosystem itself – our planetary boundaries.

DETAILS

Our global system has considerable potential to conduct monitoring and evaluation of member states. What it is less able to do is use this information to hold states to account – but this is a role civil society can play. By enhancing the monitoring and evaluation elements of our global system, and then using this information as the basis for accountability campaigns, accountability and standard setting can be enhanced.

Such an approach is already in evidence in a number of places such as in our response to sexual exploitation and abuse, financial corruption and human rights violations. But it is particularly important to further develop, enhance and systematise such processes when it comes to biodiversity.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS

Enhancing inclusivity and accountability in national and global governance

While data and legal provision may be imperfect, the real gap is when it comes to its systemic application by civil society. There have been a number of effective civil society accountability campaigns, but they are ad hoc in nature and not globally coordinated, and southern civil society is underrepresented with consequences for the movements' credibility and reach. By drawing attention to the impact and potential of this approach through the UN75 process, and by championing the notion of global coalitions of civil society, Together First hopes to encourage and strengthen such a strategy and broaden the network of civil society organisations working on the issue.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Implementation strategy

Much of the data that is needed to hold states to account is already being collected. The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data have access to a wide range of data covering all of the sustainable development goals - which between them cover a significant amount of the data needed to understand our planetary boundaries particularly when it comes to biodiversity and the threats to our ecosystems.

However in other areas there are significant gaps - for example when it comes to biodiversity where the University of Massachusetts Boston and Universidad EAFIT study seeks to bridge them. There is also information that our international institutions possess but do not publish. (To take an example from another area: civil society vetting of the human rights records of UN peacekeepers would be much more straightforward if the United Nations were to systematically publish details of all units deployed and their unit commanders). Further strengthening of internal accountability and transparency mechanisms, including internal oversight and auditing, can further add value here.

There are more fundamental gaps when it comes to our international legal system. To this end Common Home for Humanity are organising a conference to further develop the idea of meaningful international legal frameworks, and are then targeting upcoming events such as the 2021 UN Environmental Assembly in Nairobi and the 2022 50th anniversary commemorations of the founding of the UN Environment programme as hooks to promote the idea.

Decision makers and implementers

Work by Common Home for Humanity has shown the possibility of giving ecosystems, global public goods, and ultimately our planetary boundaries themselves legal recognition. Such an approach would enable legal advocacy to take place in parallel to civil society advocacy and ultimately make the monitoring and evaluation of state behaviour a basis for legal action.

MITIGATING RISKS

Mitigating eco-system collapse

There are currently five governance mechanisms that address biodiversity loss and ecosystems management: the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Yet in all cases, the level of implementation has not been empirically measured and is largely unknown. As a result, there is no baseline against which to assess performance, actions, or even expectations.

Work by the University of Massachusetts Boston and Universidad EAFIT seeks to address this through an analysis of

the implementation of the global biodiversity conventions, assessing the actions signatory countries have taken to fulfill their commitments, the national and global synergies among the different instruments and the process of implementing the Post-2020 Framework.

The next step requires civil society to use this data to name and shame, name and praise and otherwise apply pressure to member states to meet these standards.

Mitigating unknown risks

It is important to take steps to ensure that our global system is fit for purpose. Otherwise greater openness could lead to greater disillusionment. Our international institutions need to walk the talk, and civil society can help hold them to account to ensure this happens. Monitoring and appraisal mechanisms should be dramatically improved, and a culture of principled independent leadership engendered. As Sir Brian Urquhart once said, “no amount of reform will compensate for the lack of leadership”. This reform will provide mechanisms to hold our international institutions to account.