

# Policy Statement on Environmental Sustainability



Swedish Organization  
for Global Health

Author: Mathilda Rudén

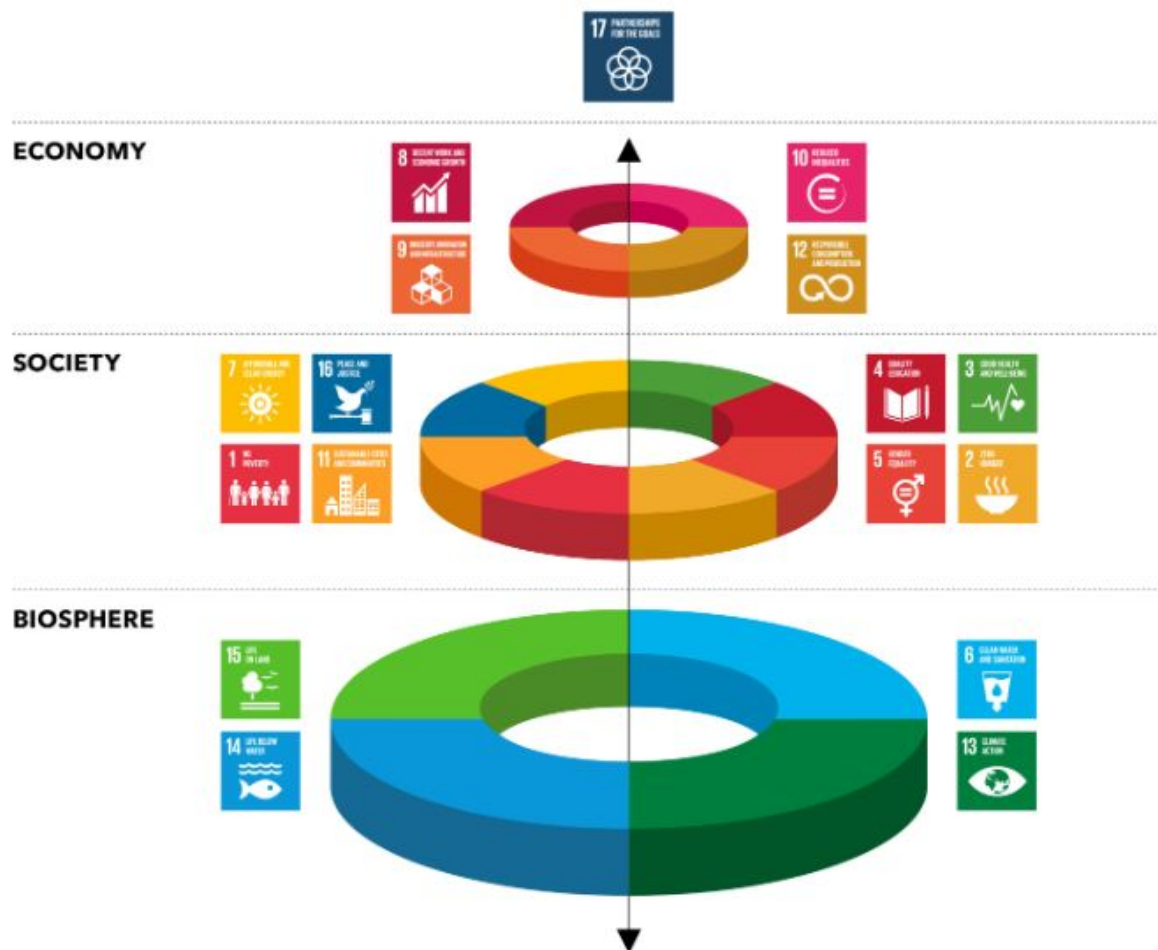
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## Introduction

For the first time in the 200,000 years humanity has been on earth, we find ourselves in a place where we have achieved many great improvements while simultaneously having a detrimental impact on the earth's system. Especially since 1950, we have seen life expectancy increasing, the mortality rate of children under 5 decreasing significantly, and more people jumping over the poverty line- with obvious variations between countries<sup>1</sup>. All great news. However, the Great Acceleration<sup>2</sup>, which is defined as the huge increment of human activities in the last 70 years, and the way we have built our economy<sup>3</sup> has pushed the earth into a new geological era, the Anthropocene, where human activities are changing the earth's system. Humanity has made many steps forward in public health, education, human rights, and reduction of inequalities during this period<sup>4,5</sup>. The problem is that what brought us these great achievements brought with it some costs. Leaving the earth's system out of the equation of progress has been creating an imbalance in those ecological and biophysical systems that humanity's survival and ability to thrive depend on<sup>6,7</sup>. Climate change, biodiversity loss, nitrogen, and phosphorus flows are just a few of the consequences we are facing, and because of which we have already passed the dangerous zone, as explained by the planetary boundaries framework<sup>8</sup>. These earth imbalances are already having a concrete effect on human health around the world, following an unequal distribution pattern, where the minor contributors in creating those imbalances face the worst effects of these changes<sup>9</sup>. As stated by the latest Lancet Countdown Report, published in November 2019, "*The life of every child born today will be profoundly affected by climate change, with populations around the world increasingly facing extremes of weather, food and water insecurity, changing patterns of infectious disease, and a less certain future. Without accelerated intervention, this new era will come to define the health of people at every stage of their lives*".

Many health and environmental scientists, as well as economists, are telling us we now have a narrow window of opportunity to avoid detrimental consequences for humanity. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are providing the framework (Graph 1) to make the shifts needed, both from an individual perspective and, most importantly, a societal one<sup>10,11</sup>.



**Graph 1.** Illustrating the 17 Sustainable Development Goals from a perspective of the biosphere as a precondition for social justice, economic development and sustainability; by Johan Rockström and Pavan Sukhdev, Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University.

## Swedish Organization for Global Health’s position

Sustainability is the theme of our time and one of the core values at the Swedish Organization for Global Health (SOGH). SOGH, a Swedish non-profit and non-governmental organization comprised of passionate students and young professionals, has the aim of promoting global health through evidence-based actions. The concept of *health* is broad and, most importantly, must include the health

of the ecosystem and environment around us, as humans and the environment constantly influence each other.

During its five years as an organization, SOGH has primarily focused on the human aspect of health. However, it has become clear that human health cannot exist without considering the health of our planet. SOGH has, therefore, come to the conclusion that the only way to discuss health is in terms of planetary health. Planetary health comes in several definitions, but all incorporate sustainability. According to The Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet Commission “*planetary health is the achievement of the highest attainable standard of health, wellbeing, and equity worldwide through judicious attention to the human systems—political, economic, and social—that shape the future of humanity and the Earth’s natural systems that define the safe environmental limits within which humanity can flourish. Put simply, planetary health is the health of human civilization and the state of the natural systems on which its depends*”<sup>1</sup>.

With this being stated, SOGH shall continue to carry out its mission to strive for improving the quality and accessibility of health care and health promotion, together with local and international partners, but also within the planetary health frame and guided by SDGs framework.

## **Action for SOGH to take**

Our organization, meaning all our members when doing activities/actions in SOGH’s name, shall:

1. Reduce the environmental impact of our projects/activities and take precautionary actions, if possible, to minimize any future detrimental impact for the environment and people’s health;
  - If projects aim to aid a product or a service, preferably choose the one that is most socially and environmentally sustainable.
  - Avoid printing on paper if the material can be communicated through electronic devices and online platforms.
  - When traveling for SOGH, choose the most environmentally friendly way to travel, when possible.
  - Leftover-food served at SOGH meetings or events should either be brought home by SOGH members or arrangements should be made, beforehand, with a local organization that can reallocate the untouched food to people in need.

- At meetings, events and other gatherings hosted by SOGH, the use of disposables should be avoided and sorting glass, plastics, paper etc. afterwards should be always done.
  - At meetings, events and other gatherings hosted by SOGH where food is served, choose food with low carbon emission outcomes that follow the planetary health diet<sup>12</sup> and do not have a detrimental social impact (e.g. vegan or vegetarian options, locally produced and certified fair trade food).
  - To minimize the energy waste from computers, turn off the device and unplug it when not in use.
2. Increase knowledge and awareness around planetary health;
- Discuss with and educate attendees about planetary health during events and meetings.
  - Use social media channels and blogs to promote planetary health and inform people about it.
3. Engage in activities that support and contribute to social and environmental sustainability;
- Attend meetings, protests or events promoting planetary health.
  - Support other like-minded organizations by sharing their projects on social media.
  - Avoid collaborating with organizations/companies that do not match our vision and do not put planetary health at the core of their activities.

## References

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