

Can we save the planet?

Experts ring the bell, we still do have hope.

Ten years

"It is only over the next 10 years from here to 2030 that we can influence what is going to happen. The scary thing is that after 2030 it basically doesn't really matter what humans do. We will be in danger of those tipping points having a domino effect on each other and we will lose total control."

That was the stark warning issued by Ms. Christiana Figueres at the Tokyo Forum 2020 Online, an important international conference on climate change and other critical items on the global agenda, hosted last December by Japan's prestigious University of Tokyo in collaboration with Korea's Chey Institute for Advanced Studies. Figueres was one of the people most responsible for the successful conclusion of the historic Paris Agreement, 2015's groundbreaking

accord on climate change.

In another excellent Forum presentation, Dr. Johan Rockström, Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and Professor of Earth System Science at the University of Potsdam, raised the alarm about nine tipping elements and stressed that "these are all interconnected systems and they might start having strong cascading effects."

"For example, we experience accelerated melting of ice in the Arctic and on Greenland, causing the absorption of more heat from the Sun when melted-ice surfaces get darker. This also leads to more freshwater flowing into the North Atlantic, slowing down the ocean circulation of heat and the Gulf Stream, which in turn affects the functioning of the monsoon rainfall systems over the

Amazon and West Africa, causing more droughts and forest fires, releasing even more carbon. The slowdown in heat exchange in the ocean also locks in warm surface waters in the Southern Ocean, which accelerates the melting of ice sheets in Antarctica. All systems on Earth are inter-connected, potentially triggering cascades."

Like Figueres, Rockström doesn't pull any punches about what it all means.

"The scale and speed in our hyper-connected world are such that we're getting close to hitting the ceiling of the earth system's capacity to remain stable," he said. "Scientifically you can make the case for declaring a state of planetary emergency. We're at risk of undermining the stability of the entire earth system."

Is he, as the climate change deniers would insist, just an "alarmist," or are far too many of us not nearly alarmed enough?

The good news

"Global Commons Stewardship in the Anthropocene"-themed forum wasn't all doom and gloom, however.

Speakers pointed to a number of positive trends in the last few years, including:

- Increased corporate understanding of climate disruption and willingness to embrace new business models. Many aiming for carbon neutrality by 2050 or sooner.
- Increased citizen awareness of climate change reality due to increasing number and severity of wildfires, floods, hurricanes, etc.

Keynote speaker Jeffery Sachs, University Professor at Columbia University, Director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and a well-known commentator on U.S. cable news, said as follows.

"What we need is humanity together,

not any country first. This is a global commons challenge. Our society is so divided. People are yelling at each other. They are fighting with each other. They are not cooperating even to save their own lives. We need to be guided by knowledge and by science in order to face challenges like Covid-19 or climate change induced by human activity."

But how can we do this – and how will we know if we are succeeding?

We need to have guidelines, pathways that will show us effective and achievable ways forward towards a prosperous but carbon zero future. We also need to have reliable metrics that will enable us to accurately judge.

In answer to this need, last August the University of Tokyo established the Center for Global Commons (CGC) led by the Forum's chief organizer, Dr. Naoko Ishii, whose illustrious career has included stints as Japan's Deputy Vice Minister of Finance and CEO and Chairperson of the GEF (Global Environment Facility).

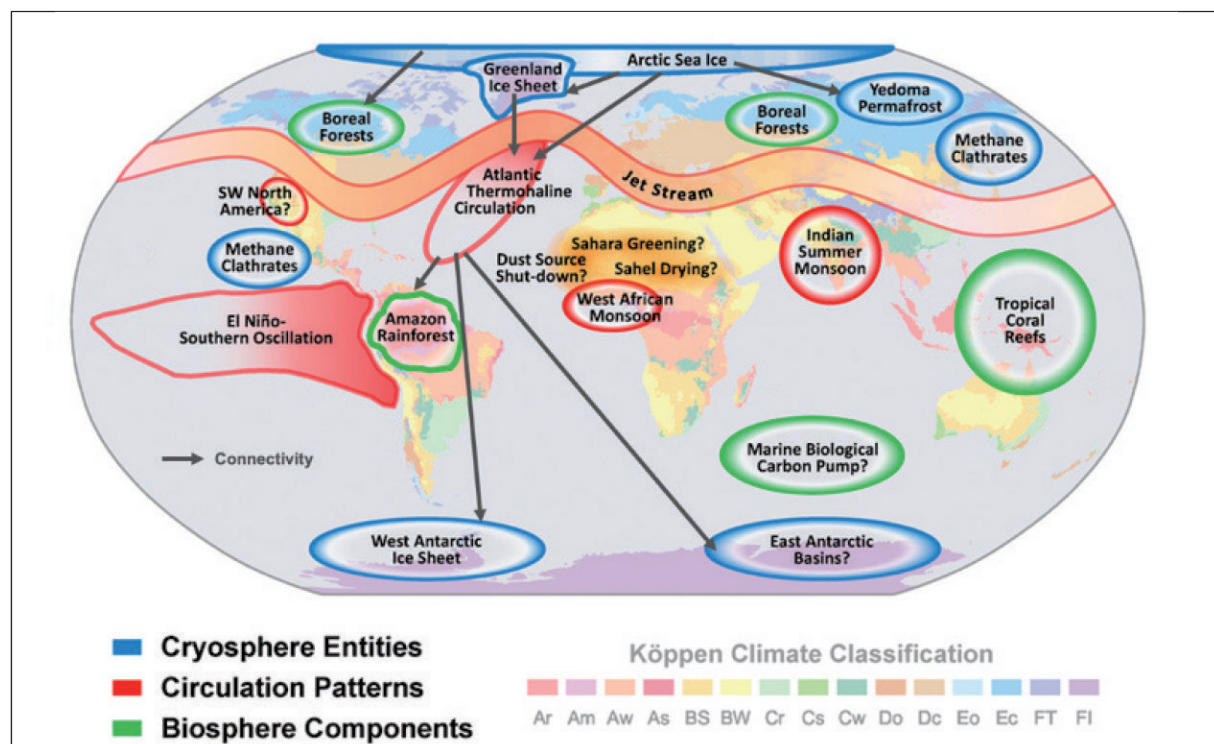
One of the Center's first major accomplishments has been the launch of the pilot version of an innovative, "Global Commons Stewardship Index," a comprehensive system for objectively tracking and evaluating the impact each country is having on the Global Commons at a national level. The Global Commons Stewardship Index will be an invaluable tool in helping governments to develop more effective climate change policies and judging their success or failure.

Through developments such as the Tokyo Forum 2020 Online, the creation of the CGC and the introduction of the Global Commons Stewardship Index, we can see that the academics and scientists are doing their part to save the planet.

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Source: Tipping Elements - the Achilles Heels of the Earth System — Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (pik-potsdam.de)