



# Sustainability Corner

## A Common Place

The notion of a 'commons' comes originally from the English common – a place where travellers could graze their animals by right as they passed through a village. History tells us that such places were poorly managed and unkempt. Why? Because short-term gain was the only objective of each user.

Humans are simply not very good at a cooperative approach to long-term management of resources for which there is no clear ownership. Unfortunately, our planet is just such a place.

Issues of commons management are emerging in the current discussion about minerals exploitation in national parks, and they are a key theme in the arguments about global warming and carbon budgets, to be addressed in Copenhagen in December.

Global warming is predicted to cause an increasing frequency and scale of extreme climatic events, such as the typhoons that have recently hit the Philippines. Is the rate of such large scale events increasing? The answer is no for geologically related disasters (volcanism, earthquakes, etc). But for climatically mediated disasters (typhoons, hurricanes, droughts, etc), the answer is yes.

How to manage our planet as a commons. That is the challenge we must all embrace.



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