



Accelerating the Sustainability Revolution

5-year strategic direction for
The Natural Step International
2012-2017

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years the Natural Step has been at the forefront of sustainable development work globally. We have developed a holistic Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) that both defines the end goal of a sustainable society and provides a methodology for organizations and communities of any type to work strategically towards that end goal. We have worked with hundreds of leading corporations and municipalities to help them use the FSSD to embed sustainability into their strategies, operations, products and services. We have developed tools and approaches that enable and facilitate transformational social and organizational change. And we have fostered commitment and competence in hundreds of global leaders and practitioners in businesses and local governments to lead the transition to a sustainable society.

Yet despite all of this great work, the progress we have made as a global society to both understand the systems change we need, and to develop solutions and actions that shift us toward a more sustainable world is undeniably insufficient. Global sustainability is an urgent issue and time is running out.

We need to accelerate the sustainability revolution. With a 20 year track record, proven approach, and sought after framework, The Natural Step is well positioned to leverage its networks, experience, knowledge capital, tools and processes to dramatically accelerate the shift toward a sustainable world.

To prepare for the next phase of our strategy, over the past few years we have undergone an organizational review. We have interviewed and met with hundreds of stakeholders – TNS offices, associates, BTH alumni, clients, partners, funders and sustainability experts – to ask them a simple question: What role should The Natural Step play in addressing our global sustainability challenge?

This document is the outcome of our review process. It presents The Natural Step's vision and strategic direction for the next five years. We are ready to accelerate the sustainability revolution.

II. WHO WE ARE

The Natural Step is a global network of non-profit organizations, strategic partners and individuals that share the same brand, core identity and purpose. With two decades of experience helping organizations and individuals understand and make meaningful progress toward sustainability, The Natural Step has offices, projects or associates in 14 countries.

The Natural Step International is the international secretariat that facilitates the coordination of the activities of Natural Step offices associates and partners; supports a global network of practitioners and researchers using a shared strategic approach to sustainability; and, promotes and disseminates the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development and related educational tools and resources.

The Natural Step has a presence in the following countries:

- Sweden
- Canada
- Italy
- New Zealand
- Japan
- Brazil
- Netherlands
- Switzerland
- Portugal
- Spain
- United States
- United Kingdom
- South Africa
- France

III. OUR VISION

The Natural Step's Global Vision is a world in which individuals, communities, and businesses thrive within nature's limits.

The Natural Step's Global Mission is to accelerate change towards sustainability.

To achieve our mission we need to foster a paradigm shift in the way that people think about the world within which we live. We strive to create a new tipping point in the number of people who understand what it means to thrive within nature's limits and act accordingly.

To date we have accelerated change by working closely with business and municipal partners to help develop leadership capacity and successful role models. This has worked to a degree, but it is not enough. We cannot possibly hope to achieve a tipping point working one organization at a time. We need to enable and equip as wide a community of people as possible to create a broad based movement for change that is capable of collaborative impact.

Over the next five years The Natural Step will inspire, equip and empower the growing community of practitioners and change agents to create sustainable solutions and collaborate to accelerate change together. To achieve this we will strive to ensure that:

- The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development becomes one of the universally accepted definitions of, and approaches to, sustainability on all five continents.
- Innovative and cutting-edge strategic sustainability thinking is easily accessible to anyone who wants to use it, in a variety of mediums, anywhere in the world.

- There is a flourishing global network of thousands of strategic sustainability practitioners actively sharing and collaborating to create systemic change.
- There is a vibrant network of Natural Step offices, actively collaborating with each other, and supporting the larger practitioner network, who are seen as global experts on strategic sustainability and transformational change and are creating quantifiable change towards sustainability.

IV. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Natural Step International will achieve our mission by following three strategic priorities over the next five years:

- A. Open-source and widely disseminate the FSSD and all related educational tools, materials, case studies, and other resources to leaders, change agents and decision-makers globally.
- B. Act as an enabling partner and catalyst in the launch of a new global learning community of sustainability leaders and practitioners around the application of the FSSD, in partnership with other like-minded organizations.
- C. Strengthen the profile, capacity and reach of The Natural Step internationally by supporting existing, and developing new, TNS branded offices, partners and associates.

A. Open-sourcing and widely disseminating the FSSD

Our goal is to enable and encourage the broad promotion of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development as a broadly accepted definition of sustainability and to open-source the knowledge and learning related to how best to use it to create transformational change. For 20 years The Natural Step has developed and applied the FSSD. The FSSD has a proven track record and is well respected, but it has not been shared or promoted broadly. Now it is time to scale up its dissemination and accessibility by enabling and collaborating with a broad range of practitioners to do so. We plan to establish clear, legitimate and easily accessible channels for all stakeholders to contribute to the open source development and promotion of the FSSD.

We will do this in the following ways:

Brand repositioning

For 20 years The Natural Step has meant many things to many people from an NGO to a movement to a framework. In order to facilitate broader dissemination and access to the Framework, and associated materials, a key strategic priority is to clearly delineate between the Natural Step organization and the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD). The Natural Step will formally de-brand the framework to put it firmly in the public domain and increase access to the knowledge capital developed around the framework over 20 years of

development and application. We will also continue to explore and discuss with other FSSD stakeholders whether a more compelling name for the FSSD can be agreed upon.

New Website and Online Library of Tools and Resources

We will work closely with other FSSD partners and stakeholders to create a new interactive, resource rich, stand-alone FSSD website as the new home for the de-branded framework and associated resources. The new website will be linked to research and academic articles, and will feature a wiki, multi-media tools, slide shows, videos, toolkits, case studies and educational materials.

Via this new independent site The Natural Step will share the wealth of resources, stories and expertise related to promoting, teaching and applying the Framework and will encourage others to do the same.

This website will be separate to the Natural Step website, which will mainly focus on the programs and service offerings of the Natural Step and its offices, partners and associates.

FSSD Diffusion Campaign

The FSSD approach to sustainability needs to become significantly more visible if we are to achieve our mission. Our goal is to act as a catalyst in the launch of a new campaign built around leverage points to scale up diffusion of the FSSD in the world.

Our primary target market for the campaign is “the choir” – sustainability leaders, practitioners and change agents that want to create change around them. Our goal is to help equip them so that they can be more effective change agents in their communities, businesses and institutions. Our secondary target market is the “sustainability curious” – people who have heard of sustainability and want to find out more. Our goal is to help inspire them to want to become change agents and to provide them with tools and materials to further their practice.

B. Fostering a movement for change: An FSSD Community of Practice

Our goal is to enable and co-create a vibrant active community of practitioners and change agents who share, learn, innovate and collaborate together using a shared understanding of sustainability, underpinned by the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development. This network would include anyone using the FSSD – TNS, researchers, MSLS alumni, clients, partners and thought-leaders. The goal is to foster the emergence of a vibrant international movement for change that can accelerate the sustainability revolution through unprecedented sharing and collaboration.

TNS will reach out to the MSLS alumni community, as well as practitioners in businesses and communities who have used the FSSD to explore the feasibility of co-creating such a network.

The new network will be co-created by its founding partners. It will likely be both a virtual and an actual community of practice, where information and expertise is readily available. It may include, for example:

- A members' online platform
- Regular webinars and online dialogues
- An effective functioning library facility where people are encouraged to develop as well as find materials
- Sector specific communities of practice where people can learn from their peers
- Great case studies
- The ability to be able to search for expertise in certain geographical regions
- In-person dialogues and learning events.
- New educational materials – new accessible education materials that practitioners can use – e.g. presentations, workshop designs, new e-learning modules, guidebooks, materials.

Incorporating the Alliance for Strategic Sustainable Development

The Alliance for Strategic Sustainable Development (formerly known as Real Change) is a program, led by Karl-Henrik Robèrt, founder of The Natural Step, connecting researchers around the world who are carrying out work underpinned by the FSSD.

Our goal is for the Alliance to become fully integrated into the new FSSD Community of Practice. Ideally there would be a pathway for the development of applied tools from research work and also for this to be a forum in which research questions from practitioners can be fed into the research agenda. Set up correctly this new network will bring together the latest work of those developing tools, frameworks and approaches based upon strategic sustainability with the wider group of practitioners

C. Strengthening the profile, capacity and reach of The Natural Step in the world

Currently, the Natural Step's profile, capacity and reach are far smaller than they could be. We aim to change this by building a stronger and more consistent brand, growing our presence in the world, and working more collaboratively to accelerate change.

Brand Strategy

TNSI will work with TNS offices to co-ordinate a new global brand strategy for The Natural Step that is separate from the FSSD. This will help to create a clear and consistent brand promise around the world and ensure that brand is leveraged in an effective manner, to grow brand equity over time.

Growth and Accreditation Strategy

Over the past several years the Natural Step has been unable to adequately respond to growing demand from groups wishing to establish a Natural Step office or receive training and support in parts of the world where there is no TNS office. TNSI will work with Natural Step offices to quickly put in place a growth and accreditation plan to allow The Natural Step to raise its profile and build its capacity to respond to demand for training and accreditation and strategic partnership development in new parts of the world in the service of accelerating change toward sustainability.

As well, The Natural Step's new membership model, including strategic partners and associates, will allow for new ways of growing our reach and capacity other than becoming a TNS office.

It is The Natural Step's goal to have a robust network of offices and associates on all five continents in five years.

The Natural Step has grown organically over the past 20 years, based on interest and commitment. We will prioritize the creation of clear brand standards and the implementation of an accreditation program to guide the growth of The Natural Step and ensure that the brand promise is consistent in different parts of the world.

Sustainability Education: The Natural Step Academy

A major TNS vehicle for promoting awareness and understanding of the FSSD and for training new TNS entities is The Natural Step Academy: a flexible and professional suite of education and training offerings.

TNSI will convene an international Academy working group to ensure that there is global consistency and coordination in the development and delivery of TNS branded courses worldwide, to ensure that they are delivered with consistently high quality and that there is brand consistency. The Natural Step will also coordinate the development of an international marketing and delivery plan to deliver new Natural Step courses each year in new parts of the world.

And it is our desire to seek funding to develop a new version of an e-learning course that is easily customized and translated, as an effective tool and potential revenue generator to be put in the service of FSSD practitioners globally.

Innovation and Excellence in Service Delivery: Advisory Services

The sustainability movement needs champions and role models. The Natural Step will continue to deliver advisory services to businesses, municipalities and other institutions to foster the emergence of more leaders and role models that demonstrate proof of possibility and inspire others.

The Natural Step will work to ensure that TNS advisors are continuously learning from each other and developing new best practices in the application of the framework, sustainable value creation and social and organizational change. The new accreditation program will help to ensure that TNS advisors working in one part of the world have the same competencies as those

in another part of the world and that the skills and experiences we have developed in facilitating organizational change become part of our core competency in addition to expertise in applying the framework. We will seek to enhance the capacity of advisors via webinars, working groups and learning events and ensure that every office has the capability to develop meaningful advisory engagements.

Organizational Resilience

The Natural Step is a unique global community of passionate change agents and talented sustainability advisors who all share a common purpose. If we are to achieve our mission, we need to work more effectively as an organization and international network. The following areas have been identified as strategic priorities to improve our own effectiveness and resilience:

Internal Communications: We will prioritize effective and regular communications and sharing knowledge between offices to enhance our ability to succeed. We will continue to use tools such as Yammer and an international intranet and shared database to help facilitate effective sharing between offices. The aim is to foster a global team and achieve collective impact.

Outcomes and Evaluation: As TNSI moves forward we will prioritize evaluating our impact, sharing learning and capturing outcomes.

Financial Resilience: TNSI will prioritize developing its own viable business model to ensure that it has the resources to facilitate, coordinate and steward the shared interests of Natural Step offices and members, and also to contribute to the successful diffusion of the FSSD in the world. We will seek to diversify our revenue streams and to ensure that paying for our services does not become a barrier to broad-based dissemination of the framework and associated knowledge capital. TNSI, as the coordinating body for TNS branded activities, derives part of its revenue from having successful brand users. As such, it is in the interest of TNSI to expand the number of brand users and help to ensure they are financially viable.