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## **United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme**

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**Annual subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives  
to the United Nations Environment Programme**

**Third meeting**

Nairobi, 26-30 October 2015

### **Agenda item 6: Initial discussion on the preparation of resolutions to be adopted at the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2).**

#### **Introduction**

This note provides information on issues that member States may wish to consider in their deliberations of resolutions to be adopted at the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2), to be held in the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi from 23 to 27 May 2016. These include issues that:

- if UNEA were to pursue, could accelerate action and leverage on the topic;
- could result in longer-term higher impact than if the issue is left on its current trajectory;
- could bear significance to institutions and countries over and above UNEP, while still be of relevance to UNEP's own programme.

The following are issues that are proposed for consideration:

- 1) Coherent integrated implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- 2) Promoting the effective implementation of the Paris climate agreement
- 3) Environment and health
- 4) Ocean governance
- 5) Sustainable environmental finance and investment
- 6) Improving the environmental performance of the extractive sector
- 7) Sustainable pastoralism as a means to deliver sustainable development goals (SDGs)
- 8) Human-induced changes to the nutrient cycle
- 9) Resource efficient, inclusive and resilient cities
- 10) Food waste
- 11) Advancing sustainable and green chemistry: opportunities for advancing a global paradigm change

Each of these issues is elaborated further below.

#### **1. Coherent integrated implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Recognizing the need for countries to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related sustainable development goals (SDGs) in an integrated manner, there is a need to take a strategic view on how to implement the environmental dimension of this agenda. UNEA may choose to consider its role in promoting the coordinated implementation among UN entities of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs and in supporting monitoring and reporting.

A key consideration will be the modalities in which UNEA, the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the UN General Assembly, as well as the governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) enhance a coordinated implementation of the environmental dimension of the SDGs, taking into account existing governance arrangements and monitoring mechanisms, and the accountability framework for the SDGs. Modalities for ensuring coherence across monitoring systems and financing mechanisms for the delivery of the SDGs will also need to be considered. The UN system-wide framework of strategies on the environment (SWFS), the Environment Management Group (EMG), the Chief Executives Board (CEB), and other coordination mechanisms will be of importance in thinking through the way forward.

UNEA may also want to call for support measures that could accompany efforts at various levels, including regional and national, to achieve the objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including in the areas of data monitoring and review, legal and institutional strengthening, and the promotion of alternative progress measurement approaches, as well as more broadly by promoting the use of an integrated approach to sustainable development.

## **2. Promoting the effectiveness of the implementation of the Paris climate agreement**

The UN Climate Change Summit in Paris in December 2015 is expected to adopt far-reaching agreements that will set the stage for international action on climate change for decades to come. UNEA may choose to take stock of the outcomes from Paris and discuss how best to further mobilize the international community to promote rapid and effective implementation efforts. Without pre-empting the outcome of the Paris meeting, member States may wish to consider the UN climate resilience initiative, notwithstanding that after the Paris meeting, there may be other issues that UNEA could consider to support further acceleration, such as technical support to countries for renewable energies deployment and low-emission policies and programmes. On the UN climate resilience initiative, UNEA could recommend how the UN system could promote rapid action. For example, a new partnership approach such as the UN-REDD partnership or the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) could leverage action from multiple partners, including knowledge and expertise on technological transfer. Champions to fast-track the approach would be critical, particularly those that promote south-south cooperation.

## **3. Environment and health: detoxifying the planet**

Pollution and other forms of environmental degradation result in unnecessary ill health. For example, the frequency and intensity of dust storms (deteriorating air quality), have increased in the last 30 years mainly due to unsustainable use of land and water resources, urbanization as well as degradation of ecosystems.

Exposure to environmental risk factors, such as unsafe water, air pollution, unhygienic or unsafe food, poor sanitation, inadequate waste disposal, absent or unsafe vector control, deforestation, land degradation and exposure to chemicals can harm human health in various ways. The *Africa Environment Outlook (AEO-3)* indicates that environmental factors contribute to about 28 percent of Africa's disease burden. New and emerging environmental risks to human health include climate change, some new materials and poor chemical management, and outbreaks of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. Health gains made in the past decades could thus be undermined by environmental forces at the planetary scale, including climate change, ecosystem degradation and resource depletion.

A fresh approach to health and environment could help. Health and environment considerations need to be integrated into (economic) development processes and trade. Technological innovation, industrial and engineering design need to be more geared towards substitution and detoxification. Regional efforts such as the implementation of the Libreville Declaration and the Luanda Commitment on Health and Environment in Africa could be strengthened. The Asia Pacific Ministerial Forum has

identified tackling air quality as a priority. Identifying environment and health linkages also offers opportunities to enhance the coordination and synergy among existing legal instruments.

By moving from a reactive to a proactive policy approach, risks that could develop into full-scale environment and health emergencies can be mitigated. Actions at the juncture of health and environment could generate a fresh momentum not only for a detoxified planet, but in ways that will help realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The UNEA may therefore want to call upon governments and on development and financial partners to scale up investments on platforms and programmes that address environment and health coherently and on countries that have their national plan of joint actions in order to stimulate government investments on large-scale health and environment development projects or programmes with a potential to impact on socio-economic development and to spearhead the achievement of SDGs.

#### **4. Ocean governance**

The approach to ocean governance at the global and regional levels is premised on the fact that global problems such as ocean acidification or biodiversity loss require common solutions from all countries that contribute to, or are affected by the problem. Some environmental problems are framed as global problems. Others are not e.g. the loss of mangroves or erosion of national coastlines. Equally, a number of transboundary problems such as pollution of an enclosed sea, or a river basin are more readily and effectively addressed by those countries that share the sea or transboundary rivers. These actions require localized actions while remaining global in nature.

The coordination of UNEP-administered regional seas conventions and action plans (for the Caribbean Sea, East Asian Seas, Western Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, North-West Pacific region, West African region) will contribute to ensuring that ocean wealth is maintained. UNEA may wish to identify how best to harness the strengths of regional seas conventions, plans and programmes, including those that are not administered by UNEP and those that are independent, to support member States in pursuing regional and global ocean governance for regional sustainable development in such a way that the environment sector is better integrated in marine and coastal governance and management frameworks at regional and global levels. UNEA may wish to consider how to bring together relevant regional seas programmes/conventions in cooperation with UNEP's regional and subregional offices, regional and sub-regional economic communities and other critical regional and national bodies, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the conventions administered by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and/or basin organizations.

#### **5. Sustainable environmental finance and investment**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—and SDG 8 in particular—reaffirm the need to put environmental sustainability and social inclusion at the centre of economic frameworks by promoting "sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all". Achieving the SDGs will require a major shift in investment flows to transform economies and infrastructure to achieve prosperity for all on a healthy planet. Proactive policy intervention is needed to align the global financial system with the sustainable development agenda and to mobilize the required investments that will enable a transition to green, inclusive and sustainable economies. UNEA may wish to consider what is needed to support such a transition to a financial system that is aligned with the sustainable development agenda.

#### **6. Improving the environmental performance of the extractive sector**

The extractives sector (oil, gas and hard-rock minerals, mined at all scales from the artisanal to the industrial) is a major contributor to many of the environmental challenges faced by the world: greenhouse gas emissions, land degradation, waste production, habitat loss and pollution from hazardous chemicals. Growing populations and increasing consumption are pushing demand ever higher. Current trends, for example, suggest that global metal stocks required by 2050 could be between 3 and 9 times those at present. Meanwhile, new technological developments, such as fracking and horizontal drilling, are making previously unavailable resources accessible. This is spreading exploration into increasingly ecologically sensitive and politically fragile areas.

An estimated 81 countries are economically reliant on the extraction and trade in non-renewable mineral resources. Together these countries account for one quarter of the world's GDP, half its population and nearly 70 per cent of those in extreme poverty. Encouraging the emergence of sustainable green economies in these countries requires minimizing the negative environmental impacts of resource extraction at source, while encouraging greater resource efficiency in the end use of those products.

UNEA could focus the attention of member States on the emergence and implementation of best practice techniques, legislation and regulations as a way to minimise the environmental footprint of the extractive sector at all scales. An initial step could be for UNEA to request that the UNEP secretariat develop a landmark publication on Extractives and the Environment as a follow-up to UNEA-2 that lays out the latest science in this area and makes recommendations for policy makers.

## **7. Sustainable pastoralism as a means to deliver sustainable development goals (SDGs)**

Drylands and rangelands cover some 25% of all terrestrial ecosystems and these are inhabited by up to 500 million people worldwide, encompassing nomadic communities, transhumant herders, agro-pastoralists and ranchers. These pastoral communities living and managing these ecosystems are some of the most under-represented population groups in the world in terms of human development indices.

Furthermore, rising global demand for livestock products (meat, milk, fat, fiber, hides) and the increasing environmental degradation and loss of jobs caused by intensive production, underlines the urgency for achieving a transformation in production and consumption in the livestock sector.

Sustainable pastoralism could provide an opportunity to deliver on key sustainable development goals in an integrated manner. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an opportunity to work globally towards sustainable pastoralism because it recognizes the importance of supporting smallholder and pastoral systems while also increasing productivity in the agriculture sector and simultaneously protecting biological diversity, managing waste and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. UNEA may serve as an opportunity to discuss the direction that this debate should take and provide guidance on concrete actions to be taken between countries and within a global partnership.

## **8. Human-induced changes to the nutrient cycle**

Apart from biodiversity loss and climate change, changes to the nutrient cycle are a critical area where there is an increasing likelihood that ecological limits of the planet become exceeded. Since humans found a way a 100 years ago to fixate nitrogen from the air, there is an increased amount of reactive nitrogen in the environment. Similarly, finite phosphate rock deposits are mined in specific geopolitical locations and brought into the environment, mainly as fertilizer. As a result, nutrient over-enrichment of both terrestrial and marine ecosystems is causing eutrophication and dead zones, loss of unique and vulnerable (nutrient-poor) ecosystems and sometimes irreversible shifts in species composition (tipping points). As these biogeochemical cycles affect land, water and air, the impacts are felt in several areas –resource efficiency (mining, agriculture), climate change (NO<sub>x</sub> emissions), chemicals (waste water, chemicals in products), ecosystem management (nutrients affect almost everything that grows resulting in large impacts on ecosystems). Once in the environment, nutrients are hard to control and phosphorus is a limited resource. Coupled with soil erosion, the negative impacts to societies and the economy are growing.

UNEA may wish to consider how best to accelerate the actions needed to address human-induced changes to the nutrient cycle, building on data and modeling work from the Global Nutrient Management Platform hosted by UNEP.

## **9. Resource efficient, inclusive and resilient cities**

Cities are home to more than half of the world's population and the majority of built assets and economic activity. Cities occupy only 3 per cent of the planet surface and yet consume 75 per cent of natural resources. They are responsible for around 50 per cent of waste generation and 60 to 80 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. Cities are sources of innovation and economic strength and rapid urbanization but they also concentrate poverty in areas where vulnerable people face exacerbated consequences from environmental degradation, including climate change.

SDG 11 focuses on sustainable cities and communities. The upcoming Habitat III conference in October 2016 will also give increased attention to sustainable cities. UNEP's work includes support to cities on ecosystem-based adaptation for urban areas, green infrastructure, energy efficiency, resource efficiency and the green economy. There is an opportunity for innovative and integrated solutions for cities to become more efficient, inclusive and provide the enabling conditions for citizens to adopt sustainable lifestyles. UNEA may wish to consider whether and how a framework of action on solutions can increase the resilience of cities on the basis of behaviour changes, consumption, infrastructure and stakeholder participation. On behaviour changes, there is a need to support people on making better choices as citizens (members of societies), businesspeople and consumers (members of markets and value chains), and policymakers (members of administrations).

Urbanization also leads to a growing amount of urban solid waste. E-waste is the highest growing waste stream in the world, estimated at 20 to 50 million tonnes per year, and is a major environmental challenge, posing problems of health in urban areas. The mainstreaming and dissemination of environmentally sound management of e-waste is needed in both developed and developing countries. There is an opportunity to sustainably manage this waste as a resource and promote a more circular economy.

## **10. Food waste**

Goal 12 of the SDGs on "ensuring sustainable consumption and production" establishes a range of targets including the implementation of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10 YFP SCP). 12 of the other SDGs include SCP-related targets, including one on "decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation" (target 8.4), which is a core task of the 10YFP.

UNEA may wish to take stock of the progress on the implementation of the 10 YFP and consider in depth the progress of one or more of the programmes in the framework, for instance, sustainable food systems, 1 of 6 in the framework. The objective of reducing food waste is the focus of one of the activity areas of the sustainable food systems programme. One-third of all food production— totaling 1.3 billion tonnes—is lost or wasted annually, from production and distribution loss to domestic waste. This amount is more than the total net food production of Sub-Saharan Africa and could feed the estimated 900 million hungry people worldwide. Food lost or wasted can have many negative economic and environmental impacts, including carbon dioxide emissions and pressures on land, water, soil, and other natural resources. UNEP is working with partners to generate action to reduce food waste. UNEA may wish to consider how best to intensify efforts with partners to raise attention to this issue and facilitate and generate further global action to reduce food waste and promote sustainable food systems, and to ensure coherence between the work of partners and member states in the context of the SDGs and the implementation of the 10 YFP.

## **11. Advancing sustainable and green chemistry: Opportunity for advancing a global paradigm change**

The global chemicals industry has become a multi-trillion dollar business and continues to grow with a significant portion of the production and use of chemicals moving from the developed to the developing countries. While a chemical-by-chemical management approach over the past decades has resulted in a range of benefits, many existing chemicals are still not fully assessed and capacity remains weak in particular in developing countries to manage the growing number and volumes of chemicals.

The concept of *sustainable and green chemistry* has emerged as a promising opportunity to transform the way chemicals are designed, produced, reused and disposed throughout their life cycle. Advancing the concept would require innovative scientific, economic and policy analysis and policy reform, including adoption of fiscal reform measures and incentive schemes at the appropriate levels. Such a concept could build on the lessons and successes from the Vienna Convention and its Montreal Protocol on the protection of the ozone layer. Advancing the concept may need an enabling policy environment at the international level as well as new partnerships between government, industry and civil society. UNEA may wish to identify what opportunities exist for a leadership role in advancing sustainable and green chemistry and the key players to engage.