

Committee of Permanent Representatives
Subcommittee Meeting
Thursday 15 February 2018
Immediately after the briefing which begins from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.,
United Nations Office at Nairobi, Gigiri
Conference Room 4

**Selection criteria and possible themes for the
Fourth Session of the UN Environment Assembly**

Following internal consultations within the Secretariat and initial guidance from the President and the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly at its meeting on 30 January, the Secretariat puts forward the following selection criteria and 2 broad thematic areas for further consideration by Member States.

The minutes of the Assembly Bureau meeting will be made available shortly at the following link:

<http://web.unep.org/about/cpr/events/unea-bureau-meetings/bureau-meeting-un-environment-assembly>

In addition, as reflected in the minutes Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly, a Member of the Bureau proposed two additional themes (broadly referred to as "State of the Environment", and "Innovation for the Environment"). The specific title and rationale of these themes alongside other possible contributions will be circulated once they are made available to the Secretariat.

In accordance with Assembly decision 2017/3 on the on the provisional agenda, date and venue of the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, the Bureau of the Environment Assembly, in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, is requested to define a theme for the Environment Assembly no later than 31 March 2018.

1 Criteria for the selection of the theme

On 30 January 2018, the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly considered a proposal for selection criteria put forward by the President of the Assembly to assist in the identification of an over-arching theme for the next Assembly. The draft criteria enjoyed general support, and it was agreed that they may serve as a useful guidance for member states in their deliberations on identifying a theme.

Subsequently, the theme for the fourth session of the Assembly should (in no order of priority):

- Provide a targeted yet sufficiently interdisciplinary environmental policy focus that engages the economic and social spheres and has a significant scope for progress at global, regional and local levels;
- Address issues of acute importance that builds on momentum of on-going global initiatives and processes to help amplify the results;
- Result in an actionable and solution-oriented outcome that is meaningful and inspiring to the world, to foster effective political will, mobilize cooperation and provide momentum to drive change on the ground;
- Inspire citizens and generate partnerships between governments, the private sector, media and civil society to facilitate effective implementation of the outcome;
- Ensure consistency between the themes of earlier Sessions of the Environment Assembly, to promote synergy and avoid duplication of work;
- Support the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, and resonate with the annual themes of the High Level Political Forum;
- Be aligned with UN Environment's mandate and capacity, while at the same time being relevant to the broader UN family and avoiding duplications with established intergovernmental processes.
- Promote the visibility and profile of the UN Environment Assembly;
- Be easily understandable and communicable to all.

2 Proposed thematic areas

The Secretariat proposes the following two thematic areas, based on broad internal consultations, and taking into account the above criteria as well as the discussion at the meeting of the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly on 30 January.

The Secretariat further emphasizes that these thematic areas are meant to assist deliberations amongst Member States and will --with member states guidance-- to be elaborated and further refined at a later stage.

The Secretariat also emphasizes that the Global Environment Outlook and other global assessments expected to be presented at the next Assembly will contribute to underpin the final theme to be selected by member States.

Thematic area 1: sustainable consumption and production

Rationale

Following the successful UN Environment Assembly in 2017 focusing on “Towards a Pollution Free Planet,” this theme provides an opportunity to dig deeper and advance the economy of tomorrow with policy leaders, businesses and civil society with a focus on ways of living sustainably and using resources in an efficient, sustainable and equitable manner. This transformation is central to accelerate actions to reduce pollution while preserving and restoring ecosystems and acceleration the transition to a less polluted planet.

Drawing on innovation and technological advances in big data and environmental technology, this thematic area would draw together the scientific and policy advocacy capacities of UN Environment Programme. Additionally, it could provide a platform for policy champions to demonstrate progress in implementation and raise global ambition, following up on the High Level Political Forum in 2018 which is focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production patterns), 6 (availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all), 7 (affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all), 15 (restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss). In addition, there will be ample space for advocacy and outreach, engaging celebrities, media and youth in an active debate about our future and our role in shaping it.

Using natural resources sustainably and consuming and producing with care is considered an approach which creates interlinkages and synergies across the Sustainable Development Goals, and which enables achievement of targets simultaneously in many other goals. Those linkages place Sustainable Development Goal 12 at the core of Agenda 2030. UN Environment Programme, as custodian of many of the targets and indicators of Goal 12 and one of the key hosts of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production, with its 500 institutional members and wide country engagement, is very well positioned to deliver on this agenda.

Sustainable consumption and production is also closely linked to efforts to create a circular economy and behavioral approaches to change practices in waste, food, buildings, agriculture, energy etc., and UN Environment’s successful partnership with the private sector on this theme is demonstrated by the recently signed MoU with the Ellen Macarthur Foundation and the World Economic Forum. The strong interest of the private sector in circular economy creates a strong momentum for engagement in both the 10 Year Framework of Programmes and the fourth session of the Assembly. This is likely to be reinforced by the focus by the G7 and G20 on resource efficiency and the circular economy – drawing also on the solid science generated by UN Environment Programme through the International Resource Panel.

The theme of consuming and producing sustainably provides a platform for connecting work across different work-streams, from science, to law, to food and ecosystems and back to finance and economy. It presents a world of opportunities – for individuals, investors, entrepreneurs, policy makers and societies at large.

Thematic area 2: Food and Nature/Biodiversity

Rationale

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that food production needs to increase by 60% by 2050, compared to a 2005/2007 baseline, if we are to meet the demands of an increasing population and projected changes in food consumption patterns. Much of this increase is projected to come from increases in yields. How do we achieve that, and at the same time safeguard the environment and the biodiversity underpinning not only our food production systems and livelihoods, but the entirety of life on Earth?

Whilst underpinning the growth of societies and economies around the world, agriculture also the main cause of deforestation in the tropics and currently consumes roughly 70% of all freshwater use globally leading to depletion of aquifers and salinization of soils in some locations. Food systems more generally are a leading source of biodiversity loss, and contribute 24% of greenhouse gas emissions, 33% of soil degradation, overfishing of 29 % commercial fish populations and over-exploitation of 20 % of the world's aquifers. Inappropriate use of pesticides and fertilizers in the production chain leads to soil contamination and pollution of our freshwaters and to the loss of pollinators, and packaging and transport of food contributes significantly to air pollution and plastic pollution to our oceans.

Failures in access and distribution coupled with degradation of land and water resources contribute to the fact that 800 million people in developing countries go to bed hungry every day. In industrialised countries and emerging economies, the increased demand for meat and imported food products significantly affect the demand for, and the environmental impacts of, food production as well as our health. At the same time, close to one-third of food produced goes to waste, putting strains on our natural resources as well as on our waste management systems.

On a positive side, agriculture plays a role in providing employment for around 1.3 billion people in a world that is short of around 200 million jobs, and many positive examples of combining food production and conservation of nature exist across the world.

The main reason why many food systems today contribute negatively to climate change, conflicts over water and access rights, biodiversity loss, human health issues and pollution is the “silo approach” that - a failure to consider inter-connections between food and nature across the value chains, from farm to fork and beyond.

Applying a circular economy approach highlights these interlinkages and interdependence within and across all food systems, and reveals opportunities where individuals, communities, and private companies can be encouraged to take transformative changes towards sustainable food production and consumption practices. Such an approach also helps define the shape and form of policies that can reward pro-nature outcomes that sustain life on earth.

The UN Environment Assembly can build on the expertise of the entire UN system and its partners and on the commitments by member states to beat pollution, reduce food waste, to mainstreaming biodiversity into key sectors; and to make the case to producers, consumers, businesses and governments that a reform of our food systems can provide win-win outcomes, with income and wealth creation and decent jobs coupled with improvements in ecosystem functioning and the conservation and sustainable use of nature. This is a proposal to rally world governments behind a shared view for how we use nature and our agricultural landscapes and seascapes in the 21st century to meet the sustainable development goals with a focus on the links between nature and food.