

UNEA Monitor

UNEA Monitor is a daily newsletter powered by Major Groups during the UN Environment Assembly. The newsletter tracks the most important negotiations and events and delivers the daily news through the lens of civil society.

New UN Environment Executive Director Inger Andersen Meets with the Major Group Leads and Regional Representatives

On Monday, March 11, 2019, the newly elected UN Environment Executive Director Inger Andersen met with the Major Group Leads and Regional Representatives to UN Environment. Ms. Andersen spoke in a personal capacity as she has not officially assumed her post as the new head of UN Environment. She did share her vision for this UN agency, underlining the need for a reassessment while raising the level of ambition and effectively working across the UN system. Ms. Andersen also responded to the concerns of the representatives in the room, which included:

- Creating better opportunities for involvement and contribution;
- Defending environmental rights;
- Including women and recognizing their competence;
- Working effectively at the regional level and across regions; and
- Engaging with business and trade unions as well as with children and youth.

Ms. Andersen committed to meet with the Major Groups and Regional Representatives going forward at future UN Environment Assemblies.



Major Groups meeting with Ms. Inger Andersen.



Ms. Khawla Al-Muhammadi (NGO MG) delivering a common statement in the opening plenary on behalf of eight Major Groups.

Stories from the Green Tent

The Green Tent is the Civil Society Platform at UNEA-4. The UNEA Monitor is covering some of the green tent events throughout the week of the Assembly.

Best Practices to Build Capacity in Advancing Sustainable Development through Sustainable Consumption and Production – A Session with the Business and Industry Major Group

In the session with the Business and Industry Major Group, representatives of different industrial sectors discussed how to better work in a world of limited resources.

While steel industry waste is currently about 3.7 percent of inputs, the sector is aiming at being zero waste. There are many uses for steel industry waste: slag can be used for building, process gases for heat and electricity, and chemicals in the chemical industry. Relabeling waste as co-products can help change perceptions that often hamper secondary use. Policymakers are also pressed to ensure that same requirements are placed on waste products used for a secondary purpose, as are placed on raw products.

The Dairy Sustainability Framework is pushing towards global collaboration for best practices. The dairy industry employs one billion people directly and indirectly, and has six billion customers. Being a major industry that uses resources and emits greenhouse gases, the dairy industry needs continuous improvement and a recognition of the diversity of circumstances to achieve sustainability.

The garment and textile industry has paid much attention to solving problems related to waste

water. Lacking education of workers on water treatment can lead to severe biodiversity impact and risk to worker welfare. Although most production facilities operate their own wastewater facilities, these are very expensive and easy to switch off. To address these challenges, the industry is now planning for a coalition across retail brands to harmonize a number of best practices.

Collaboration inside the PVC industry includes producers, suppliers, Government, NGOs, users, etc., working to improve the sustainability of the sector. A series of measurable targets have been established, allowing an evaluation of the contribution of industrial performance to the SDGs. While in 2001, there was virtually zero collection and recycling, by 2017, recycling reached 640,000 tonnes. This contributes to reduced energy use, as producing virgin PVC requires 70 percent greater primary energy use than recycled materials. The CO₂ release saved is measurable. Other improvements within the industry include replacement of harmful chemical inputs, such as lead based stabilizers. Actions have been voluntary driven.

All industry representatives recognized the need for a market-based approach to incentivize both businesses and customers to participate in advancing sustainability.



Major Groups listening to the panel in the Green Tent.

Incentivizing and Advancing Sustainable Lifestyles – A Session with the Science and Technology Major Group

What kind of a public policy will advance and even incentivize a sustainable lifestyle? What are the barriers to achieving such a policy? These were the key questions of the session organized by the Science and Technology Major Group and Future Earth.

The session recognized that decoupling economic growth from resource use is not enough for achieving sustainability as long as absolute resource use will not decrease. Furthermore, a systemic change enabling the reduction of consumption can most effectively be achieved through a bottom up participatory approach, driven by action, new narratives, and changes in social norms.

There is also a need for policy that allows investment in sustainable options and includes penalties for high-impact practices.

The session further underlined the importance of sustainability education. Schools have targets defined by national governments and are expected to meet the demands of society, such as training a new workforce. However, education often maintains the status quo instead of challenging it. Transforming educational systems to encourage critical thinking and sustainable lifestyles necessitates more than curricula reform. It is an all-encompassing process that should involve activities such as group learning, school council discussions, active recycling on campus, maintenance of wildlife reserves, and sustainable practice laboratories.



Participants in the Session with Science and Technology Major Group and Future Earth.

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