

Innovative Solutions for Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Consumption & Production

Revised elements for the concept of the theme of the 4th United Nations Environment Assembly
(June 18th, 2018)

Background

1. In developing the theme for the fourth session of the Environment Assembly, the Secretariat will be guided by the Future We Want, the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference which recognizes in its paragraph 4 “that poverty eradication, changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development”.

2. The concept will further bear in mind the interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals as set out in “*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”.

Conceptual framework

3. Innovative solutions are not goals, but rather means to address environmental challenges. Innovative solutions can be thought of as “business unusual” approaches and creative ways aimed at promoting sustainable production and consumption and accelerating sustainable development generally. An innovative solution is not restricted to an invention or a technological innovation but instead encompasses the creation of enabling environments for creative approaches in policy, financing, partnerships, processes, and the use of data to understand environmental issues and improve sustainability. Innovative solutions will also increase technical capacities, attract new investments, open new markets and enhance productivity and sustainability.

4. ~~There are numerous environmental challenges that impact society, economy and environment such as food insecurity, environmental displacement/migration, poverty, energy insecurity, loss of biodiversity, and pollution among others. Some of these challenges are long standing but have not been paid attention to, such as land mismanagement and desertification causing sand and dust storms and displacement. Now is the time for national governments, the business sector and the civil society to tackle these threats by embracing innovative approaches.~~

5.

6. Sustainable consumption and production addresses the full life cycle of economic activities: the extraction of resources, their processing into materials and products and the subsequent use and discarding of the products. It can be broken down to specific economic activities to identify priorities according to their environmental impact and resource demands.

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7. Innovative solutions, and systemic changes towards sustainability in various stages of the life cycle will achieve sustainable consumption and production and address environmental challenges directly. In developing the theme, the Secretariat will promote a systems approach that connects the flow of resources - at each stage of the life-cycle - with their use and impact on the environment, economies and societies. This approach will include the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns and its six thematic programmes adopted at the Rio+20 Conference.

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8. To identify recommendations and suggested interventions relevant to the theme of the fourth session of the Environment Assembly, the Secretariat will take into account the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development all its relevant Sustainable Development Goals aiming at achieving sustainable development through improving global resource efficiency and decoupling economic growth from environmental challenges by embracing innovative solutions. In addition, the Secretariat will also take into account the Environment Assembly Resolution 3/5 entitled 'Investing in innovative environmental solutions for accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals' and all relevant resolutions and ministerial declaration of the Assembly and Governing Council.

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9. In this context, building on the Environment Assembly Resolution 3/5, the Secretariat will use the following categories to organize and highlight existing and proposed innovative solutions: (1) policy interventions; (2) environmentally sound technologies; (3) sustainable financing schemes; (4) education, research and development, capacity-building and (5) private and public partnerships. Social innovations and new business models that foster sustainable development shall also be considered.

10. Based on these categories, opportunities for synergistic implementation will be identified where simultaneous actions are taken to address environment, social and economic challenges through policy, financial, market, partnerships innovative solutions.

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Proposed focus areas

11. To allow the Assembly to deliver concrete outcomes and make an efficient use of the time available prior and during the Assembly, Member States have expressed an interest to focus on a limited number of environmental challenges that can be addressed in whole or in part by promoting sustainable consumption and production and innovative solutions and interventions, as spelled-out in the previous section.

12. The following proposed focus areas are set forward for the consideration of Member States. They are based on the criteria of global relevance, can be addressed by both sustainable consumption and production patterns and innovative solutions. These areas are presented without prejudice to issues and solutions that Member States may wish to raise, but will help the Secretariat develop background documentation and prepare solutions-oriented ministerial dialogues:

- Sustainable food systems including food security and poverty eradication,
- Life-cycle approach to resource and waste management
- Business development for sustainable development in a time of rapid technological change
- Environmental displacements/migration and Energy insecurity

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13. Once agreed by Member States, the Secretariat will develop further each focus area considering the proposed conceptual framework set out in paragraphs 3-7 and identify strategic partnerships, initiatives, and innovative solutions for each area. Further development of the focus areas will also consider contributions that Member States will provide to the President of the Assembly in the context of the consultation on the outcomes of the high-level segment.

14. In developing further, the proposed focus areas presented in this section, the concept will take into account cross-cutting issues such as mainstreaming biodiversity; using big data, information management; indigenous knowledge solutions; promoting sustainable lifestyles as well as efficient use of resources.

Elements for an Implementation Plan against Pollution

15. Paragraph 14 of Ministerial Declaration of the third session of the Assembly calls for the “Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to submit a plan for implementation in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, for [Member States] consideration by no later than the next United Nations Environment Assembly”, “building on the outcomes of the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly”.

16. The Secretariat will continue to consult on the Implementation Plan drawing from the above mandate. The proposed plan will be the main vehicle for organizing and presenting the follow-up to the theme on pollution. As outlined below, it will build on the outcomes of the third UN Environment Assembly. It will also seek to address the gaps and challenges to addressing pollution that were identified in the Executive Director’s report to UNEA3 (<http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/report-executive-director>).

Timeline

17. The Secretariat proposes the following timeline for further consideration by Member States:

- *19 April: Initial discussion at the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives*
- *10 May: Presentation of a draft concept note/outline to the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives*
- *Mid/end of May: Consultations with Member States on the concept note**
- *14 June: Discussion with the Committee of Permanent Representatives*
- 20 June: Endorsement of the draft concept note by the Bureau of the Environment Assembly
- September: Draft outline of the Executive Director **synthesis** is background report for guidance from Member States and stakeholders.
- September-October: Consultations on the draft background synthesis report organized by the Secretariat with the UN System, the Bureau of the Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

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Note: the timeline for developing the background synthesis report will be aligned by the process led by the President of the Assembly on the outcome of the high-level segment of the Assembly to ensure coherence.

* Italic items have already taken place.