

The fourth United Nations Environment Assembly: ASSESSMENT AND LESSONS LEARNED

Compiled by the Secretariat of the UN Environment Programme, in consultation with Member States and stakeholders

1. BACKGROUND

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment. It was created following a decision in June 2012 at Rio +20 with the objective to strengthen and upgrade the UN Environment Programme and ensure a more coherent system of international environmental governance, with a universal membership including all 193 UN Member States. UNEA meets biennially to: set the global environmental agenda; provide overarching policy guidance and defining policy responses to address emerging environmental challenges; undertake policy review, dialogue and exchange of experiences; set the strategic guidance on the future direction of the UN Environment Programme; organize a multi-stakeholder dialogue; and foster partnerships for achieving environmental goals and resource mobilization¹. Through its resolutions and calls to action, the Environment Assembly provides leadership and catalyzes intergovernmental action on the environment and addresses emerging issues. The Assembly is also the governing body of the UN Environment Programme and the successor of its Governing Council which was established after the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 and was composed of 58 member States.

The [first](#), [second](#) and [third](#) sessions of the UN Environment Assembly in 2014, 2016 and 2017 tackled major environmental themes such as illegal trade in wildlife, environmental rule of law, financing the green economy, pollution, the Sustainable Development Goals, and delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The first session of the UN Environment Assembly adopted a ministerial declaration in 2014 that called for the achievement of an ambitious, universal implementable and realizable Post-2015 Development Agenda that integrated all the dimensions of sustainable development for the protection of the environment and the promotion of inclusive social and economic development in harmony with nature. The 2017 ministerial declaration was entitled "Towards a pollution-free planet" and adopted 11 resolutions and 3 decisions most of which related to this.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE UN ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY

a) Main outcomes from the fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly

The fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly took place 11 – 15 March 2019, under the theme "Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production". The key outcomes include the adoption of a [Ministerial Declaration](#), [23 resolutions](#), [3 decisions](#), a new [Programme of Work and Budget for the period 2020-21](#), and [the Fifth Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law \(also known as Montevideo V\)](#). The session also welcomed an [Implementation plan "Towards a Pollution-Free Planet"](#), [The 6th Global Environment Outlook](#), and agreed to a [contribution to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) taking place in July 2019.

b) Participation

173 Member States and 3 observer states attended the fourth session, of which 132 were represented at ministerial level (114 Ministers and 18 Deputy Ministers). In total 4,942 participants attended (43% female, 53% male; 3% not specified), including 1,713 member States delegates, 137 representatives from intergovernmental organizations, 1,176 from Major Groups and Stakeholders, 499 representatives from the private sector (including trusts and foundations),

¹ As set out in GC decision 27/2

72 independent experts and 426 invited guests and speakers. The 2019 Sustainable Innovation Expo attracted 46 innovative companies who showcased innovative solutions, and over 2000 participants attended the Science Policy Business Forum.

While it is encouraging to see so many participants attending UNEA, it can be noted that this also resulted in an increased environmental footprint of the Assembly.

c) A new UNEA Bureau

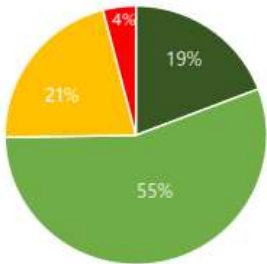
A new Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly elected, with by Mr. Ola Elvestuen, Minister of Climate and Environment of Norway, as President. The other bureau members represent Costa Rica, Serbia, France, Bahrain, Suriname, Indonesia, Estonia, Burkina Faso and South Africa. A more detailed overview of the new bureau members is available [here](#).

d) Results from UNEA-4 evaluation surveys

Four online surveys for participants were undertaken to solicit feedback; one for all delegates, one for the civil society representatives, one for private sectors participants and one on the greening of UNEA. In short, the general survey indicates that a significant majority of participants:

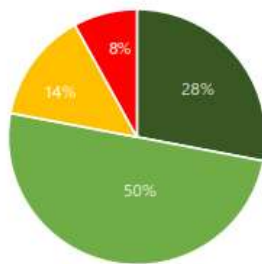
- Rate the fourth session UNEA 4 as either very successful or successful (74% of respondents)
- Perceived UNEA 4 as either very effective or effective in informing participants about key environmental issues (76%)
- Would recommend other colleagues to attend the next UNEA (71%)
- Consider the UNEA website as either excellent or adequate (75%)
- Consider the UNEA App as either excellent or adequate (73%)

How would you rate the UN Environment Assembly overall?



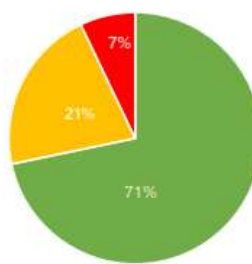
- Very Successful
- Successful
- Partially Successful
- Not successful

How would you rate the support provided by UN Environment for your participation in the UN Environment Assembly?



- Outstanding
- Good
- Adequate
- Needs Improvement

would you recommend colleagues to attend the next UN Environment Assembly

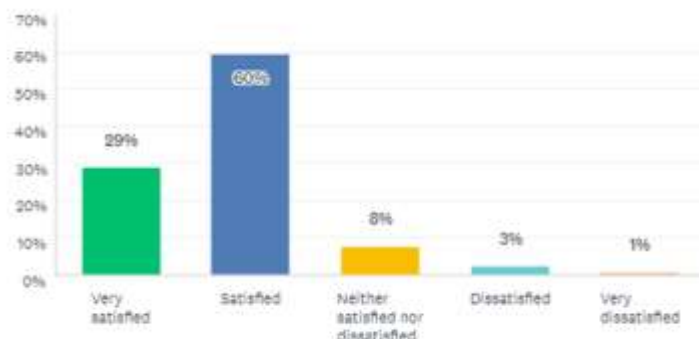


- Yes, Definitely
- Maybe
- No

Respondents of the online survey for the **Civil Society** expressed general satisfaction regarding the overall experience at UNEA 4, as well as with the organization and the assistance provided by the Secretariat. They also indicated several areas for improvement, and in particular to improve the opportunities to engage in the Environment Assembly in a more meaningful way through timely speaking slots, including in the negotiations of resolutions, and to be better acknowledged as important policy and implementation partners. In addition, many civil society representatives considered that too many events were taking place in parallel, and called for more measurable targets and timetables

in the resolutions. Another concern expressed was that the real impact from UNEA decisions and initiatives on the physical environment is unclear.

Asked how they would you rate their experience at UNEA-4, survey participants from the civil society answered as summarized below:



The online survey for **private sector representatives** indicated, amongst other things, that:

- 80% of participants met with potential partners during the Sustainable Innovation Expo
- 80% of participants responded that they had the opportunity to connect with other private sector groups and governmental bodies
- 95% of exhibitors who responded were overall very satisfied with the participation in the Sustainable Innovation Expo

e) Impact in media

UN Environment's 2018-19 Programme of Work sets a target of a 20 per cent increase in media coverage and reach for the Assembly, which was greatly exceeded. The main highlights of the media presence are as follows:

- The Assembly was covered in 26,500 news articles (a 128 per cent increase from the previous Assembly), in 49 languages and 160 countries.
- 388 journalists from 52 countries attended the Assembly.
- Most coverage was in English (14,000+ articles), Chinese (5,180), Spanish (2,053), French (1,096) Arabic (860).
- Top coverage included [National Geographic](#), the [Washington Post](#), [Reuters](#), [BBC](#), [CNN](#), [the Guardian](#), [the Economist](#), and [China Daily](#).

A comprehensive report on media engagement is available at the following link: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/z18SM2Zjl68Hv/>.

3. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on inputs from the surveys and other inputs from member States, stakeholders, and staff in the weeks after UNEA-4, the Secretariat has identified **11 specific lessons learned** with associated recommendations for the preparation, organization and follow-up of the UN Environment Assembly, for consideration at the Subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives on 11 June, and at the 146th regular meeting of the Committee on 20 June. Following feedback from member States, these lessons learned will be adjusted and complemented as needed, to form the basis for the planning and organizing of a successful fifth session of the Assembly, scheduled for 15-19 February 2021. The lessons-learned will also provide useful inputs for the CPR review process mandated by UNEA decision 4/2.

1. Timely identification of politically appealing, and strategic and policy-relevant themes for future UN Environment Assemblies, based on broad consultations and benefiting from guidance from relevant scientific assessment reports, is of key importance.

Recommendations:

- The UNEA President and Bureau in close consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives is invited to:
 - Establish relevant criteria for identifying a theme, including on, for example, length, timeliness, broad applicability and support, relevancy to the UNEA theme, alignment with the UNEA mandate, and relevancy for work programmes and themes under other international processes such as the High Level Political Forum based on previous work;
 - Consult widely with Member States and stakeholders with a view to reach broad consensus on a theme in advance of the decision;
 - Decide on a consensual theme for each session of UNEA at the latest 14 months in advance of its opening date (by December 2019 for UNEA-5, in accordance with UNEA Decision 4/2);
- Member States are invited to consider a possible agreement on defining themes or general focus areas that cover more than one future session of the UN Environment Assembly, while also taking into account the need to tackle emerging issues.
- The Secretariat will support this process through:
 - Early identification of a selection of prospective key areas or themes;
 - Facilitating a broad consultation process, including with the scientific community.

2. UNEA ministerial declarations should be short, action-oriented and ambitious, and they should relate closely to the theme of the Assembly and contribute to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, taking into account the annual theme of the High Level Political Forum. Early and broad-based consultations will facilitate adoption by consensus.

Recommendations:

- The UNEA 5 President is invited to organize, with the support of the members of the UNEA Bureau and the Secretariat, an open, transparent and inclusive consultation process for the development of a draft ministerial declaration to be adopted by consensus at UNEA-5, within the scope of the theme of the next Assembly.

3. Draft resolutions tabled for consideration at future Assemblies should contribute to real progress on the ground, be complementary to the UNEP Programme of Work, and either be clearly linked to the theme of the Assembly or address urgent emerging issues. To make the UNEA-5 workload manageable, member states should seek and ensure support by regional groups before tabling resolutions. Resolutions which combine several similar initiatives should, where possible, be merged into larger “omnibus” resolutions. The preparatory intersessional process should be fully utilized and better tailored to allow for small delegations, including those without permanent representation in Nairobi, to take part in negotiations and minimize the need for late night and weekend negotiations during the OECPR and UNEA.

Recommendations:

- Member States and Major Groups and Stakeholders are invited to take the present Lessons Learned and recommendations into account in the context of the ~~contribute to the~~ CPR-based review of the efficiency of UN Environment’s policy-making organs to be initiated at the 6th Annual Subcommittee meeting scheduled for October 2019, in accordance with UNEA Decision 4/2 (L.29), paragraph 10 a) – c), including with regard to:
 - The preparation, working arrangements, and scheduling of meetings;
 - The respective roles and responsibilities of the Bureaux of the Environment Assembly and the CPR;
 - Criteria, modalities and timing for presenting and negotiating draft resolutions and decisions;
- The UNEA President and Bureau are invited to provide clear guidance to member States on the process for the tabling of draft resolutions for consideration by the Assembly, building on the guidance provided through the CPR-based review referred to above and without prejudice to the Rules of Procedure.

- The Secretariat will support the CPR-based review by facilitating an inclusive and transparent approach through effective consultations and information-sharing, including with member States and accredited civil society organisations which are not represented in Nairobi, through remote connection.

4. The political outcomes of Environment Assemblies should have an increased impact and recognition in other international environment and sustainable development policy fora.

Recommendations:

- The UNEA President is invited to formally present the outcomes of the Environment Assembly at the meetings of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (usually taking place in July), in accordance with UNEA resolution 3/3, with the support of the Secretariat.
- Member States are invited to refer to and make use of the outcome of UNEA-4 at relevant international meetings, such as the High-Level Political Forum and the SDG and Climate Summits in September 2019, meetings of Conference of Parties of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, and to strive for policy coherence when developing their positions for these meetings.
- The Secretariat will continue to support the UNEA 5 President's role at the High Level Political Forum and related meetings, and proactively advocate for the implementation of the UNEA political outcomes, including through other UN entities and in the context of the UN reform process and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

5. Further efforts are needed to raise adequate financial resources for future UN Environment Assemblies, in particular to secure funding for conference servicing and the meaningful participation of representatives of developing countries and Major Groups.

Recommendations:

- Member States are invited to:
 - Consider possible options to secure increased financial resources from the UN regular budget, under the auspices of the UN General Assembly, to cover the real costs of future sessions of UN Environment Assembly as a universal body, also taking into account the continued need to improve overall cost effectiveness.
 - Consider complementary financial contributions to support the organization of future sessions of the Assembly, in particular to support participation of developing countries and Major Groups representatives.
- The Secretariat will support this process through:
 - Preparing for a well-informed discussion and negotiation at the next UN General Assembly in support of a potential increase in the regular budget to fully cover the core costs of future sessions of the UN Environment Assembly;
 - Improving the internal process to plan and budget for the activities under sessions of the Assembly
 - Identify strategies and specific areas for improved cost effectiveness to, if possible, lower overall costs as part of the budgeting for future Environment Assemblies;
 - If necessary, stepping up efforts to secure additional resource mobilization from member States for the organization of future sessions of the Assembly to complement the contribution from the UN regular budget.

6. Further action and additional resources are necessary to ensure meaningful participation of Major Groups representatives at future UN Environment Assemblies.

Recommendations:

- Member States and the UNEA Bureau are invited to consider:
 - Measures to promote meaningful speaking slots for Major Groups, also taking into account that individual organizations may speak in their own right, as well as under the Major Groups and Stakeholders umbrella;
 - A dedicated session at the OECPD to allow for direct interaction between Member States and Major Groups;
 - Effective timing of the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue to facilitate participation of Ministers and Heads of Delegations;
 - The organization of inter-generational dialogues and other events that specifically target Children and Youth.
 - Including representatives from Major Groups and Stakeholders in their delegations to UNEA.
- The Secretariat will support these efforts through:

- Facilitating regional and global meetings, seminars and webinars to support the implementation of UNEA-4 resolutions and to prepare for UNEA-5, including at least one international multi-stakeholder meeting in all UNEP regions, if possible back to back with regional ministerial meetings;
- Organizing and implementing a training and capacity building program for young environmental leaders, to assist them to better understand the opportunities and requirements for effective engagement with UNEA and UNEP.
- Undertaking efforts to secure additional resource mobilization from member States in support of Major Groups participation.
- Continuing to organize dedicated events to engage with the business community on UNEA-related matters, such as “Leaders’ Breakfasts/Luncheons”.

7. Regional environmental ministerial meetings, with stakeholder participation, provide a very valuable contribution to future UN Environment Assemblies.

Recommendations:

- Member States are invited to consider the timing and content of regional preparatory environment ministerial meetings, to maximize inputs to future sessions of the Assembly;
- The Secretariat will consider how to further strengthen the support (including financial support to ensure broad participation, where relevant and possible) to regional UNEA preparations, both through regional offices and from headquarters.

8. Timely availability of official working documents remains a fundamental prerequisite for future UN Environment Assemblies.

Recommendations:

- Member States are invited to respect deadlines and established practices regarding submission of draft resolutions.
- The Secretariat will continue to strive for high quality, succinct and relevant pre-session and in-session working documents by ensuring the timely availability and translation of mandated documents, and by maintaining and improving an effective resolution online (“papersmart”) platform to facilitate timely circulation of documents to member States, including for governments based outside Nairobi.

9. More consideration should be given to creating an optimal balance between political negotiations, the High-Level Segment, and official and non-official events, to avoid overloading the agenda of future UN Environment Assemblies and undermining implementation of its core mandate.

Recommendations:

- The UNEA President and Bureau and member States are invited to consider and provide guidance to the Secretariat on the organization of the next Assembly, to ensure maximum value-added, for example regarding:
 - The organization of the High-Level Segment, including on the appropriate timing and format for national statements and information-sharing of best practices, the number and scheduling of Leadership Dialogues, the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue and the official Side Events;
 - Possible options to increase the “political ownership” of the outcomes of the Assembly;
 - The scheduling of non-official side events;
 - The scope and format of the next Sustainable Innovation Expo;
 - The role and timing of the Science Policy Business Forum;
 - The need for and timing of other non-official events;
 - The launch of various publications;
 - The need to avoid clashes with important national and regional and holidays and festivals.

10. Implementation of the outcomes of previous sessions of the UN Environment Assembly remains a priority – and a challenge.

Recommendations:

- Member States are invited to:

- Provide further guidance on how to improve the monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the programme of work and budget and of the resolutions of the Environment Assembly, in accordance with UNEA resolution 4/22 (L.26) and UNEA decision 4/2 (L.29), paragraph 10 d);
- Consider aspects related to means of implementation in support of the implementation of resolutions, in particular where related activities may go beyond the Programme of Work.
- The Secretariat will:
 - Prepare an internal roadmaps outlining next steps and division of work, -including a list of Secretariat resolution focal points, in support of for the implementation, funding, and reporting on UNEA resolutions;
 - Propose options for an improved framework for reporting on the implementation of UNEA resolutions to be integrated with the reporting on the Programme of Work and budget at the 146th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, in accordance with paragraph 5 of UNEA resolution 4/22 (L.26);
 - Appoint a lead division for the follow-up of the UNEA 4 Ministerial Declaration, and consult with member States on how to ensure its effective implementation.

11. Logistic support during the 4th session of the UN Environment Assembly was effective overall, but there is room for further improvement.

- The Secretariat will continuously strive to improve the logistic support for future sessions of the Assembly, including through:
 - Establishing a core UNEA logistics team within the Secretariat well in advance of the session;
 - Simplifying and improving the online registration system (Indico) and encourage early registration;
 - Organizing preparatory meetings with the host government at an early stage to allow for sufficient reflection and internal consultation.
 - Ensuring stable and fast Wi-Fi connectivity across the UN compound;
 - Ensuring timely distribution of meeting rooms and high-quality conference facilities, including for Major Groups and Stakeholders;
 - Providing a sufficient number of well-trained screen editors in support of negotiations;
 - Improving access and transparency on availability of documents on the website;
 - Further developing and improving the UNEA App and the papersmart portal;
 - Revamping and improving the UNEA and CPR websites;
 - Maintaining and improving information technology and internet tools to facilitate the participation of Member States who do not have resident missions in Nairobi.