



Distr.: General  
16 November 2020  
Original: English



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

**United Nations Environment Assembly of the  
United Nations Environment Programme  
Fifth session**

Nairobi (online), 22–26 February 2021\*  
Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*\*

**International environmental policy and  
governance issues**

**Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/10 on innovation  
on biodiversity and land degradation**

**Report of the Executive Director**

**Introduction**

1. In its resolution 4/10 on innovation on biodiversity and land degradation, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested the Executive Director of UNEP, inter alia, to support the Member States in developing and implementing voluntary targets with regard to land degradation neutrality, including the definition of national baselines, targets and associated measures, to achieve land degradation neutrality by 2030. It also requested the Executive Director to support Member States in developing national policies and measures to restore, conserve and sustainably use biological diversity and strengthen ecosystem resilience, functions and services, both within and outside protected areas, to support relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

2. In resolution 4/10, in response to the invitation set out in General Assembly resolution 73/284, the Environment Assembly further requested the Executive Director, together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and in collaboration with the secretariats of the Rio conventions and other relevant multilateral environmental agreements and entities of the United Nations system, to lead the implementation of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030). Furthermore, it requested the Executive Director to support and promote the implementation of the initiative of the Government of Egypt to promote a coherent approach for addressing biodiversity loss, climate change and land and ecosystem degradation, in line with Convention on Biological Diversity decision 14/30 on cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives. In addition, it called on the Executive Director to contribute, in close cooperation with the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, to the preparations for the high-level political forum on sustainable development to be convened by the General Assembly at the level of Heads of State and Government.

\* In accordance with the decisions taken at the meeting of the Bureau of the United Nations Environment Assembly held on 8 October 2020 and at the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives held on 1 December 2020, the fifth session of the Assembly is expected to adjourn on 23 February 2021 and resume as an in-person meeting in February 2022.

\*\* UNEP/EA.5/1/Rev.1.

3. The collaborative action of UNEP under the programme of work to respond to the above requests and to restore, conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and strengthen ecosystem resilience focused on the following areas: advancing the global biodiversity agenda, including by supporting the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity; promoting human-wildlife coexistence; expanding innovative financing for restoration and ecosystem-based approaches; and integrating biodiversity and land degradation and desertification priorities in conjunction with supporting the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

## **I. Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/10**

### **A. Advancing the global biodiversity agenda**

4. With financial support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNEP and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided technical assistance to 137 Member States, resulting in the submission of the sixth national biodiversity reports, which inform progress on achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Compared to the fifth national reports, on average, a more consistent and accurate use of biodiversity indicators was recorded, as was the inclusion of double to triple the amount of spatial data to improve the analysis and use of data in decision-making.

5. UNEP supported the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in making progress on a post-2020 global biodiversity framework, despite the significant challenges presented by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. At the invitation of Member States, UNEP facilitated national dialogues to enhance better understanding of the framework. UNEP, the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre and UNDP also developed a document for the Convention on Biological Diversity Subsidiary Body on Implementation containing information on support available from the United Nations for future implementation of the framework. The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre supported the Convention on Biological Diversity in processing the peer review feedback on the proposed monitoring framework for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and in assessing the feasibility of the suggested indicators.

6. UNEP supported the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity, held in September 2020 on the margins of the general debate at the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. It resulted, inter alia, in 70 Member States signing the “Leaders’ Pledge for Nature” to step up action to address drivers of biodiversity loss.

7. UNEP continued to work closely with other United Nations entities, Member States and partners to advance synergies across multilateral environmental agreements. With the support of and hosted by the Government of Switzerland, UNEP facilitated technical workshops across multilateral environmental agreements in biodiversity, chemicals and waste and the Rio conventions to identify concrete elements that could be included to improve the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, while also integrating biodiversity elements into other conventions. In addition, actions to improve the coordination of the monitoring and review of implementation were identified.

8. With the support of the Government of Switzerland and the European Union, UNEP developed the Data Reporting Tool for multilateral environmental agreements. It provides private and secure national working spaces for parties to effectively share data and identify monitoring and reporting synergies for national reporting across all biodiversity-related conventions.

### **B. Promoting human-wildlife coexistence**

9. UNEP, along with the Government of Zimbabwe and the African Union, hosted the inaugural Africa Wildlife Economy Summit in June 2019. Attended by five Heads of State, 14 ministers and representatives of 30 countries, the Summit strengthened understanding of actions needed to overcome barriers to public and private investment in biodiversity-centred economies. A declaration was made by community leaders from 13 countries to support an equitable wildlife economy. Building on the political momentum and technical exchanges of the Summit, focused policy dialogues on the biodiversity economy were held at the seventeenth African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, with support from UNEP and the Southern African Development Community, to develop a regional biodiversity economy strategy. UNEP continued to provide technical assistance to targeted Member States, such as Kenya and South Africa, to advance national-level objectives for expanding equitable wildlife economy opportunities.

10. With support from the European Union, UNEP expanded work on the wildlife and biodiversity economy and integrated land management in the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area in Southern Africa, which is home to the largest populations of African elephants in Africa and

significant populations of rhinoceros, wild dogs, lions and other threatened species, and the Sangha Trinational transfrontier conservation area in the Congo Basin, which is home to critical forest elephant and great ape populations. In the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, a dynamic cross-sectoral model of natural and human-induced processes was developed based on local stakeholder knowledge. The model serves as a context-specific management tool to conduct scenario analyses in support of improved sectoral policies and integrated land use planning in critical wildlife areas.

11. As human-wildlife coexistence is intricately tied to the threat of the increasing emergence of zoonotic diseases, UNEP partnered with the International Livestock Research Institute to undertake a rapid scientific assessment and develop policy recommendations in the report *Preventing the Next Pandemic: Zoonotic Diseases and How to Break the Chain of Transmission*. The report, which had been downloaded around 12,000 times by October 2020, is accompanied by an ongoing campaign to raise awareness and support policy dialogues with key Member States and other partners to better understand the environmental dimensions of zoonotic diseases.

### **C. Expanding innovative financing for restoration and ecosystem-based approaches**

12. UNEP supported the development of several new funding mechanisms, including the Tropical Landscapes Finance Facility in Indonesia in partnership with BNP Paribas, ADM Capital and the World Agroforestry Centre. For example, the \$95 million “landscape bond” finances a sustainable natural rubber plantation that includes dedicated forest restoration and protection areas, as well as smallholder rubber initiatives that generate income and support rural livelihoods.

13. UNEP supported the establishment of the AGR13 Fund together with Rabobank, Mirova-Althelia and IDH–The Sustainable Trade Initiative. The AGR13 Fund is a blended public-private fund established to finance projects to protect or restore forests, improve sustainable agriculture and improve rural livelihoods. Currently, the Fund has committed \$90 million of capital (the target is \$150 million) from the Government of the Netherlands, Rabobank and GEF. The Fund is important to meet the \$1 billion objective that Rabobank and UNEP have set in terms of financing deforestation-free commodity production and other forms of sustainable land use.

14. UNEP partnered with the &Green Fund, with capital from the Government of Norway, Unilever and GEF (through UNEP). Over the past year, &Green has invested in innovative transactions in sustainable rubber production and sustainable palm oil in Indonesia, and in a sustainable integrated soy and cattle farm in Brazil to advance sustainable agriculture and food systems.

15. With support from Germany and Luxembourg, the Restoration Seed Capital Facility was established to promote private investment in forest landscape restoration. The new Facility is also providing technical support to fund managers and investment advisers on a cost-sharing basis to expand a sustainable project pipeline, with initial projects launching in 2021.

16. Analysis was initiated to capture the lessons learned from UNEP-supported finance facilities that support restoration and other nature-based solutions.

### **D. Integrating biodiversity and land degradation and desertification priorities**

17. UNEP developed a United Nations-wide action plan to deliver the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, which will restore 100 million hectares of degraded land, sequester 250 million tons of carbon dioxide and create 10 million green jobs. In partnership with the World Bank, UNEP supported a fragility analysis in the Sahel. Additional and ongoing technical assistance improved understanding and linkages between the environment and conflict in the region, with various products in development.

18. In addition, a draft proposal for the designation of 2026 as the international year of rangelands and pastoralism was submitted with support from UNEP and other partners, such as the International Livestock Research Institute, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, FAO, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas and the International Land Coalition, to mobilize additional actions for these issues, and to contribute to the global restoration agenda.

19. At the national level, UNEP provided technical assistance and resource mobilization resulting in new Global Climate Partnership Fund support to stop desertification in Mauritania. In partnership with FAO and the Global Soil Partnership for Food Security and Climate Change Adaptation and

Mitigation, technical work began on a global soil pollution report that will be launched during the fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

## **E. Supporting the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration**

20. A strategy to guide the implementation of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration was prepared through an open and inclusive consultative process, as exemplified by the more than 2,000 comments received from all over the world. Together with the Decade brand and identity, the strategy was launched in September 2020.

21. The interactive and engaging Decade website was developed and has been made operational. It includes multiple communication products such as a brand guide, a partnership toolkit and a suite of social media assets.

22. A task force was created to take charge of monitoring and reporting on the progress of restoration efforts throughout the Decade. In the forthcoming months, the monitoring framework will be finalized, under FAO and UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre coordination, with more than 60 organizations and 190 experts. The task force includes experts from entities such as the European Space Agency, the World Resources Institute, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

23. Progress was made on establishing core flagship programmes and a multi-donor trust fund to fund strategic elements of the Decade and to incentivize broader action. The fund will become operational in 2021.

24. Partnerships for the implementation of the Decade goals have been established with, inter alia, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the secretariats of the three Rio conventions, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Global Landscapes Forum, the World Resources Institute, the World Economic Forum and the World Bank to align activities and expand collaboration in support of restoration.

25. The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, as the data lead in the Nature Map consortium, developed integrated global maps of priorities for restoration and conservation of biodiversity and carbon storage to support Member States.

## **F. Restoring, conserving and sustainably using biological diversity and strengthening ecosystem resilience**

26. As a result of the UNEP projects executed through GEF financing, in the reporting period from July 2019 to June 2020, the following impacts were reported:

- (a) 2 million hectares of agricultural land with increased productivity;
- (b) 0.5 million hectares of land under improved agroecological and/or biodiversity-friendly production;
- (c) 3.5 million hectares of protected areas under improved management;
- (d) 1.7 million direct beneficiaries.

## **II. Lessons learned**

27. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of human beings' relationship with nature. As plans for recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic are being developed, the United Nations Environment Assembly presents a key opportunity to raise ambitions and accelerate systemic interventions that place nature at the very centre of recovery and transformation.

28. COVID-19 has drawn attention to the risks of zoonotic diseases and the need for enhanced environmental dimensions of "One Health" approaches. There is a need to ensure nuanced, science-centred discourse on how to address these issues as part of the global, regional and national responses.

29. To deliver the transformative change anticipated by the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, more collective action is needed to secure the tangible engagement and support of actors beyond those usually considered relevant in such contexts, including in the finance, transport, planning and infrastructure sectors. Strong commitments are needed from financial institutions and other non-traditional players with increased investments for biodiversity.

30. Unlocking private finance is critical to meeting international commitments relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, the post-2020 Convention on Biological Diversity biodiversity framework and others. UNEP should use the lessons learned on how the private sector can be engaged in those projects in which UNEP is involved to advance, creating new standards for how public and private capital needs to be directed to sustainable land and marine resource use.

### **III. Recommendations and suggested actions**

31. The Environment Assembly may wish to consider:

(a) Urging Member States to use holistic, inclusive, long-term strategies that proactively protect or restore biodiversity, maximizing the myriad of ecosystem services that nature provides, and urging them to explicitly factor these services into policies across governments and all economic sectors. Key areas of transformation are needed to advance sustainable food and agriculture systems, integrate natural capital and nature-based risks into financial systems, and improve patterns of consumption and production in key sectors, including infrastructure, tourism and transport, and green global and regional supply chains;

(b) Enhancing the mandate of UNEP to convene and develop actionable and systemic solutions to address these complex issues. The United Nations Environment Assembly offers an opportunity to mobilize support for evidence-based policy recommendations, including by focusing attention on the role that the sustainable wildlife trade plays in advancing biodiversity conservation in line with global commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, among others;

(c) Requesting UNEP to play a key role by building capacity, convening and in some cases pioneering proof-of-concept instruments to leverage public finance to unlock and garner private capital to address deforestation and other types of ecosystem degradation. Furthermore, UNEP can play a key role by informing Member States about the total public and private investment that is directed to nature-based solutions and compare that to what is needed. Highlighting the difference can help build momentum to close the gap between the two.

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