

# Report of the interregional meeting for the UNDA 1819Q Project “Towards coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals”

## Background

The interregional meeting was held virtually from 26 – 28 October 2021 as part of the UNDA (United Nations Development Assistance) 1819Q Project “Towards coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals”. The project aimed to strengthen the capacity of four countries (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia and Guyana) to develop national policies or strategies that include multi-sectoral priorities and build technical capacity to deliver on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs in a coordinated and integrated manner. The project implementation phase covers 2018 to 2021 and is in its final stages. The interregional meeting convened partner government officials from the four project countries, UNEP staff who participated in the implementation of the project or in activities related to policy coherence for sustainable development, as well as UN country partners, government focal points and other partners for the Project and/or related to the project’s implementation (e.g. statistical offices) and SDG focal points in the countries.


***Day 1, 26 October 2021 13:00 – 15:00 UTC***

## Opening session

**Tita Korvenoja, Chief of the Environmental Governance Branch, Law Division, UNEP**, opened the meeting on behalf of UNEP. She welcomed participants and started by thanking representatives of the governments of Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia and Guyana, the UN Secretariat and all the partner institutions and UN agencies for their contribution to the successful outcomes of the project. The challenges posed by COVID-19 were overcome by flexibility and adaptive management. The project provided support to the Covid-19 response of the partner countries through sustainable development and aiming for a healthier environment. The project fostered cross-institutional collaboration on data and policies and allowed for testing tools for integrated approaches. Ms. Korvenoja concluded her opening by expressing her interest in learning from successes and challenges that the countries and partners have experienced during the implementation of the project.

**Mikael Rosengren, programme manager, UNDA Secretariat**, explained in his video message that UNDA was established 20 years ago to enhance capacities in developing countries. Currently, UNDA focuses on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He welcomed UNEP’s contribution in leading one of these projects with the aim to test new and innovative development approaches. This project has showcased such approaches and that they can be successful. Learnings by this project can be scaled up and potentially replicated in a second phase with funding from UNDA. The account welcomed this meeting as an opportunity to draw lessons learned and share experiences from the project.

**Santiago Aparicio, Director Dirección de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible, Colombia**, expressed appreciation for the efforts of UNEP to support the implementation of SDGs. The project has helped to identify those SDGs with the highest catalytic potential and therefore represent the most important entry points for the sustainability transformation. Prioritizing certain SDGs can help to be more strategic and context specific. The



project results will be useful in the upcoming design of the next national development plan that Colombia intends to start developing in the coming months.

**Sharifa Razack, Deputy Director, Environmental Protection Agency, Guyana**, appreciated the occasion of to meet virtually the representatives of Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Colombia, who along with Guyana participated in the project. She appreciated the opportunity to exchange successes, challenges and lessons learned with the colleagues who have participated in the project. While noting that the three dimensions of sustainable development need to be well balanced, Ms. Razack considered the environmental dimension of the SDGs to be very critical to sustainable development and to meeting the 2030 agenda.

**Inoussa Zagre, Director, Senior Forest Expert, Ministry of the Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change, Burkina Faso**, expressed the gratitude of the government of Burkina Faso for the project. Burkina Faso has the ambition to integrate the SDGs in its policy planning documents. The project had allowed to prioritize certain targets which are now reflected in the national development plan (PNDES). The project allowed Burkina Faso to identify synergies among measures related to different SDGs.

**Md. Mafidul Islam, Chief, General Economics Division, Bangladesh Planning Commission, Bangladesh**, thanked the organizers of the workshop and appreciated the opportunity to share lessons learned from the implementation of the project. He reiterated that Bangladesh applies whole of government approaches for implementing the SDGs. Mr. Islam explained how Bangladesh is managing data and how it prepared multiple voluntary national reviews, including with the support of UNEP.


**Diane Klaimi, UNDA project manager, Law Division, UNEP**, welcomed participants to the interregional meeting. She thanked participants for the active engagement in the four years of implementing the project and for being flexible in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. She explained the objectives of the workshop and provided an overview of the meeting agenda, as well as the status of project implementation. She reflected on some lessons learned from a project management perspective and explained the approach chosen for the project. Ms. Klaimi reminded participants of the project objectives and the three workstreams of the project. Outcomes emerging from the project include tools, roadmaps and good practices which strengthened the environment in sustainable development. These will be compiled in the case studies.

## **Session 1: Discussion of the case studies**

**Jonathan Gilman, Regional Policy Coordinator, Asia and the Pacific Office, UNEP**, as the facilitator introduced the objective of session 1 which was to discuss the approach taken in the implementation of the project and draw initial conclusions/lessons learned from the project.

**Andreas Obrecht, project consultant for UNEP** presented the status of the work on the case study publications. He explained the methodology used for developing the case studies. The case study will be made available in four distinct short publications which should be attractive for national and international experts, policymakers, project developers, and anyone interested in SDG implementation. The publications aim to highlight good practices, ideas and innovations which came with the implementation of the project and include recommendations for strengthening implementation of the environmental dimension of the SDGs. He explained that the approaches used, activities and achievements vary by country while some lessons learned are similar among some countries.

**Fakrul Ahsan, Chief Technical Advisor, SC4SDG Project, UNDP Bangladesh**, presented the work done under the project in Bangladesh and coordination between UNEP and UNDP in supporting integrated approaches in Bangladesh. Activities covered capacity building on data production of government officials, the inclusion of SDGs in national policy documents, the result-based monitoring of the five-year national development plan. Activities also covered research, partnership and engagement. Also 10 capacity-building workshops and three metadata



training workshops are planned this year to enhance the capacity of the government officials, including on 17.14.1 on policy coherence and 14.2.1 on the blue economy. The objectives are to ensure that SDGs are integrated into the National Policy Planning and Development Plan and monitoring and evaluations. The new national five year development plan expanded its usual focus and included the environmental dimensions with UNEP's technical guidance. Mr Ahsan explained how the project enabled engagement in the development of many country reports, including the VNR 2020 and the report to the UNGA 2021. Mr Ahsan furthermore highlighted progress on monitoring and evaluating implementation of the SDGs. He also highlighted the strategy to finance SDG implementation, including the funding requirements.

**Inoussa Zagre, Director, Senior Forest Expert, Ministry of the Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change, Burkina Faso** explained eight activities undertaken in the country which strengthened national coherence and helped decentralize development initiatives and how those were an important consideration in this project. Some activities had to be adapted due to Covid-19. Activities included subnational outreach, engagement with elected officials at all government levels, training programmes which also aimed to create synergies across different actions. Thanks to the project, the development of a mapping system and the data management systems were possible. The activities will continue beyond this project and support for that will be sought from UNEP. An important institutional player in this project is an inter-ministerial committee who fosters SDG implementation. The commission clears governmental reports for submission to the Council of Ministers.

**Clara Solano, Executive Director of Fundación Natura, Colombia**, explained Colombia's development policy and the biggest challenges it faces, including the COVID-19 pandemic. She informed about the participation of the Fundación Natura in the collaborative process UNEP facilitated under the project. She presented the tourism industry as an example for opportunities and challenges to sustainable development and explained how the economic development mainly happened in urban areas. Ms. Solano illustrated with examples how Colombia addresses ecosystem restoration in order to achieve the sustainability transition required by the Paris Agreement and the SDGs.

**Sharifa Razack, Deputy Director, Environment Protection Agency, Guyana**, highlighted the focus of the project on report statistics and environmental data. There was a recognition that data in Guyana is insufficient to report on SDGs, particularly in the light of Guyana's fast economic development. The project was therefore very timely, and the Covid-19 response was very opportune. What is required now is an agreement between key agencies as to how to collect and share data and capacity building for processing data and metadata. SDGs should be indeed included in new strategies, such as the low carbon development strategy. The SDGs furthermore are considered an opportunity for synergies among MEAs and the government ministries and agencies. Mrs. Razack also presented the business case for environmental data, which can attract sustainable investments.

In the subsequent **discussion**, the facilitator raised the question whether the activities initiated by the project would go beyond the project end, noting that some of those activities were already designed to last longer. In the discussion, Professor Mongbo, Benin, highlighted the different challenges countries face for sustainable development and how important it is to contextualize projects. Also, statistics and indicators need to be translated into understandable, context-specific form. An example for such a specific factor is migration. The importance of indicators and policy coherence was emphasized and that new initiatives should build on existing projects.

In **conclusion**, Ms. Diane Klaimi noted that the project was implemented according to the national context, priorities and agenda. The project has benefitted the countries, for example by fostering interagency cooperation and synergies. She explained that the following day 2 would be more technical, looking at, among others, environmental statistics and policy coherence.

## **Day 2 (Wednesday, 27 October 2021, 13:00 – 15:00 UTC)**

Diane Klaimi welcomed back participants and reopened the meeting for its second day. She introduced the objectives of Day 2, which were to exchange of experiences with VNR, NBSAPs, NDCs and other national policy documents, experiences with indicators, data and monitoring as well as to sharing experiences with enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development. She mentioned that UNEP has a leading role in monitoring sustainable development as custodian for many environmental global indicators.

### **Session 2: National policy instruments and the SDGs**

**Deirdre Shurland, Policy Consultant for UNEP**, facilitated session 2 which aimed to explore how the project strengthened the environmental dimension of national policy instruments and enhance policy coherence at national and subnational levels. She explained how she was UNEPs focal point for the project implementation in Guyana. Ms. Shurland also expressed her appreciation for the work on environmental SDGs data conducted by the SEI in Columbia. With the examples of both Guyana and Colombia, she illustrated the unique challenges each country faces when striving for sustainable development but also identified some common challenges, such as data gaps.

**David Purkey, Centre Director for the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) in Latin America**, introduced the work SEI is doing in Latin America. Together with the National Planning Department of Colombia, SEI explored how the SDGs can be used as a policy tool at national and subnational levels. It was clear that priorities need to be set by identifying those SDGs which have a catalytical potential, meaning that they are very interdependent with other targets, and which have potential to leverage progress among more than just the SDG itself. The methodology developed by SEI is unique in the way that it combines data analysis with stakeholder input and other sources of information. The application of the methodology in Colombia showed different results for the national level and for the subnational level for the case of the Antioquia region. The methodology also helps to test if priorities set in national strategies and development plans are efficient and effective.<sup>12</sup>


**Rila Harlequin, Statistician within the Demography, Vital and Social Statistics Department, Bureau of Statistics, Guyana**, shared experiences with incorporating environmental considerations into national policy instruments in the case of Guyana. The Guyana Bureau of Statistics would like to play a greater role in providing environmental data to assist policymakers in the decision-making process. This will be even more strengthened with the launch of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics. This strategy will provide a framework for mobilizing, harnessing and leveraging resources both nationally and internationally and provide good quality, reliable and timely statistics to serve and facilitate planning and decision making. Also in Guyana, stronger cooperation among ministries, agencies and departments is needed, while civil society participation needs to be fostered. One way to foster cooperation that has proven effective is to hold joint training sessions on environmental statistics, data and indicators for multiple ministries and agencies. Another way is to celebrate wins, such as the launch of a report, with staff from multiple ministries.

In the subsequent **discussion**, it was noted that the SDG tool by SEI could be upscaled to the global level. Indeed, that would be something that UNEP or other international organizations could undertake. SEI envisages upscaling their methodology and consider establishing a global cloud sourcing tool to facilitate mutual learning and spreading of good practices. A valuable lesson learned from the project implementation in Colombia is the fact that there are distinct requirements depending on level of government. Subnational levels are likely to require specific targets, tools and indicators. Another question raised was regarding the recognition of the importance of environmental statistics. In the case of Guyana, the relevant regulations need to be strengthened when it comes

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<sup>1</sup> Paper "The application of soft systems thinking in SDG interaction studies: a comparison between SDG interactions at national and subnational levels in Colombia": <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10668-021-01808-z.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sdgsynergies.org>



to environmental data. The discussion furthermore revolved around Covid-19 response and the impact of the pandemic on data. Some data had been acquired prior to the start of the pandemic.

### **Session 3: Data, monitoring and information on SDGs**

The facilitator of session 3, **Brennan van Dyke, Deputy Director, Science Division, UNEP**, introduced the objectives of the session, which was to discuss how data generation, management and uptake on SDG implementation could be improved. She emphasized the interest of UNEP to address data gaps and ways for filling them and recalled the important role of UNEP when it comes to the 25 environment-related indicators for which it acts as the custodian agency.

**Alamgir Hossen, Deputy Director, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics**, explained the important role of the Bureau of Statistics in coordinating the national statistics system in Bangladesh on data management for SDGs and the challenges it faces, for example with the interoperability of data or the lack of capacities. He emphasized that policymakers are keen to base their decisions on evidence and therefore the Bureau of Statistics has a strong mandate. Bangladesh is however taking concrete steps to improve the statistics system, for example through the launch of an online platform on SDG related data.<sup>3</sup> Remote-sensed data will gain in importance and a Big Data Initiative has been launched. Regarding indicators, Bangladesh has adapted the global set of indicators to its national circumstances and a national coordination committee is supporting custodian agencies and data providers in enhancing statistics.

**Dany Ghafari, Programme Management Officer, Science Division, UNEP**, explained how UNEP worked on measuring progress towards the SDGs and developed environment-related indicators for measuring global progress on implementation of the SDGs. He explained how UNEP is maintaining contact with country counterparts to maintain an overview of where countries stand with establishing environmental national indicators. He noted that the uptake so far is limited and that challenges have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. UNEP has therefore increased capacity-building and information efforts. Mr. Ghafari explained that UNEP is working with regional commissions and national partners in improving SDG implementation and SDG data reporting. This also includes strengthening of internal coordination mechanisms at UNEP level but also in countries. UNEP is encouraging the use of non-traditional data sources, such as remote sensed data.

The meeting then **discussed** the potential of non-traditional data sources and how their uptake could be increased. Brennan van Dyke explained how UNEP is working with the UN Statistical Division and other UN entities such as geospatial network and mentioned the strengthened engagement with private partners. It was furthermore mentioned that environmental monitoring is important to develop for example legal guidelines. Another point raised was the capability to extrapolate small samples and other methodological challenges and opportunities.


### **Session 4: Policy coherence for sustainable development**

**Jean Jacob Sahou, Regional Development Cooperation Officer, Africa Office, UNEP**, began his facilitation of session 4 by recalling with some examples the high importance of policy coherence, particularly for the wise use of natural resources. He mentioned the objective of the session to explore how policy coherence can be measured and improved and that the discussion will also discuss the role of regulations and links of policy coherence with poverty.

**Hyun Sung, Programme Officer, International Environmental Law unit, Law Division, UNEP**, started by highlighting how difficult it is to overcome silos and achieve policy coherence. UNEP has developed SDG

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sdg.gov.bd>



indicator 17.14.1 on policy coherence and a methodology allowing countries to assess domestic policy coherence. Applying the methodology should also facilitate raising the awareness for policy coherence and help enhancing it. UNEP has developed the methodology by testing it in pilot countries. The methodology includes eight domains to assess policy coherence.

**Norbert Ouedraogo, MEEVCC, Burkina Faso**, shared the Burkina Faso experience with policy coherence. Burkina Faso prioritized the SDGs and SDG targets in inter-ministerial dialogues and discussions with subnational and civil stakeholders. Burkina Faso set up a system of national institutions and bodies for supervising and implementing the SDGs at national and subnational levels. Around 300 actors are involved in the different bodies.

### ***Day 3 (Thursday, 28 October 2021, 13:00 – 15:00 UTC)***

Diane Klaimi welcomed participants back to the last day of the meeting. She welcomed the discussions held in the previous days and recalled the emphasis of the project on producing concrete results, including with tools such as the one developed by SEI. She reminded participants of the work on policy coherence and the links between institutions which are required to effectively implement the SDGs.

### **Session 5: Communicating the results**


**Piedad Martin, Deputy Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean Office, UNEP**, opened session 5 by highlighting the potential for communication of the results of this project, with the caveat that the discussions are also complex because of the different themes the project touched upon. Nevertheless, the themes covered by the SDGs touch everyone, and the SDGs are therefore a very good communication product.

**Natalia Monroy, National Department of Statistics (DANE) SDG Indicators Group, Colombia**, explained how Colombia applies different communication tools, such as a voluntary guide for measuring and informing about SDGs. Another tool Colombia is using is a 'SDG Barometer' to check the status of information available on different indicators. Ms. Monroy mentioned that a lot of data is collected through questionnaires with partner organizations, which might be a challenge for data consistency. Therefore, more capacity building efforts are required.

**Javier Suraski, Programme Officer Governance and Finance for Sustainable Development, CEPEI**, showcased the work of CEPEI in supporting countries in developing voluntary national reviews (VNRs) and making these reports available for audiences at national level. In some cases, for example Kenya, the reports show how the environment is completely integrated in economic and social goals. Mr. Suraski gave the example of Nepal where the SDGs were an entry point for cooperation with local communities. Some lessons learned by CEPEI were that countries might link the process to develop a VNR to efforts to strengthen domestic data and planning mechanisms. Secondly, to use this process to enhance interagency cooperation, thirdly to make sure that environmental considerations are incorporated in the VNR.

Jean Jacob Sahou, UNEP, and **Blaise Sawadogo, Director of the Permanent Secretariat of the National Council for Sustainable Development, SP/CNDD**, presented the efforts by Burkina Faso to accompany the project with a media plan. The media plan was intended to cover all activities and ensure that it reflects also other projects. The objective was to increase the visibility of the project. Measures of the media plan ranged from social media to radio and newspapers. Articles, documentaries and reports were all part of the plan as well. However, due to resource limitations the plan was not fully implemented. However, UNEP will continue the work beyond the project timeline.

In the **discussion**, the question was raised to which extent the experiences gained with the voluntary national reviews could be applied to voluntary local reviews which are currently being prepared by cities. It is assumed that



the environmental dimension gets more traction at the local than at the national level which could then trigger a stronger emphasis on the environmental dimension in VNRs further down the road. A point was made that there is potential to upscale good practices gained with the production of voluntary national reviews across regions and countries and UNEP – with regional fora - playing a role in that.

## Closing Session

**Cecilia Lopez Y Royo, Head of the Policy Coordination Unit of the Policy and Programme Division, UNEP,** launched the closing discussion by stating that indeed, communication should be more than just an afterthought and the discussions held over the last two days should be brought forward.

In the discussion, **Javier Suraski** considered UN reform a great opportunity for enhancing SDG implementation. The idea of issue-based coalitions can increase coherence of work, including at regional level where interregional cooperation should also be strengthened and this project is a good example of how this can be done.

**Piedad Martin** considered Covid-19 recovery a challenge, also for project implementation because of the shift of resources away from environmental projects. Many environment ministries are highly affected by that, which makes it even more difficult to take an integrated approach. This project has shown how environment is linked to health and other issues and that each SDG is in fact related to the environment. This is a message to be taken from this project.

**Diane Klaimi** highlighted the work of UNEP in enhancing synergies among multilateral environmental agreements, strengthening environmental governance, institutions, and policy coherence. On the latter, the methodology has been tested and rolled out in countries. UNEP headquarters relies on regional offices to tailor projects and efforts to regional and national requirements.


**Deirdre Shurland** reaffirmed the importance of involving regional fora and engaging more countries into the work. The discussions held in the context of this workshop needs to be held at the level of policy makers, decision makers and head of UN country teams. She said that the voluntary reviews of SDG at the local level have a great potential.

**Subhra Bhattacharjee, Strategic Planner and Head of United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office in Bangladesh** reflected on the points raised earlier by stating that Bangladesh experiences similar issues. Environmental concerns are very much at the forefront of peoples' minds and they hear it in speeches of ministers, but this is rarely followed up by action. The discourse is often not matched with action, due to other vested interests which come into play.

**Cecilia Lopez Y Royo** agreed with the challenge to reconcile some economic interests with environmental interests. She raised the question of how Covid-19 recovery efforts can be greened more moving forward.

**Piedad Martin** informed participants that the UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean just applied a Covid-19 recovery tracker methodology to countries in the region to get a full picture to which extent the recovery commitments by countries have become a reality. The investment in green recovery options is very low and estimated to be at only around 2% in the region, compared to the global level estimated to be around 19%. A lot of the investment is locking in negative development trajectories. UNEP has a potential for convening stakeholders because it has a high credibility and is perceived to be comparatively neutral.

**Javier Suraski** was of the view that indeed it is necessary to expand the circles and face actors who are less sensitized to environmental issues or have other interests. New ways to communicate which are adapted to different cultural context have to be developed.



**Jean Jacob Sahou** emphasized the importance to work across ministries, particularly with the ministries of economy and finance as well. Concepts of green growth or green economy need to be part of the Covid-19 recovery. Mr. Sahou mentioned that projects such as ours need to have outputs which are institutionalized, meaning that parliamentarians should be involved in such projects. All that will continue to require strong efforts on capacity development.

**Jonathan Gilman** informed the meeting on the approach chosen for this project to work jointly with UNDP with the ministries of finance and planning in Bangladesh. He highlighted the strength gained from the cooperation with UNDP which is an example of how interagency cooperation can amplify efforts.

**Professor Mongbo, Benin**, agreed with the points made regarding the importance of communication but added that such efforts should keep national debates, such as budgetary processes. Regional exchanges of best practices and lessons learned should be fostered, including in cooperation with regional organizations.

**Cecilia Lopez Y Royo** summarized the discussion by recollecting two points which were raised by all, mainly the importance of interagency cooperation and coordination and the importance of inclusive communication, going beyond those who are already aware about the environmental dimension.

**Concluding** the interregional meeting, **Diane Klaimi** recalled that the intention behind this meeting has been to provide an intergovernmental platform to discuss amongst countries at the regional level and initiate an interregional network for communication. However, the options were limited due to the covid-19 pandemics, but the work needs to continue beyond the project in the next phase. She acknowledged the contributors to the meeting and recalled some take-aways from the workshop concluding discussion, such as the potential of cooperation at regional level and of inter-regional cooperation. Ms. Klaimi appreciated the flexibility of UNDA, the UNEP regional offices and the country partners to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and adapt the project workplan accordingly. Ms. Diane also thanked the technical team, the interpreters, and all the speakers and presenters of this interregional meeting and closed the meeting.

The meeting documents, presentations, reports and tools will be shared through the meeting website: <https://www.unep.org/events/workshop/interregional-workshop-unda-1819q-project-towards-coherent-implementation>

## **Contact information**

Project webpage: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/environmental-rights-and-governance/what-we-do/supporting-2030-agenda/unep-action>

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