

Contributions of the United Nations Environment Assembly to the 2022 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: Responses to the questions raised by the President of the Economic and Social Council

a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs.

UNEA 5 theme on “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” and UNEP@50 on “Strengthening UNEP for the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” have much to contribute to the 2022 HLPF on sustainable development and the five Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review also in the context of the COVID-19 recovery. The Ministerial Declaration adopted at UNEA-5, and the Political Declaration adopted at UNEP@50, provide strong elements related to the theme of this 2022 HLPF “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

The COVID 19 pandemic has accelerated the need for the world to take urgent action to address the environmental crises and strengthen the long term sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from COVID-19.¹

UNEA has recognized the interdependencies among biodiversity loss, pollution, climate change, desertification, land degradation, and their interlinkages with human wellbeing, including health, and the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems.²

Key opportunities for strengthening actions for nature to achieve the SDGs, including SDGs 14 and 15, highlighted at UNEA include the change in the current patterns of interaction with nature, promoting a One Health approach, implementation and scaling up of nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches, enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production, more sustainable and resilient infrastructure including natural infrastructure, sustainable nitrogen management, and enhanced mobilisation of means of implementation, including resources, capacity-building, technology and partnerships, among others.

The pandemic has also shown that strong environmental governance supported by enabling macroeconomic policies can build on science to help catalyse a response required to improving well being, in general, and the lives of the poor and the vulnerable. Science can and must inform and drive financial, economic and behavioural shifts towards sustainable consumption and production patterns.³

Renewed efforts are also needed to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international environmental law, including through global partnerships and enabling a sustainable future for our planet and addressing urgent social, economic and environmental challenges. Access to information, access to public participation in decision-making processes and access to justice in environmental matters is key to advancing sustainable development. This can be enhanced through capacity-building and education and a range of partnerships.⁴

b) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body.

UNEA 5.2 recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe negative impacts on human health, safety and well-being, as well as severe disruption to societies and economies and a devastating impact on lives and livelihoods, and that the poorest and most vulnerable are the hardest hit by the pandemic.⁵

¹ Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

² Resolution 5/3 Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development

³ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

The interdependent crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are also causing devastation and strain on health systems, including through the emergence of infectious and noncommunicable diseases and increasing health inequalities.⁶

UNEA called for renewed efforts at all levels to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international environmental law, and to keep the ambition regarding environmental protection and means of implementation, including through global partnerships.⁷

c) Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review.

UNEA has prioritized policies that can have multiplier effects and allow progress in not only the SDGs under review but several SDGs, if not all.

The following policies that were agreed to or recognized in UNEA can be highlighted to advance the implementation of the SDGs under in-depth review:

- **Promotion and strengthening of nature-based solutions for SDG 14, SDG 15**, to address effectively and adaptively social, economic and environmental challenges, such as biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, desertification, food security, disaster risks, urban development, water availability, poverty eradication, inequality, unemployment, as well as social and sustainable economic development, human health and a large range of ecosystem services.⁸
- **Promotion of innovative, holistic approaches that truly value nature.** Need of transformative and systemic changes and for policies that address several environmental, economic and social challenges simultaneously, rechanneling financial flows through innovative, holistic approaches that truly value nature.⁹
- **Safeguarding life under water and restore a clean, healthy, resilient and productive ocean** by strengthening efforts to protect, conserve and sustainably manage our oceans, seas, lakes, rivers and coastal ecosystems while acting to prevent pollution (including plastic) and sea level rise, ocean warming and acidification.¹⁰ Enhance the mainstreaming of the protection of coastal and marine ecosystems in policies, particularly those addressing environmental threats caused by increased nutrients, wastewater, marine litter and microplastics was also addressed in UNEA 4.¹¹
- **Promotion of the implementation of a One Health approach** in order to better detect, prevent, prepare and respond to health risks, as well as to invest in enhancing the provision of ecosystem services related to health.¹²
- **Enhancing circular economy policies and approaches** to achieving sustainable consumption and production, taking into account national circumstances and capacities, in relevant national and regional strategies and action plans, including those related to relevant multilateral environmental agreements.¹³
- **Ensuing sustainable and resilient infrastructure** by, among others, strengthening frameworks, including for financing, that maintain and enhance ecological connectivity, avoid further fragmentation, and minimize other potential impacts on ecosystems and livelihoods, and also promote natural infrastructure with its broad range of benefits.¹⁴
- **Strengthening environmental governance and foster rule of law** by renewing efforts at all levels to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international law and strengthening, where needed, environmental laws, policies and regulatory frameworks at the national, regional and global levels, without reducing the existing levels of environmental protection, and to strengthen capacity across all sectors for the effective implementation of international environmental law; ensure access to information, access to public participation in

⁶ Resolution 5/5. Biodiversity and health.

⁷ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

⁸ Resolution 5/3 Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development

⁹ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ UNEA 4/11. Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities.

¹² Resolution 5/5. Biodiversity and health

¹³ Resolution 5/11. Enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

¹⁴ Resolution 5/9. Sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

decision-making processes and access to justice in environmental matters and share evidence based environmental information and raise public awareness regarding critical, persistent and emerging environmental issues.¹⁵

- **Enhancing environmental education and training, in line with the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity building**, including through UNEP's mandate and cooperation with all relevant United Nations bodies, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations University, the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and other international institutions.¹⁶
- **Promoting gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls** in environmental governance, recognizing the importance of gender equality, the empowerment of women and the role that women play as managers of natural resources and agents of change in safeguarding the environment and the potential of women's knowledge and collective action to improve resource productivity, enhance ecosystem conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources, and create more sustainable, low-carbon food, energy, water and health systems.¹⁷
- **Enhancing the provision and mobilization of all types and sources of means of implementation**, including capacity-building, technology and financial support, and to promote global partnerships and North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, in order to support developing countries in the implementation of national environmental policies in the areas in which they require it, and complementing their national efforts, consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.¹⁸

d) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures emanating from UNEA for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda include:

Strengthening measures to achieve a sustainable, resilient and inclusive global recovery including, but not limited to continuing to enhance actions to combat climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹⁹

Mainstream, in a balanced manner, the environmental dimension of sustainable development into national policies, strategies and planning, including but not limited to supporting building of the capacity of relevant authorities, taking into account national circumstances, in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²⁰

Promote and strengthen ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions, including by reducing deforestation and forest degradation and by protecting, conserving, sustainably managing and restoring degraded land, soil and ecosystems that provide us with food, water and energy, are habitats for biodiversity, and provide carbon storage and sequestration, thus yielding multiple benefits across the economic, social and environmental domains and underpinning the efforts to achieve the SDGs.²¹

Share knowledge and build capacity, especially in developing countries, in the areas of research and development, technological innovation to help improve information knowledge sharing and technical support for an inclusive resilient sustainable recovery.²²

¹⁵ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

¹⁶ UNEA 2/3. Investing in human capacity for sustainable development through environmental education and training.

¹⁷ UNEA 4/17. Promote gender equality, and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls in environmental governance.

¹⁸ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

¹⁹ Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.²⁰ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

²¹ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

²² Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

Integrate circular economy approaches, taking into account national circumstances and capacities, in

relevant national and regional strategies and action plans, including those related to relevant multilateral environmental agreements.²³

Encourage partnerships to promote and enhance circular economy approaches as well as business models, innovations and investments to contribute to inter alia sustainable management, use and consumption of natural resources and materials.²⁴

Mainstream and coordinate conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity into sectoral policies and programmes, with a view to preventing against current and future health risks, including disease outbreaks with epidemic and pandemic potential.²⁵

Strengthen links between biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and public health in sectoral policies and in accordance with the One Health approach, in order to better detect, prevent, prepare and respond to health risks, as well as invest in enhancing the provision of ecosystem services related to health, taking into account where appropriate the One Health high level expert panel recommendations.²⁶

Renew efforts at all levels to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international environmental law, and strengthen, where needed, environmental laws, policies and regulatory frameworks at the national, regional and global levels, without reducing the existing levels of environmental protection.²⁷

Promote transformative and systemic changes and policies that address several environmental, economic and social challenges simultaneously, rechanneling financial flows to serve the attainment of the SDGs through innovative and holistic approaches that truly value nature.²⁸

e) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF.

Affirm the indispensable role of the UNEA within the United Nations system as the intergovernmental decision-making body with universal membership, while respecting the independence and respective mandates of multilateral environmental agreements, for enhancing progress in the comprehensive implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, providing overarching policy guidance and strengthening international environmental governance and implementation of the global environmental agenda in line with the document “The Future We Want”.²⁹

Welcome:

- the outcomes of the resumed fifth session of the UNEA-5 and UNEP@50, as a meaningful contribution to ensure transformative actions to address the triple planetary crisis and towards the acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- the outcomes of UNFCCC COP26, including adoption of the Glasgow Climate Pact, and the holding of the first part of the CBD COP15 in Kunming, China, under the theme proposed by the host, “Ecological civilization: building a shared future for all life on earth” and call for an ambitious and transformational post-2020 global biodiversity framework for adoption at the second part of COP15;³⁰
- the Global Assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and Working Group I and II contributions to the Sixth Assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and taking note of other relevant reports;³¹
 - the UNEA resolutions to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee towards an

²³ Resolution 5/11. Enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Resolution 5/5. Biodiversity and health.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

²⁸ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session

²⁹ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

³⁰ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

³¹ Resolution 5/3 Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development.

international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution and to establish a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

Reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and, recognizing that

we face different challenges, we will strengthen our international cooperation towards the environmental dimension of sustainable development.³²

Recognise:

- that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is important for the enjoyment of human rights and for sustainable development in all its dimensions;³³
- the call to end pollution given the resolutions adopted at UNEA-3, UNEA-4 and UNEA-5.2 on this issue;
- that pursuing circular economy approaches as a pathway for achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns can contribute to addressing the interlinkages of the planetary crises and human health impacts, thus contributing to meeting relevant goals under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other internationally agreed environmental goals;³⁴
- the importance of the best available science for effective action and policymaking on climate change, biodiversity and pollution, and stress the urgency of enhancing ambition and action in relation to mitigation, adaptation and finance in this critical decade.³⁵

Reaffirm the commitment to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, recognising restoration could bring positive socioeconomic change, protect ecosystems, facilitate climate adaptation and act as an accelerator for achieving several SDGs.

Encourage the rechanneling of financial flows to serve the attainment of sustainable development goals through innovative holistic approaches that truly value nature.³⁶

Promote and strengthen nature-based solutions, yielding multiple benefits across the economic, social and environmental domains and underpinning our efforts to achieve the SDGs.³⁷

Call for:

- renewed efforts at all levels to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international environmental law, and to keep the ambition regarding environmental protection and means of implementation.³⁸
- the enhancement of the provision and mobilization of all types and sources of means of implementation, including capacity-building, technology and financial support, and to promote global partnerships and North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.³⁹

Encourage the private sector and multilateral financial institutions to continue to support countries whose economies have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic for a sustainable resilient and inclusive recovery.⁴⁰

Welcome and express support for the upcoming international meeting “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”, to be held in Stockholm on 2 and 3 June 2022 to further accelerate the achievement of the environmental dimension of the 2030 agenda and a healthy planet for the prosperity of all.⁴¹

³² Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

³³ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

³⁴ Resolution 5/11. Enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

³⁵ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Resolution 5/3 Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development.

³⁸ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

⁴¹ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.