
Committee of Permanent Representatives
Subcommittee Meeting
Thursday 17 March 2022
14:00 p.m. – 17:00 p.m.
Conference Room 1, United Nations Office of Nairobi
Hybrid Meeting

Agenda Item 2: Inputs to the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

This note, entitled “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”, serves as the background document for the consideration of Agenda Item 2, “Inputs to the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.”

In accordance with the mandate provided in paragraph 3 of the UNEA resolution 3/3 and the decision of the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly to defer its consideration of the contribution to the 2022 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to a future meeting of the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representative, the Secretariat has prepared a draft contribution of the UN Environment Assembly to the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the theme of the High-Level Political Forum “*Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”, which is shared in response to the invitation dated 26 November 2021 by H.E. Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of the Economic and Social Council, to the President of UNEA, and takes into account the outcomes of the recently concluded resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2), including the Ministerial Declaration of UNEA-5 and the political declaration at UNEP@50.

Member States are invited to consider the first draft contribution of the UN Environment Assembly to the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in view of a revised draft contribution for further consideration at the next scheduled subcommittee meeting.

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

This paper provides contributions of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) to the thematic review of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2022. The contribution is shared in response to the invitation dated 26 November 2021 by H.E Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of the Economic and Social Council, to the President of UNEA.

(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.

The COVID19 pandemic has shown how connected we are as a global community living on one shared planet. Health, food, economies, and the wellbeing of nearly 8 billion people and other species across diverse ecosystems, constitute a web of life that is inextricably interlinked. The pandemic has shown how fragile we can be, but also how we as a global community can work together, rapidly change behaviour, and based on science mobilize urgent responses when needed. It has shown the importance of global cooperation and solidarity to respond to and solve global challenges. We need to mobilise the same sense of urgency and political will to respond to the critical state of the planet to protect life on the planet and the welfare of current and future generations.

The resumed fifth session of UNEA (UNEA 5.2) focused on urgent action for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, recognizing that biodiversity loss poses threats to human, animal and ecosystem health, and that conserving, restoring, and sustainably using biodiversity, ecosystems and their services can bring benefits for health and well-being. It also recognised the need for transformative and systemic changes and for policies that address several environmental, economic and social challenges simultaneously, rechannelling financial flows to serve the attainment of sustainable development goals through innovative holistic approaches that truly value nature.

UNEA 5.2 adopted 14 resolutions and a ministerial declaration including the establishment of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to close the gaps in existing instruments and tackle plastic pollution, including marine plastic litter, with circular solutions across the lifecycle of plastic products.

Human well-being critically depends on the wellbeing of Earth's natural systems. Yet the economic, technological and social advances have also led to a reduction of the Earth's capacity to sustain current and future human well-being. As the environment is gradually being degraded, the risk of crossing thresholds that upset critical socioecological systems increases, leading to threats such as new pandemics and sudden changes to food supply.

Keeping the planet's ecosystems healthy is key to providing health and well-being for all. Policies, good practices and appropriate technologies to tackle climate change, ecosystem

degradation and pollution can significantly reduce associated risks to human health including from respiratory diseases, water-borne diseases, malnutrition and chemical exposure.

Ministers gathered at UNEA5.2 recognized the heightened risks of future pandemics and other health threats if the current patterns of interaction with nature are maintained and the One Health approach is not taken into account when moving forward.

Currently the scale and pace of the global response to the planetary crisis related to biodiversity, climate and pollution, all closely connected to the SDGs under review, is failing to reverse or even slow down the current trends. We are at a point where it is not sufficient to limit loss, but we need to turn the trends to restore our planet and its life supporting systems.

The pandemic has shown the critical role of science. 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.

Only a system-wide transformation will achieve well-being for all within Earth's capacity to support life, provide resources and absorb waste. This transformation will involve a fundamental change in the technological, economic and social organization of society. Nature and people need to be at the heart of decision making and how we measure progress.

Major shifts in investment and regulation are key to just and informed transformations that overcome inertia and opposition from vested interests. Regulatory processes should embody transparent decision-making and good governance involving all relevant stakeholders. Opposition to change can be defused by redirecting subsidies toward alternative livelihoods and new business models.

All actors have individual, complementary and nested roles to play in bringing about cross-sectoral and economy-wide transformative change with immediate and long-term impact. This can be enhanced through capacity-building and education and a range of partnerships.

Ministers at UNEA committed to promoting an inclusive and sustainable recovery, a green and just transition, with the goal of revitalizing economies and livelihoods and ending poverty; by mainstreaming biodiversity, climate change and pollution concerns into all policies and tools; by making use of green economy pathways that emphasize ecosystem and knowledge-based management; employing gender sensitive approaches and addressing inequalities; and by reducing carbon and non-carbon greenhouse gas emissions while adapting to climate change and its impacts in line with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement.

(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.

Environmental changes are undermining hard-won development gains, causing economic costs and millions of premature deaths annually. It is impeding progress towards ending poverty and hunger, reducing inequalities and promoting sustainable economic growth, land degradation, for instance, adversely affects more than three billion people. The increasingly unequal and

resource-intensive model of development drives environmental decline through climate change, biodiversity loss and other forms of pollution and resource degradation.

The well-being of today's youth and future generations depends on an urgent and clear break with current trends of environmental decline. We need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 compared to 2010 levels and reach net-zero emissions by 2050 to achieve the 1.5°C Paris Agreement target. At the same time conserving and restoring biodiversity and minimizing pollution and waste is equally important.

Achieving the SDGs is threatened by an array of escalating environmental risks. The burden of environmental decline is felt disproportionately by the poor and vulnerable and looms even larger over today's youth and future generations.

The deteriorating state of the planet undermines efforts to achieve healthy lives and well-being for all. Around one quarter of the global burden of disease stems from environment-related risks, including those from animal-borne diseases (such as COVID-19), climate change and exposure to pollution and toxic chemicals. Pollution causes some 9 million premature deaths annually and millions more die every year from other environment-related health risks.

The risks to human well-being and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will continue to escalate unless environmental degradation is halted. Global warming of more than 2°C combined with continued loss of biodiversity and increasing pollution will likely have dire consequences for humanity.

Reducing inequalities and the risk of social conflict requires the minimization and reversal of environmental degradation and declines in natural resources.

Everyone has a role to play in ensuring that human knowledge, ingenuity, technology and cooperation are redeployed from transforming nature to transforming humankind's relationship with nature.

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

Setting the word on a transformative pathway for realizing the Decade of Action will require prioritizing policies that can have multiplier effects and allow progress in not one but several SDGs. The following transformative policies could be highlighted by the HLPF:

- Integrating the value of nature in decision making, accounting for nature and rechannelling financial flows

Ministers at UNEA recognized the need for transformative and systemic changes and for policies that address several environmental, economic and societal challenges simultaneously and rechannelling financial flows to serve the attainment of sustainable development goals through innovative holistic approaches that truly value nature.

The economic, financial and productive systems can and should be transformed to lead and power the shift to sustainability. Society needs to include the true value of nature in decision-making, eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies, systematically internalize environmental

and social costs, and invest in the transition to a low carbon, resource efficient, nature positive, and socially inclusive economy.

Governments should use policies and regulatory frameworks to provide incentives for businesses to also incorporate the full value of nature accounting into their decision-making.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will require massive shifts and increases in public and private financial flows and investment patterns, including in the water, food and energy sectors. Incentives must be shifted so that investments in sustainable development are financially attractive.

➤ Accelerate the transition to economies that are low carbon, nature positive, resource efficient and socially inclusive:

This transition entails decoupling of economic activity from unsustainable resource use and negative environmental impacts while improving human well-being. The HLPF should call all sectors of sustainable development to develop enabling economic policies and incentives to accelerate the transition to nature positive low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive economies.

Feeding humanity, ensuring water and energy security, and enhancing the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of nature are complementary and closely interdependent goals. Achieving these goals requires food systems that work with nature, reduce waste and are adaptive to change and resilient to shocks. Small-scale farmers, especially women farmers, are central to the challenge of food and nutrition security and must be empowered.

Changes in global patterns of consumption and production are critical to transforming food, water and energy systems and to challenging social norms and business practices. Improving access to safe, nutritious and affordable food for all, while reducing food waste and changing dietary choices and consumer behavior in high-income countries and groups, is central for the achievement of hunger, biodiversity, waste and climate goals.

There is an urgent need to stop deforestation and loss of wetlands. Without doing so the 1.5°C target of the Paris Agreement is out of reach.

Ensuring sustainable food production from the oceans while protecting marine biodiversity requires policy action to apply sustainable harvesting approaches to fisheries management, improve spatial planning and address threats such as climate change, ocean acidification and pollution.

Sustaining freshwater in the context of climate change, rising demand and increased pollution involves cross-sectoral and sector-specific interventions at the watershed or river basin scale. This can be achieved by simultaneously increasing water-use efficiency, wisely expanding storage, reducing pollution, improving water quality, minimizing disruption and fostering the restoration of natural habitats and flow regimes.

Shifting taxation from production and labour to resource use and waste promotes a circular economy. Potential inequalities resulting from this shift can be offset through social safety nets.

➤ Strengthen environmental rule of law and good governance:

The HLPF should call for strengthened action to reinforce the implementation of environmental rule of law and good governance, including by ensuring sectoral priorities and laws taking into account environmental obligations and good governance. The importance of community-based approaches should also be especially highlighted by the HLPF as they are frequently written off as ineffective. Building robust opportunities for indigenous peoples and local communities to be heard and to exercise their rights at all levels is critical in promoting effective wildlife conservation strategies and ensuring environmental rule of law. It is key to promote gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls in environmental governance. Greater protection is needed for individuals and groups who are defending their environmental rights.

➤ Stress the importance of nature/biodiversity as an essential requirement and key enabler for sustainable development and the risks associated with delayed action:

The World Economic Forum's Nature Risk Rising Report says that about US\$44 trillion, over half the world's GDP, depends on nature and its services. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration was launched in 2021 with the aim of supporting and scaling up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide and raise awareness of the importance of successful ecosystem restoration. The HLPF should call for strengthened action to protect and restore nature and promote ecosystem-based approaches to achieve the sustainable development goals in its three dimensions. Nature plays a central role in regulating the climate and in contributing to the resilience of human society to climate impacts. Currently, the degradation of nature, caused in part by climate change itself, threatens to undermine that role.

➤ Promote sustainable infrastructure to meet development needs while ensuring the preservation of biodiversity and mitigating and adapting to climate change:

The HLPF should call for the development and communication of internationally recognized good practice guidance on sustainable infrastructure, promote capacity building and the sharing of related knowledge, including education knowledge and technology and digitalization and to increase financial support and technical cooperation between the development partners in applying sustainable approaches to infrastructure development, focusing on integration across all of the 17 SDGs.

➤ Providing space for nature:

The loss of biodiversity can only be halted and reversed by providing space dedicated for nature while also addressing drivers such as changing land and sea use, over exploitation, climate change, pollution and invasive alien species. To prevent extinctions and maintain nature's life-supporting contributions, biodiversity conservation and restoration must be integral to the many uses of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems, and coupled with an expanded and better-managed global network of interconnected protected areas designed to be resilient to climate change.

- Access to information and engagement of all relevant stakeholders, as set out in the principle 10 of the Rio Declaration:

The HLPF should stress the importance of ensuring the access to information and engagement of all relevant stakeholders for the implementation of the 2030 agenda and promotion of integrated approaches and take note of successful negotiations in that regard such as the adoption of the Escazu Agreement on the “Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in the Latin and American Countries”. The HLPF should also highlight the importance of cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and successful practices to ensure the access to information and engagement of all relevant stakeholders and the importance of education to access and use relevant information.

- Strengthen environmental monitoring systems and technologies and the development of environmental data management capacities to help:

The world needs openly accessible data, information, analysis, knowledge and science to better inform and guide what needs to be done to achieve sustainability across all environmental dimensions. Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires an integrated approach that considers linkage across different environmental and non-environmental components, building upon disaggregated data generation and incorporating traditional knowledge, science-based solutions and citizen science. More needs to be done to ensure that once data is accessible, that it is easy to use for all relevant stakeholders in developing policies, implementing and enforcing them.

- Access to quality education is critical for a sustainable future:

Education has a critical role to play to help people have the knowledge and skills needed for the transition to low carbon, nature positive and circular economy.

(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.

Key policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures include:

- Strengthen 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.
- Mainstream and coordinate the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity into sectoral policies and programmes to enhance ecosystem resilience, halt and reverse biodiversity loss, monitor and control invasive alien species, promote food safety with a view to preventing against current and future health risks, including disease outbreaks with epidemic and pandemic potential.

- Share knowledge and build capacity in the areas of research and development, technological innovation to help improve information knowledge sharing and technical support for an inclusive resilient sustainable recovery.
- Take measures, in cooperation with the private sector, to enhance the design of products taking into account lifecycle assessments, to favor product lifetime extension, repair, re-use, and easier recycling in the context of circular economy with the view to contributing to achieving resource efficiency, and promote 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.
- 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 by ensuring an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable recovery, including by building back better and greener.
- Due consideration needs to be given to the impact of policy choices on the wellbeing of the next generation.
- Protecting and restoring nature as a key part in building back better and enhancing resilience to future shocks. Healthy ecosystems enhance humanity's resilience to future shocks by strengthening food security, protecting humans from climate impacts, mitigating climate change and improving our health. It is key to address the root causes of the risk.
- Ecosystem restoration—the changes needed to conserve and manage nature to enable it to thrive and recover – is an economic and social opportunity. Plans to recover the economy from the pandemic needs to also place the planet's ecosystems on a path to recovery and accelerate the transition to economies that are low carbon, resource efficient, nature positive and socially inclusive.
- Redirecting financial flows to support the solution. There is a need for transformative and systemic changes and for policies that address several environmental, economic and social challenges simultaneously, rechannelling financial flows to serve the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals through innovative and holistic approaches that truly value nature.
- Marginalized and vulnerable communities have proven – time and time again – to be custodians of nature, while suffering disproportionately from biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. Achieving gender and generational equality and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders as crucial co-leaders and allies will be essential to countries meeting existing commitments and scaling up action at various levels.

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

The Ministerial declaration may consider to:

- Express deep concern about the devastating impacts of the pandemic on human lives and health, economies and societies, which threaten our ability to achieve sustainable

development, and recognise the importance of taking a One Health approach, and other relevant holistic approaches, moving forwards.

- Recognize that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is important for the enjoyment of human rights and for sustainable development in all its dimensions, and that the wellbeing of humanity depends on nature and hence our ability to sustainably use, restore and protect the ecosystem services it provides for poverty eradication, resilience, our health, economy and ultimately our existence.
- Reaffirm the commitment to the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.
- Recognise that practices that restore land and soil and aim to achieve land degradation neutrality have the potential to bring about positive socioeconomic change, protect ecosystems, facilitate climate adaptation and act as an accelerator for achieving several Sustainable Development Goals.
- Cooperate to strengthen capacity across all sectors for the effective implementation of international environmental law and continuously strengthen, 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.
- Recognise the need for transformative and systemic changes and for policies that address several environmental, economic and social challenges simultaneously, rechanneling financial flows to serve the attainment of sustainable development goals through innovative holistic approaches that truly value nature.
- Promote an inclusive and sustainable recovery, a green and just transition, with the goal of revitalizing our economies and livelihoods and ending poverty, by mainstreaming biodiversity, climate change and pollution concerns into all policies and tools; by making use of green economy pathways that emphasize ecosystem and knowledge-based management; by using gender-sensitive approaches and addressing inequalities; and by reducing carbon and non-carbon greenhouse gas emissions while adapting to climate change and its impact in line with UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.
- Build on the strength of innovation, science and knowledge, capacity-building, and investment in green and sustainable technologies and reaffirm the importance of dedicated cooperation for development partnerships and our strong commitment to multilateralism and international solidarity.
- Welcome the decision by UNEA to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee towards an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.
- Welcome the outcomes of UNFCCC COP26, including adoption of the Glasgow Climate Pact, which recognized the need to urgently reduce emissions from fossil fuels and other sources of greenhouse gas emissions, and the critical role of protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems in delivering benefits for climate adaptation and mitigation while ensuring social and environmental safeguards, and the importance of the adequacy and predictability of adaptation finance.
- Welcome the holding of the first part of the CBD COP15 in Kunming, China, and call for an ambitious and transformational post-2020 global biodiversity framework for adoption at the second part of COP15.

- Welcome the outcomes of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly held in Nairobi on 3 and 4 March 2022 under the theme "Strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme for the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment
- Promote and strengthen ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions, yielding multiple benefits across the economic, social and environmental domains and underpinning our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Recognise the importance of the best available science for effective action and policymaking on climate change, biodiversity and pollution, and stressing the urgency of enhancing ambition and action in relation to mitigation, adaptation and finance in this critical decade.
- Strengthen cooperation across sectors and levels of governments, in partnerships with other governments and local actors and the private sector to transition to sustainable food systems, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement.

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