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United Nations Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment Programme

Fifth session

Nairobi (hybrid), 22 and 23 February 2021
and 28 February–2 March 2022

**Resolution adopted by the United Nations Environment
Assembly on 2 March 2022**

5/9. Sustainable and resilient infrastructure

The United Nations Environment Assembly,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015 on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which recognized that investing in sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including transport, energy, water and sanitation for all, was a prerequisite for achieving many goals, and expressed a commitment by countries to facilitate development of sustainable, accessible and resilient quality infrastructure in developing countries through enhanced financial and technical support,

Recalling also General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, and Sustainable Development Goal 9 on building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation,

Noting that infrastructure is inextricably linked to all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals and that the United Nations Office for Project Services has found that infrastructure systems affect the achievement of up to 92 per cent of the 169 individual Sustainable Development Goal targets,¹ including but not limited to those on protection, restoration and sustainable use of ecosystems, biodiversity conservation, combating desertification, resource efficiency, sustainable and inclusive urban economies, sustainable consumption and production patterns, disaster risk reduction, climate mitigation and adaptation, job creation and poverty reduction,

Stressing the importance of the ecosystem approach for the integrated management of land, water and living resources and the need to step up efforts to tackle desertification, land degradation, erosion and drought, biodiversity loss and water scarcity, which are seen as major environmental, economic and social challenges for global sustainable development,

Recalling its resolution 4/5 on sustainable infrastructure, in which it encouraged Member States to take the steps necessary to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 9 and related targets in other Sustainable Development Goals, taking into account national capabilities and priorities, and recognizing the objective of moving towards sustainable consumption and production patterns, to develop and strengthen national and regional systems-level strategic approaches to infrastructure planning, and to promote nature-based solutions as key components of systems-level

¹ S. Thacker, D. Adshead, G. Morgan, S. Crosskey and others, *Infrastructure: Underpinning Sustainable Development* (Copenhagen, Denmark, United Nations Office for Project Services, 2018).

strategic approaches to infrastructure planning and development, and requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to prepare a compilation of best practice to assist Member States in promoting and strengthening the sustainability of their infrastructure,

Stressing the relevance of other resolutions adopted at the present session of the Environment Assembly for developing sustainable and resilient infrastructure,

Noting that actions to promote more circular economies present opportunities for minimizing the negative environmental impact of infrastructure, for example, through increased efficiency in the use of resources, including material resources,

Noting also that numerous decisions and resolutions on infrastructure and biodiversity have been adopted by the governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity² and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals,³

Recalling General Assembly resolution 75/1 of 21 September 2020, entitled “Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations”, and General Assembly resolution 75/207 of 21 December 2020, entitled “Promoting investments for sustainable development”, which reaffirmed the ambition to get back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by designing sustainable and inclusive recovery strategies in relation to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and highlighted the need for public and private investment in and financing for quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure at the national and international levels,

Recognizing that infrastructure investments are central to the COVID-19 economic recovery plans of many Governments as a means of creating employment, boosting productivity, addressing inequalities and building resilience to future crises,

Noting that, according to the report entitled *Are We Building Back Better? Evidence from 2020 and Pathways to Inclusive Green Recovery Spending*,⁴ the vast majority of COVID-19 recovery spending by Governments was found to be “minimally green”,

Noting also the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030 and that a new global biodiversity framework is expected to be adopted in 2022 by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity as a stepping stone towards the 2050 Vision of “Living in harmony with nature”,

Appreciating the theme of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, “Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 75/271 of 16 April 2021, entitled “Nature knows no borders: transboundary cooperation – a key factor for biodiversity conservation, restoration and sustainable use”, which emphasizes the importance of cooperation to avoid the fragmentation of transboundary habitats and to maintain and enhance connectivity between ecosystems and stresses the importance of the application of environmental impact assessments in line with national legislation, where appropriate, to maintain ecological connectivity between ecosystems and avoid their further fragmentation so that nature can continue to provide ecosystem services to people,

Acknowledging that natural infrastructure can include strategically planned and managed networks of natural lands, water and soil, such as forests and wetlands, working landscapes and other open spaces that conserve or enhance ecosystem values and functions and provide associated benefits to human populations, and can provide cost-effective and resilient alternatives or complements to built infrastructure in the context of constrained fiscal capacity and should be promoted to restore and sustain healthy ecosystems and societies as part of an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic,

Taking note of the potential environmental impact of infrastructure projects on ecosystem integrity and connectivity,

² See, for example, Convention on Biological Diversity decision 14/3 on mainstreaming of biodiversity in the energy and mining, infrastructure, manufacturing and processing sectors.

³ See, for example, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals decisions 13.130–13.134 on infrastructure development and migratory species and resolution UNEP/CMS/Resolution 7.2 (Rev.COP12) on impact assessment and migratory species.

⁴ Brian J. O’Callaghan and Em Murdock, *Are We Building Back Better? Evidence from 2020 and Pathways to Inclusive Green Recovery Spending* (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021).

Recognizing the importance of cooperation between neighbouring countries at all levels for sustainably managing land, water and biodiversity conservation and restoration,

Recognizing also that investments in sustainable and resilient infrastructure are important for addressing the interconnected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and desertification, for meeting sustainable recovery needs and for safeguarding future delivery of essential services,

Recognizing further that the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of comprehensive health infrastructure, including the environmentally sound management of medical waste,

Stressing that addressing the infrastructure investment gap and delivering priority infrastructure may require significant but targeted investment from both the public and private sectors, including the co-financing of individual projects and the deployment of financial instruments for sustainable and resilient infrastructure by multilateral development banks and other public and private institutions,

Acknowledging the need for urgent action to address the challenges faced in planning and developing quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, in particular by all developing countries,

Highlighting the fact that the implementation of any infrastructure projects, including projects with potential environmental impact on ecosystem integrity and connectivity, must be in line with relevant legislation and seek to avoid or minimize adverse impact on ecosystems and livelihoods,

Acknowledging the importance of the monitoring framework for the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 9, alongside other relevant frameworks for monitoring progress on the sustainability of infrastructure at the aggregate level, and that such frameworks may require knowledge-sharing, technical assistance and capacity support,

1. *Encourages* Member States and other stakeholders, as appropriate, to:

(a) Consider integrating and implementing the 10 “international good practice principles for sustainable infrastructure”⁵ into national policies, including through the use and development of sustainable infrastructure tools,⁶ taking into account national contexts;

(b) Implement existing tools, such as guidelines and best practices, including those developed under or endorsed by multilateral environmental agreements,⁷ co-develop additional knowledge products, and participate in exchange mechanisms to share best practices and lessons learned with regard to sustainable infrastructure;

(c) Cooperate internationally to strengthen frameworks, including for financing, for sustainable and inclusive infrastructure that maintains and enhances ecological connectivity, avoids further fragmentation, and minimizes other potential impacts on ecosystems and livelihoods;

(d) Consider the role of digital infrastructure in enabling sustainable consumption and production patterns and improving the sustainability and efficiency of other infrastructure systems as part of integrated approaches;

2. *Encourages* Member States to:

(a) Conduct strategic and environmental impact assessments so that environmental considerations are integrated into decision-making at appropriate levels, and advance integrated, system-level approaches to the planning and delivery of sustainable infrastructure;

(b) Engage, as appropriate, with subnational institutions to consider integrating the international good practice principles, where relevant, into local recovery-focused infrastructure plans and projects;

(c) Promote investment in natural infrastructure and nature-based solutions for delivering essential services and improving ecosystem services, creating employment and accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

⁵ See *International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure: Integrated, Systems-Level Approaches for Policymakers* (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021).

⁶ The Sustainable Infrastructure Tool Navigator comprises a database of tools to help users to identify the most relevant tools for their needs.

⁷ Including those of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, available at www.cms.int/en/species/threats/infrastructure.

- (d) Promote investment in environmentally, socially and economically sustainable health infrastructure for improved resilience and resource efficiency, with the environmentally sound management of medical waste;
- (e) Promote investment in infrastructure that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, climate resilient, resource efficient, that prevents ecosystem fragmentation and contributes to sustainable production and consumption patterns, thus contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of relevant multilateral environmental agreements;
- (f) Provide opportunities for the engagement of relevant stakeholders, including local communities, vulnerable people and indigenous peoples, in all stages of the process to identify, design, build and maintain infrastructure;
3. *Requests* the Executive Director to support Member States and members of specialized agencies, within the scope of existing resources, by:
- (a) Promoting the implementation of existing tools, such as guidelines and best practices, which have been developed under or endorsed by multilateral environmental agreements,⁸ and further developing knowledge, providing technical assistance and capacity support, within available resources, to plan and deliver sustainable infrastructure investment that will drive an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable recovery, including through the assessment of potential impact on ecosystem integrity and connectivity;
- (b) Working with Member States and the United Nations system through existing platforms, including the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Production and Consumption Patterns, and with other international partners, to support long-term sharing of experiences, peer-to-peer learning, technical assistance, capacity-building and training on sustainable infrastructure;
- (c) Facilitating private-sector engagement in planning and developing, and mobilizing finance for sustainable and resilient infrastructure by engaging businesses, practitioners, investors and other private-sector stakeholders;
- (d) Inviting the International Resource Panel to advance efforts for connecting science and policy for sustainable infrastructure in order to provide expert, policy-relevant and science-based options on the matter;
- (e) Supporting the implementation of the international good practice principles by translating them, as appropriate and upon the request of a Member State, for application to specific subsystems of infrastructure and for the private sector and other stakeholder groups;
- (f) Continuing to collect and share best practices, tools and experiences for improving the sustainability of infrastructure systems, and to submit a report containing that information to the Environment Assembly at its sixth session.
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⁸ Ibid.