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**International environmental policy and
governance issues**

**Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/18 on the
Poverty-Environment nexus**

Report of the Executive Director

Introduction

1. In its resolution 4/18 on the Poverty-Environment nexus, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested the Executive Director of UNEP, within the scope of the existing programme of work and budget and in collaboration with other United Nations bodies and partners, to strengthen initiatives to address the linkages between poverty and the environment; and to consider how UNEP could, including through its country and regional offices, contribute to the eradication of poverty.
2. The Environment Assembly further requested the Executive Director, in collaboration with partners, to promote innovations in sustainable agriculture; support adaptation and resilience-building efforts to address the adverse impacts of climate change, desertification, natural disasters, environmental degradation and other environmental changes that can contribute to human displacement; and promote sustainable energy solutions that support poverty eradication and sustainable development, enable access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy, take into account social and cultural factors and empower women and youth. It invited Member States to invest in innovative sustainable forest management practices to conserve and sustainably use forest ecosystems and benefit rural households that depend on forest resources for forest-related economic activities to generate income and meet their energy needs, and to consider instituting policy reforms to ensure that communities living in and around areas rich in minerals and other extractives benefit socially and economically from the environmentally sustainable production of extractives. It called upon Member States to incorporate sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture into their domestic agricultural policy and programme agendas and support and promote sustainable fisheries, innovative sustainable aquaculture practices, and the conservation and sustainable management of the marine environment.

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

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

3. The Executive Director was also requested to report to the Environment Assembly at its fifth session on the progress achieved in the implementation of the resolution. The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

I. Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/18

4. Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/18 has been made possible in part through the project titled “Poverty-Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals (2018–2022)”, carried out jointly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Launched on 1 September 2018, the project is being implemented in 10 countries: 5 in the Africa region and 5 in the Asia and the Pacific region.¹ The project involves tool development and provision of technical assistance in capacity-building, strategic planning, policymaking, master planning and Poverty-Environment mainstreaming in national and local planning and budget processes for poverty eradication in the pilot countries.

5. Other UNEP programmes and projects that have supported the implementation of poverty eradication interventions at the community level, with relevance to resolution 4/18, include: (a) the Regional Seas Programme; (b) the Beijing-based International Ecosystems Management Partnership (UNEP-IEMP);² and (c) the pilot project on “Transforming Climate Action to Empower Women Entrepreneurs in the Energy Sector: Lighting and Clean Cooking”, sponsored by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and being implemented in Mozambique and the United Republic of Tanzania.

6. During the period under review, working with various partners as described below, UNEP continued to promote innovations in sustainable agriculture; invest in innovative sustainable forest management practices; promote sustainable fisheries and innovative aquaculture practices; support policy reforms on extractives to enhance transparency and ensure that communities living in and around mineral-rich areas are protected; support adaptation and resilience-building efforts to address the adverse impacts of climate change, desertification, natural disasters, environmental degradation and other environmental changes that contribute to human displacement; and promote sustainable energy solutions, as described below.

A. Sustainable agriculture

7. UNEP, in collaboration with partners, promoted agricultural innovations, including the uptake of climate-resilient agriculture by smallholder farmers and women farmers, and supported the incorporation of climate-resilient agriculture into domestic agricultural policies to maximize sustainable and equitable resource management.

8. Through its UNEP-IEMP Collaboration Centre, UNEP strengthened capacity for sustainable agriculture in Zambezi River Basin countries by (a) producing cropland maps at a 10 m resolution for Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe and making the data sets available to their respective ministries of agriculture; and (b) conducting training in agricultural forecasting using CropWatch Cloud, a leading global agricultural monitoring cloud platform, for officials of the Mozambican Government.

9. Under the umbrella project “Sustainable Livelihood and Green Development Strategies in Environment-Economic Fragile Areas”, funded by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, UNEP-IEMP conducted case studies on sustainable livelihoods in rural areas with local partners in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Nepal. Through these studies, site-specific interventions for sustainable agricultural development (e.g., organic farming, branding of agrobiodiversity products and community fisheries) were identified in each country to conserve endemic species and support local livelihoods. Key findings from experiences and lessons learned in community-based management were derived for potential replication/upscaling through knowledge-sharing, capacity-building and policy influence.

10. In Côte d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone, under the auspices of the biodiversity programme of the Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of West, Central and Southern African Region (Abidjan Convention), UNEP worked with coastal communities to develop climate change adaptation plans and land-use maps. Similar interventions were carried out under the auspices of the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals project in Bangladesh, Malawi,

¹ Africa region countries: Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania; Asia and the Pacific region countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Nepal (<https://pea4sdgs.org/>).

² <http://www.unep-iemp.org/>.

Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Poverty-Environment Action promotes sustainable agriculture, including the use of organic manure as a source of fertilizer and nutrients for crop production. In Rwanda, the project supported the development of a national land-use and development masterplan for green growth and climate action, while in Malawi, it promoted a soil loss mitigation action plan and supported women's engagement in entrepreneurship for food security, targeting women smallholder farmers. Poverty-Environment Action partnered with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Korea International Cooperation Agency on the project "Empowering Women through Climate Resilient Agriculture" in the rural Lilongwe, Salima and Mzimba North districts of Malawi. Alternatives to agrochemicals use were identified, tested and promoted in support of maintaining ecosystems integrity.

11. To promote food security and nutritional security in China, UNEP, UN-Women and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) worked with indigenous farming communities to demonstrate the viability of agro-biodiversity as an important coping mechanism. In addition, Poverty-Environment Action conducted a study in Vietnam on the gross domestic product (GDP) of poor segments of the population, under the Project for Ecosystem Services (ProEcoServe), supported by the Global Environment Fund (GEF).

B. Sustainable forest management

12. UNEP, together with GEF and FAO, supported Member States in investing in innovative practices to conserve and sustainably use forest ecosystems. In Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, UNEP promoted non-consumptive economic use of forest resources by local communities through the Abidjan Convention's Calabar Protocol on Sustainable Mangrove Management.

13. Under the Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Western Indian Ocean, and specifically component 2 of the Western Indian Ocean Large Marine Ecosystems Strategic Action Programme: Policy Harmonization and Institutional Reforms project,³ UNEP supported coastal community engagement through work on rehabilitation of mangrove ecosystems, including protection of coral reefs and sea grass to improve fisheries, aimed at providing coastal communities with sustainable futures and livelihoods.

14. Under the Ecosystem-based Adaptation through South-South Cooperation project, led by the Ministry of Forests and Environment of Nepal and supported by UNEP-IEMP, work was carried out on climate-resilient watershed restoration, including reforestation, agroforestry and riverbank stabilization through the planting of close to one million seedlings of food crops in 2019 in the Lamjung, Gorkha and Tanahu districts of Nepal. Grass, bamboo and banana suckers were planted on degraded riverbanks. Together with fruit trees, cardamom plantations, beehives and water conservation measures, the crop diversification improved the livelihoods of local people, generating direct benefits for 187 households in rural communities.

C. Sustainable fisheries

15. Under the Abidjan Convention and the Nairobi Convention, UNEP, together with GEF and FAO, worked with Member States to support and promote sustainable fisheries and the conservation and sustainable management of the marine environment. As part of its strategic directions under the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia, UNEP worked with Member States from this region to promote sustainable blue economy principles. A blue bond technical assistance support initiative was launched and is expected to spur sustainable utilization of marine resources, including the mitigation of harmful practices and coastal environmental hazards such as oil spills.

16. Through GEF funding, UNEP, together with UNDP and FAO, engaged coastal communities of Western African, the wider Caribbean, the western Indian Ocean, the seas of East Asia and the Mediterranean Sea in protecting shorelines from destructive activities. Bangladesh, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Panama and Sierra Leone initiated mangrove rehabilitation programmes to enrich such habitats and alleviate poverty by providing a source of income for local communities. Poverty-Environment Action supported capacity-building on sustainable fisheries in Mauritania, including awareness-raising on the environmental and health impacts of fishing activities.

³ Component 2 of the project is "Stress Reduction through Community Engagement and Empowerment in Sustainable Resources Management" (<https://www.unenvironment.org/nairobiconvention/projects/western-indian-ocean-large-marine-ecosystems-sapphire>).

D. Sustainable management of extractives

17. Policy reforms to enhance transparency in the extractives sector are critical for sustainable development. Artisanal mining for minerals, gems and precious metals in Africa represents an unsustainable activity carried out mainly by low-income local communities living under poor conditions. The health hazards associated with the mercury used in gold mining is a major concern, despite the promise of great wealth from this activity. Tailings (mine waste) laden with toxic mercury residues find their way into natural waterways and human food chains and bloodstreams, thus affecting the health and safety of local populations.

18. In Kenya (Migori area), Mauritania (Tasiast and Zouerat areas) and northern United Republic of Tanzania (Mwanza region), UNEP and UNDP, working with local governments, engaged affected communities by providing expert advice on the dangers of mercury in the environment and proposed viable alternatives. Gold miners and women were sensitized to the environmental and health impacts of mining activities, including the destruction of archaeological objects having preserved the local history since the Middle Ages. This work was aimed at ensuring that communities living in and around mineral-rich areas would have access to the socioeconomic benefits of sustainable production of extractives. In Mozambique, under Poverty-Environment Action, technical input was provided during negotiations between the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Energy to implement a system to collect 2.75 per cent of extractives revenue from the industry for allocation to district/community sustainable development projects.

E. Environmental factors affecting migration and displacement

19. UNEP continued to support Member States that sought assistance for their adaptation and resilience-building efforts to address the adverse impact of climate change, desertification, natural disasters, environmental degradation and other environmental changes that trigger human community displacement. This became most critical with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, when many urban households were displaced after job losses and sought refuge back in their rural communities, in search of secure lives and livelihoods, and especially food security.

20. In the aftermath of cyclone Idai, which swept through Mozambique in 2019, causing environmental devastation and affecting the most vulnerable, in particular women and children, UNEP-IEMP, in partnership with Chinese scientists, generated maps for flooding assessment and decision-making as part of the recovery programme.

21. In China, UNEP-IEMP implemented the project on “strengthening Qinghai women farmers’ income security and resilience in a changing climate”, funded by UN-Women China, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Chinese Academy of Sciences and local governments. The project promotes poverty reduction among target groups in Qinghai Province by helping them become economically independent. Project success was demonstrated by women’s increased access to climate-resilient resources such as finance, markets and extension services and their enhanced capacity to move upwards in the value chain.

F. Sustainable energy solutions

22. UNEP worked with UNDP, UN-Women and Member States to address the Environment Assembly’s request regarding promotion of sustainable energy solutions. Investment in integrated energy and environmental policies were key to improving the energy mix and empowering women and youth in remote rural communities, which included introducing solar power for lighting and water pumps, harnessing biogas and biomass and providing cold storage for vaccines or fish preservations in remote locations.

23. In Djibouti, local communities harness solar energy for lighting and heating to support ecotourism businesses. They also use solar energy to desalinate sea water for domestic use and to power cold storage facilities for fish waiting for the market. The use of solar water pumps in Rwanda’s eco-villages and in Malawi are examples of how the sun’s energy has been harnessed to power drip-irrigation systems and improve food security, especially among women smallholders.

24. In Mozambique (Chongoene District, Gaza Province) and the United Republic of Tanzania (Kasalazi Island, Mwanza region), UNEP, in partnership with UN-Women and local authorities, launched the “Transforming Climate Action to Empower Women Entrepreneurs in the Energy Sector” project to introduce the use of clean and renewable energy technology in lighting and clean cooking.

II. Lessons learned

25. The above-mentioned interventions have demonstrated that the goals of ending poverty, transforming lives and protecting the planet can be pursued at the same time. Strategic shifts in favour of pro-poor and pro-environment policies can help achieve transformations that accelerate investment to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable use of natural resources. The following are the lessons learned through the implementation of this resolution:

(a) Many years' worth of achievements has been lost because of COVID-19. Therefore, nature and environmental goals must occupy a central place in recovery strategies and in development policy in general. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of building relief packages on the nexus of poverty and natural capital.

(b) Relevant legal instruments and institutional and regulatory frameworks have been advanced in some jurisdictions to support similar policies in Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Rwanda. These efforts have yielded positive community response to realizing economic benefits by applying tools and technical skills gained through interventions by UNEP and its partners.

(c) Multidimensional Poverty Index statistics are critical for developing poverty alleviation policies. The index's poverty analytics demonstrate the multidimensional nature of poverty – covering health, education, housing, public service and access to natural resources – for both rural and urban communities. In Malawi and Rwanda, for instance, the poverty analytics exercise was most useful in mapping of environmental natural resources such as natural forests and land to inform the mainstreaming of policy into government instruments.

(d) The concept of “inclusive wealth”⁴ presents an opportunity to explicitly define the recovery from COVID-19 in terms of sustainable development, the Paris Agreement and the “beyond GDP” movement. Inclusive wealth as a measure of sustainability and inequality has seen significant improvements in the past decade. UNEP's biennial Inclusive Wealth Report and the World Bank's “The Changing Wealth of Nations 2018” publication have demonstrated that it is possible to assess changes in natural, human and physical capital across all countries, regardless of income level. The United Nations System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and its Experimental Ecosystem Accounting have greatly improved the ability of UNEP to account for environmental stocks and their economic contributions. The inclusive wealth paradigm shows that future economic possibilities depend on the current management of all forms of wealth, including human health and skills, physical infrastructure, sustainable natural resource and ecosystems management (including air quality, biodiversity and climate systems), social trust and the strength of communities, and the quality of democratic institutions. Combined, these assets determine an economy's inclusive wealth and are the building blocks for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Likewise, inclusive wealth statistics can help guide policy efforts towards enhancing the capacity of nations to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and shape the post-COVID-19 recovery.

(e) South-South cooperation mechanisms are critical in providing a learning platform and exchange of experiences for Global South countries with weak and vulnerable economies. For instance, the Indonesian experience of issuing sovereign green *sukuk* (Islamic bonds) is instructive for new municipal markets wishing to attract and expand “bottom of the pyramid” investment at the local level.

(f) Inter-agency collaboration and partnership with private-sector and other stakeholders are key to achieving high-impact results and outcomes. Most successful interventions were through partnerships of United Nations agencies – UNEP, UNDP, FAO, UN-Women – supported by Member States.

(g) Multi-donor cooperation in financing is key to achieving results. For instance, Austria, the European Union, Norway and Sweden have worked cooperatively to ensure the smooth implementation of the Poverty-Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals project.

(h) As Poverty-Environment challenges are common in multi-country situations, global environment and climate change funding mechanisms are critical. Interventions through regional seas programmes with the support of GEF have demonstrated good synergies and results mainly because of the robust structure of GEF, with Member States as stakeholders.

⁴ A country's inclusive wealth is the social value (not the dollar price) of all its capital assets, including natural capital, human capital and produced capital (<https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/inclusive-wealth-report-2018>).

III. Recommendations and suggested actions

26. The Environment Assembly may wish to consider adopting the Multidimensional Poverty Index as a tool for poverty analytics, to be used in new areas and countries to provide the information and statistics needed to support delivery of Sustainable Development Goal 1 of ending poverty.

27. The Assembly may also wish to consider using inclusive wealth statistics to guide policy efforts towards enhancing the capacity of Member States to deliver the 2030 Agenda, shape the post-COVID-19 recovery and accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
