

Contribution of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme to the 2023 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 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 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had devastating impacts on human lives and health, economies and societies, which further threaten our ability to achieve sustainable development. The world is facing heightened risks of future pandemics and other health threats if we maintain the current patterns of interaction with nature and do not take a One Health approach, and other relevant holistic approaches, in moving forward.¹

The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is threatened by an array of escalating and mutually reinforcing environmental risks and given the linkages between climate change, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, and air, water and soil pollution, it is essential to address these problems in an integrated manner consistent with the mandates and priorities of existing multilateral environmental agreements.² 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 SDGs through innovative, holistic approaches that truly value nature,³ as well as to strengthen measures to achieve a sustainable, resilient and inclusive global recovery.⁴

Cities and urban dwellers have been fully exposed to their dependence on nature and value chains for bringing food and critical supplies, with the pandemic compounding a housing crisis and exacerbating existing inequalities.⁵ Supporting cities, infrastructure, buildings and construction in urban and peri-urban areas to become more resource efficient, circular and clean is therefore essential for the implementation of SDGs 9 and 11.⁶

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. Investments in sustainable and resilient infrastructure are important for addressing the interconnected environmental crises, for meeting sustainable recovery needs and for safeguarding future delivery of essential services.⁷ Yet, the vast majority of COVID-19 recovery spending by Governments was found to be “minimally green”, and largely in public health infrastructure in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.⁸

Access to safe and sustainable water resources, according to SDG6, has been compromised during COVID-19. Recovery from the pandemic has shown the central role of water to achieve SDG6. Water supply for drinking and

¹ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

² UNEA Resolution 5/7. Sound management of chemicals and waste.

³ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

⁴ UNEA Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post-COVID-19 recovery.

⁵ People and Planet: The United Nations Environment Programme strategy for tackling climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste from 2022–2025.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ UNEA Resolution 5/9. Sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

⁸ Idem.

economic uses as well as wastewater treatment has to be stressed as key contributions for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Action needs to be implemented to address water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems, with the participation of local communities and the strengthening of partnerships. Lakes provide a wide range of ecosystem services, including the provision of water for human consumption, health, food and energy.⁹ Nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches are among the actions that play an essential role by effectively and efficiently addressing major social, economic and environmental challenges, such as water availability.¹⁰

Concerning SDG 7, the pandemic disrupted global supply chains and strained people's ability to pay for their basic energy needs. Renewable energy continues to grow, yet increased efforts are needed to collectively reduce emissions through accelerated action and implementation of domestic mitigation measures, and contribute to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all. Clean energy technologies are highly dependent on minerals and metals, and the sustainable extraction and processing of minerals and metals are crucial. In this context, the United Nations Environment Assembly stresses the important contribution of environmentally sustainable management of minerals and metals to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹¹

As regards SDG 17, progress has been made at the national, regional and global levels for a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including those that serve as platforms for sharing knowledge and experience, and where nurtured partnerships are ready to tackle the multiple challenges of recovery and enhance sustainable development.¹² Efforts towards making effective and efficient use of existing financial mechanisms and funds for the purpose of implementing international environmental law and improving the status of the global environment in promoting environmentally, economically and socially sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic should be enhanced.¹³

The provision and mobilization of all types and sources of means of implementation, including capacity-building, technology and financial support, and the promotion of global partnerships, 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, should also be enhanced, together with the urgent fulfilment of existing financial commitments under various multilateral environmental agreements to assist developing countries, as well as of relevant pledges.¹⁴

b) Three key areas where transformative actions for accelerated progress have been successful, and three key areas where support is most urgently needed, with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023.

During 2022, several global environmental processes were held, from the resumed session of UNEA 5 to the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity. **Three** transformative actions for accelerated progress are: **Firstly, the strengthening of the science-policy interface** to support agreements and the implementation of decisions and resolutions. An example is the establishment of a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution,¹⁵ with clear impacts in the implementation of SDGs 3, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 15. **Secondly, the decision to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution**, which could include both binding and voluntary approaches, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastic, taking into account, among others, the

⁹ UNEA Resolution 5/4. Sustainable Lake Management.

¹⁰ UNEA Resolution 5/5. Nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development.

¹¹ UNEA Resolution 5/12. Environmental aspects of minerals and metals management.

¹² UNEA Resolution 5/10. Environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ UNEA Resolution 5/8. Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, as well as national circumstances and capabilities.¹⁶ When developed, this instrument can contribute to SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 14 and 15. **Thirdly**, progress has also been made in terms of the **mobilization of financial support** to assist developing countries. Steps have been taken to establish funding arrangements for assisting developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, in responding to loss and damage, including with a focus on addressing loss and damage, decided at the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement CMA4,¹⁷ and the decisions that have been adopted by the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, including a call to increase the mobilization of financial resources from all sources, domestic and international, public and private, with a view to closing the biodiversity financing gap.¹⁸

Four areas with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023 where action is urgently needed, are: **Firstly**, towards achieving the water-related targets, having a significant impact on human well-being and on the three dimensions of sustainable development.¹⁹ The state of lake environments, notably in terms of water quality and quantity, is severely deteriorating around the world.²⁰ Excessive levels of nutrients have significant impacts on ecosystems, with cascading effects on biodiversity, soil, water and air quality, ecosystem function and human well-being.²¹ In this regard, there is a need to accelerate actions to significantly reduce nitrogen waste globally by 2030 and beyond through the improvement of sustainable nitrogen management²² and enhance cooperation on integrated water management and prevention of water pollution, including transboundary cooperation.²³ The UN Water Conference of 2023 will be a unique opportunity for promoting long-term, comprehensive and transformative actions at governmental and intergovernmental level to address the SDGs, building on the outcomes of the 2022 UN Ocean Conference.

Secondly, urgent action is also needed to address the challenges faced in planning, developing, and financing quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure to advance SDGs 9 and 11, including through enhanced collaboration with the private sector, taking into account the need of developing countries for international cooperation and support to complement their efforts to mobilize domestic resources.²⁴

Thirdly, achieving a resource-efficient economy requires systems of production and consumption that have been optimized with regard to resource use.²⁵ This includes promoting and enhancing circular economy approaches as well as business models, innovations and investments.²⁶ Inclusive multilateral and multi-stakeholder dialogues on sustainable consumption and production can be important contributions towards the implementation of the Global Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production 2023-2030²⁷ and can contribute to sustainable development.

Fourthly, addressing the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, requires an ambitious result of the Fifth Meeting of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5), including the adoption of an ambitious improved enabling framework reflecting the life cycle approach and addressing the means of implementation of the framework.²⁸

¹⁶ UNEA Resolution 5/14. End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument.

¹⁷ Decision -/CP.27 -/CMA.4 Funding arrangements for responding to loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including a focus on addressing loss and damage.

¹⁸ Decision 15/7 on resource mobilization adopted by the conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

¹⁹ UNEA Resolution 5/4. Sustainable lake management.

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ UNEA resolution 5/6. Sustainable nitrogen management.

²² Idem.

²³ UNEA Resolution 3/10. Addressing water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ International Resource Panel, Global Resource Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want (UNEP, 2019).

²⁶ UNEA resolution 5/11. Enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production

²⁷ Idem.

²⁸ UNEA resolution 5/7. Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste.

c) Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerate progress towards multiple SDG targets, including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs.

A clean, healthy and sustainable environment is important for the enjoyment of human rights and for sustainable development in all its dimensions, and the well-being of humanity depends on nature and hence on our ability to sustainably use, restore and protect the ecosystem services that it provides for poverty eradication, resilience, our health, our economies and ultimately our existence.²⁹ On 28 July 2022, the General Assembly adopted a resolution recognizing the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, recognising that sustainable development, in its three dimensions (social, economic and environmental), and the protection of the environment, including ecosystems, contribute to and promote human well-being and the full enjoyment of all human rights, for present and future generations.³⁰

Among the actions taken that benefit both the recovery from COVID-19 and the implementation of the SDGs, is the adoption of the One Health Approach, among other holistic approaches, which will help prevent, detect, better prepare for and respond to crises while addressing the inequities of global health, sustainably balancing and optimizing the health of people, animals, ecosystems and the wider environment.³¹

In this regard, the Quadripartite for One Health (comprising the World Health Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Environment Programme), would raise awareness of the drivers of biodiversity loss and their interlinkages with emergence and spread of infectious and noncommunicable diseases, as well as on the importance of investing in nature and in ecosystem services related to human health, based on the best available science.³²

The adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF),³³ an ambitious global plan for nature, committing the global community to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030, acknowledges that protecting the life on Earth represents a sum of many efforts – by government, by businesses, and by everyone – as individuals and consumers. The GBF is a clear commitment to accelerate actions to transform the relationship between people and nature, with clear interlinkages to the accomplishment of the SDGs, and as possible prevention towards future pandemics. This includes commitments to substantially and progressively increase the level of financial resources from all sources,³⁴ in an effective, timely and easily accessible manner, including domestic, international, public and private resources, in line with SDG17.

d) Assessment of the situation in the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, in addition to its far-reaching health-related, economic and social consequences, brought into sharp focus the risks inherent in neglecting biological safety, while highlighting the lack of systemic preparedness to deal with major health shocks. With its pernicious impact on vulnerable populations, the pandemic has also highlighted the existing inequalities in many societies, thereby emphasizing the need to achieve sustainable development with equity in mind.³⁵

²⁹ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

³⁰ UN General Assembly resolution 76/300. The human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

³¹ UNEA Resolution 5/6. Biodiversity and Health.

³² Idem.

³³ Decision 15/4 on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ Report (A/CONF.238/9) "Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity."

UNEA's policy recommendations, commitments, and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 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, taking into account different national circumstances and national priorities and policies and the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.³⁶
- Strengthen links between the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and public health in sectoral policies, in accordance with the One Health approach,³⁷ among other holistic approaches.
- Address the challenges faced in planning and developing quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure, and cooperate internationally to strengthen frameworks, including for financing mechanisms, for sustainable and inclusive infrastructure.³⁸
- Enhance the environmental sustainability of minerals and metals along their full life cycle and align mining practices and investments in mining with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as with obligations and decisions under multilateral environmental agreements, as appropriate.³⁹
- Encourage the private sector and multilateral financial institutions to continue to support countries, particularly developing countries, whose economies have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to achieve a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery and achieve sustainable development.⁴⁰
- Call upon Member States to share knowledge, technology and build capacity, especially with 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.⁴¹
- Integrate circular economy approaches into national and regional strategies and action plans and support the implementation of nature-based solutions⁴² and/or ecosystem-based approaches, contributing to the achievement of the goals under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁴³

e) Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023 SDG Summit.

- Reiterate that the COVID-19 pandemic has not changed the urgency of addressing the environmental dimension of sustainable development but, on the contrary, has accelerated the need for the world to take urgent action to address environmental crises and to strengthen the long term sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from COVID-19.⁴⁴
- Reaffirm that eradicating poverty, changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production and promoting sustainable ones, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development, while stressing that poverty eradication remains the greatest challenge facing the world today.⁴⁵

³⁶ UNEA Resolution 5/10. Environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

³⁷ UNEA Resolution 5/6. Biodiversity and health.

³⁸ UNEA Resolution 5/9. Sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

³⁹ UNEA Resolution 5/12. Environmental aspects of minerals and metals management.

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

⁴¹ UNEA resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

⁴² UNEA Resolution 5/5. Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development.

⁴³ UNEA Resolution 5/11. Enhancing Circular Economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

⁴⁴ UNEA resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

⁴⁵ 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 and UNEA 5 Ministerial declaration.

- Recall the United Nations General Assembly resolution 76/300 of 28 July 2022, entitled “The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment”.⁴⁶
- Recognise the urgent need and our common objectives to reinforce and advance the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of the environment for present and future generations, as it is crucial to urgently reverse the current trends of environmental decline, which are impeding progress towards sustainable development, while recognizing differing national circumstances.⁴⁷
- Acknowledge that improving national environmental monitoring systems and technologies,⁴⁸ the availability of scientific information and assessments can address capacity challenges and gaps, enable more effective and efficient action to address key environmental challenges to improve human well-being and contribute to the prosperity of all.⁴⁹
- Recall the ongoing Global Environment Outlook process which objective is to keep the world environmental situation under review.⁵⁰
- Recall the General Assembly resolution 73/284 on the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration⁵¹ and call upon Member States to promote restoration.
- Recognise that nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches are among the actions that play an essential role in the overall global effort to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.⁵²
- Welcome the recommendations of the international meeting “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”, to further accelerate the transformation to a sustainable future.⁵³
- Call upon Member States to promote transformative and systemic changes and for policies that address several environmental, economic and social challenges simultaneously, rechanneling and enhancing financial flows to serve the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁵⁴
- Promote integrated management of water resources to advance the achievement of internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as objectives of the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028.⁵⁵
- Call upon Member States to strengthen action to address water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including through sustainable lake management.⁵⁶
- Encourage Member States, organizations of the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations to implement zero-waste initiatives at all levels, to promote environmentally sound management of waste and sustainable development.⁵⁷
- Call upon Member States and relevant stakeholders, including from the public and private sector, to enhance the environmental sustainability of minerals and metals along their full life cycle and align mining practices and investments in mining with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁵⁸

⁴⁶ UNGA resolution 77/168 “Report of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme.”

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session.

⁴⁹ UNEA Resolution 5/8. Science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

⁵⁰ UNEA Resolution 5/14 Future of the Global Environment Outlook.

⁵¹ UNEA Resolution 4/10. Innovation on biodiversity and land degradation.

⁵² UNEA Resolution 5/5. Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development.

⁵³ Report (A/CONF.238/9) “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity.”

⁵⁴ Idem.

⁵⁵ UN General Assembly resolution 71/222. International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028.

⁵⁶ UNEA Resolution 3/10. Addressing water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems and UNEA Resolution 5/4. Sustainable lake management.

⁵⁷ UN General Assembly resolution 77/161. Promoting zero-waste initiatives to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

⁵⁸ UNEA Resolution 5/12. Environmental aspects of minerals and metals management.

- Encourage the pursuit of circular economy approaches as a pathway to achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns,⁵⁹ and welcome the Global Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production 2023–2030.⁶⁰
- Recognize the importance of inclusive multilateral and multi-stakeholder dialogues on sustainable consumption and production, resource efficiency and the circular economy to promote sustainable development”.⁶¹
- Promote investments in infrastructure that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, climate resilient, resource efficient and that prevent ecosystem fragmentation and contribute to sustainable production and consumption patterns and just transition.⁶²
- Commit to an integrated management of water resources for the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives and on the implementation and promotion of related programmes and projects, as well as on the furtherance of cooperation and partnership at all levels in order to help to achieve internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as objectives of *the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028*.⁶³ Welcome the outcomes of the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27), the 4th session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA4), and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP17) held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 6 to 20 November 2022.
- Welcome the outcomes of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) held in Montreal, Canada, from 7 to 19 December 2022, including the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework⁶⁴ and call for renewed efforts to enhance its implementation.
- Welcome the outcomes of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, from 9 to 20 May 2022, including on tenure, migration and gender, that highlight the role of land in addressing multiple crises, and a united global pledge to boost drought resilience and invest in land restoration for future prosperity.
- Reaffirm our commitment to achieve the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement.
- Reaffirm the ambition of completing the work of the intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution by the end of 2024.⁶⁵
- Commit to pursuing and joining new and innovative cross-sectoral and multistakeholder partnerships to develop actions for nature and reverse the persistently negative long-term trend for the environment.⁶⁶
- Commit to seeking out innovative solutions to environmental challenges by strengthening partnerships between the public and private sectors and academia for accelerating the uptake and upscaling of those solutions.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ UNEA Resolution 5/11. Enhancing Circular Economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production

⁶⁰ UN General Assembly resolution 77/162. Promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on Agenda 21.

⁶¹ UNEA 5 resolution 5/11, Enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

⁶² UNEA Resolution 5/9. Sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

⁶³ UNGA resolution 71/222. International Decade for Action, Water for Sustainable Development, 2018–2028.

⁶⁴ Decision 15/4 on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

⁶⁵ UNEA Resolution 5/14. End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument.

⁶⁶ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

⁶⁷ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session.