



THE EMG NEXUS DIALOGUES

Nexus Dialogue Four, December 3rd 2017



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

EMG

THE CITIES- POLLUTION- HEALTH NEXUS

The diverse nexus between pollution and the environment, and pollution and human health in urban settings, is recognized as a pressing issue on the agenda of policy makers in cities, national governments and at the global level. Poor outdoor air quality kills millions each year, whilst global urban air pollution levels continue to increase.

Rapid urbanisation has continued at an unprecedented pace and a decrease in air quality is associated with many health problems such as non-communicable diseases. These problems are an impediment to national sustainable development due to the effects on the environment, economic growth, worker productivity and healthcare costs.

The fourth and final EMG Nexus Dialogue of the 2017 series was held in the margins of the 3rd United Nations Environment Assembly, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and UN Environment. The Dialogue brought together participants to discuss the importance of tackling health risks from air, water and solid waste pollution through multi-sectoral approaches and at different geographic levels.

For more information visit the EMG Website at unemg.org/emg-nexus-dialogues





NEXUS DIALOGUE FOUR:

Realising the Sustainable Development Goals - Integrating the environment and health agendas into policies for urban settings

TECHNICAL SEGMENT OVERVIEW

The technical segment explored existing efforts to integrate environmental and health policies in urban settings, including integrated decision-making and policy solutions for environment and health issues in urban settings. A mapping of actors and partnerships at the nexus of cities, pollution and health was presented, together with experiences from the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives and the Urban Health Initiative. An interactive discussion built on these presentations by covering lessons learned in other relevant initiatives.

The environmental risk of pollution is one of the greatest factors for health issues: every year 12.6 million people are affected, in mostly large urban areas. Mobilizing the attention of people on these matters is important; putting human beings at the centre, taking more actions around our behaviour. Engaging the city level is effective, as it comprises more diversity and innovation in terms of possible solutions, whilst these areas will receive 70% of all new infrastructure in the coming 30 – 40 years. New economic models may be needed; for example, a move to a circular economy as part of efforts to reduce air, water and solid waste pollution.

PRESENTATIONS

Dr. Maria Neira, World Health Organization, provided an overview of the environmental burden of disease, noting that many health risks are behavioural and so can be pollution.

Ms. Martina Otto, UN Environment, highlighted that cities are economic hubs, where innovation can take place, yet they are consuming significant amounts of natural resources and contributing to greenhouse gas emissions totals.

Dr. Philip Osano, Stockholm Environment Institute, explained the interaction between SDGs and their targets in the urban pollution nexus, stating there is still room for more UN partnerships.

Mr. Yunus Arikan, International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, suggested that we continue to think the same way, which is not helping, and that UN reform might be an opportunity to establish the UN as an expert on the urban world.

Dr. Vahid Hosseini, Air Quality Control Company, Iran, gave an example from the city of Tehran where municipality vehicle operators, emissions filter manufacturers, ministries and law enforcement established a legislative solution to a complex vehicular diesel smoke problem.

Mr. Sebastian Lange, UN-Habitat, explained that the Urban Health Initiative activates health sectors to mobilise local leaders through data collection and information building. Urban Health Initiative case studies from Accra and Kathmandu were presented.

It was highlighted that the actions in one sector can impact the outcomes of another and that the role that local governments play in implementing the SDGs is particularly important in the nexus of cities, pollution and health. Participants in the audience noted that pollution also comes from outside cities, and that there is a link between the increasing need for food in cities and agricultural pollution in rural areas. Furthermore, urban pressures are two-fold: from existing cities and from new or rapidly growing cities. The nature of the challenges for future cities may also be different.

On a similar note, differences were highlighted which occur between existing cities in advanced economies and emerging cities in developing countries. Perhaps a different approach is required, since in growing cities there is an opportunity to learn from the actions of major existing urban areas to protect the environment. Others highlighted that there are different levels of capacity in cities, and that urban policies to protect the environment are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Moreover, collaborative solutions must meet international challenges; an example was provided. Nigeria does not generate much e-waste, nor does it produce or consume as much as other countries; yet, it receives significant amounts. This is a global conversation, one that needs more places to discuss issues as a community.

It was suggested that quantifying the health benefits of the interventions we propose will help stimulate political action. There is a need for more data, for instance in conducting life cycle analyses and impact measurements to support planning mechanisms. In any case, we need leaders at the city level; a wise politician with a vision. It was asked, from the donor side, why a specific global fund is not available for improving urban human health and environmental conditions. According to some participants, past interventions have given us conflicting messages. Governments once pushed diesel for its fuel efficiency, but its air pollution effects are now of concern. Electric vehicles are currently advocated, yet the solid waste issues throughout their life-cycle are often not assessed from the beginning.



HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OVERVIEW



- Dr. George Njenga**, Dean, Strathmore Business School, Nairobi,
- Dr. Maria Neira**, Director, Public Health and the Environment Department, World Health Organization,
- Mr. Elliott Harris**, Assistant Secretary-General, UN Environment,
- Dr. Alexandre Babak Hedjazi**, Director, Global Environmental Policy Program, University of Geneva,
- H.E Hon Joseph Ole Lenku**, Governor, Kajiado County, Kenya,
- Dr. Aisa Kirabo Kacyira**, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat,
- Dr. Alice Akinyi Kaudia**, Environment Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Kenya

After an overview of the technical segment was provided and panellist introductions were shared, Dr. Maria Neira began by expressing the need for primary prevention rather than treatment; tackling the causes of pollution. Hospital admissions relating to the effects of air pollution are multiplying in India. These people are treated but the cause remains. Mr. Elliott Harris pointed out that the solution involves stopping what causes pollution, mentioning that a fundamental change is required in the way we produce and consume.

Mr. Ole Lenku noted, along similar lines, that the biggest challenge are economic growth, industrialization, urbanisation and waste management. Talking about Kajiado county, outside Nairobi, its Governor gave examples of the passing of an environmental act to guide waste management, along with education and awareness. Other county waste initiatives have involved several stakeholders including the Ministry of Finance, UN-Habitat and aid agencies working together. Dr. Aisa Kirabo Kacyira focussed both on the local and the global levels, deliberating on the need for urban planners to attract the constituency that they serve, influencing their future in the policies they design. She said they are not the polluters, but the strategies they make – if not done holistically – could create an urban space where pollution is haboured over a long period of time. At the same time, she made reference to UN-level collaboration, also noting that the SDGs provide an opportunity to monitor and define what we do in this collaboration.





Ambassador Franz Perrez built on this by talking about how the EMG Nexus Dialogues can act as the catalyst for bringing together the different aspects of the 2030 Agenda that we need. He also noted that the challenge of overcoming departmental silos, just like those in the UN that the EMG is promoting to overcome, is an issue that governments struggle with too.

Dr. Maria Neira highlighted the importance of the medical profession and of attracting nurses, doctors and medical students into the discussion on environmental and social determinants. The medical community is often not empowered enough to use their voice despite witnessing and treating increased health-related effects of air pollution.

Dr. Alice Akinyi Kaudia gave an insight into Kenya's efforts to tackle the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda, noting that the Kenyan constitution guarantees a cleaner and healthier environment, and that a national council on the climate has been established along with a climate change action plan.

Dr. Alexandre Babak Hedjazi, connecting via conference call, asked what exactly is the way forward, and suggested that the back-to-basics are important at the educational and cultural levels. We need to link people's lives to the local issues and practical problems by scaling down to neighbourhoods, citizens and students. These key stakeholders must be able to take ownership of what they find.

The high level segment closed with a summary in closing remarks, by Mr. Elliott Harris, focussing on the core issues discussed:

- Strengthened cooperation among the policy, health and urban planning sectors;
- More data collection and information-building to support these sectors' policies;
- Increased engagement with citizens, in particular with local academia playing a part of the solution during planning and implementation;
- Aligning key actors' policy and nexus discussions in the urban, health and environment sectors;
- Changing our individual behaviour as producers and consumers is important.





FUTURE DIALOGUES

NEXUS DIALOGUE 5

A new round of EMG Nexus Dialogues will return as part of the 2018 Series. During the fifth EMG Nexus Dialogue the following nexus issues will be discussed:

The link between biodiversity and key components of human security.

The Dialogue will consider how UN agencies and their partners can further enhance their collaborative and individual efforts to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the associated Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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