

Implementing the environment dimension of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development¹

Synergies between the implementation of the SDGs and international environmental objectives – Briefing Paper

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) made it high up on the political agenda, both nationally and internationally. Many states have initiated processes to implement the SDGs and prepare appropriate national frameworks. This paper examines SDGs implementation measures and the implementation processes for existing internationally agreed environmental objectives in three areas: sustainable consumption and production; biodiversity conservation; and chemicals and waste management. It then focuses on exploring the synergies between SDGs environment related targets and internationally agreed environmental objectives, shedding light on opportunities to make the implementation of the SDGs and of environmental objectives a mutual supportive process.

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Introduction

Immediately after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)², governments initiated processes to address their implementation. Non-governmental organisations, think tanks, and academic institutions started research activities, publications and debates about the needs and the options to implement the SDGs. The 2016 United Nations Environmental Assembly focused on delivering the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda. At the 2016 High Level Political Forum (HLPF), Member States presented 22 Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) reflecting the early steps of implementation.³ This response demonstrates that the 2030 Agenda, in its first year, made it high up in the national and international spheres.

The debates at national level about the SDGs' implementation have brought about many interesting concepts of institutional changes. However, the nexus between the institutional changes and the synergies between the implementation of the SDGs and the implementation of internationally agreed environmental objectives is yet to be established.

Building upon the linkages between the SDGs and environmental objectives, it is necessary to consider what they mean for implementation processes. To what extent can the implementation of MEAs contribute to achieving the SDGs' environment dimension and vice-versa? How can the implementation of the SDGs and of the MEAs be mutually supportive processes?

Many organisations have undertaken comprehensive exercises to identify the linkages between the SDGs and MEAs.⁴ This briefing paper builds upon these analyses, making an attempt to examine opportunities for synergies between the implementation of the SDGs and MEAs. Focusing on the SDGs' environment dimension, it considers implementation aspects and opportunities for synergies in three areas: sustainable consumption and production (SCP), biodiversity conservation, and chemicals and wastes management.

Initially, a general look at the SDGs' and environmental objectives' implementation processes and how they could be perceived in conjunction is presented. It follows up with highlights on specific implementation processes for the three areas, as agreed in MEAs and the SDGs. Some synergies are considered, shedding light on opportunities to make the implementation of the SDGs and of environmental objectives a mutual supportive process.

² [A/RES/70/1 - Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)

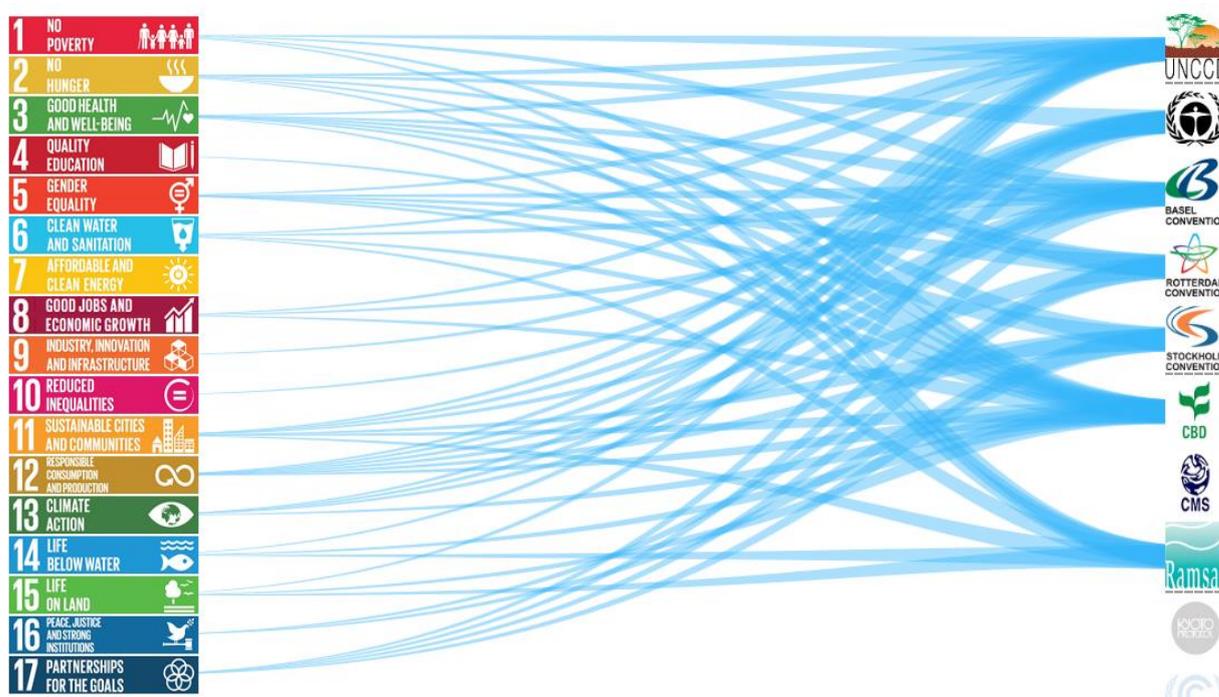
³ See: E/HLPF/2016/7 with a summary of the VNR submitted to the session.

⁴ UNEP Live, SDG Portal, at: <http://uneplive.unep.org/portal#.V1mMFLsrLIU>; The role of MEAs in achieving SDGs, UNEP 2016, at: <http://www.unep.org/environmentalgovernance/>; UNEP Regional Office for Europe (UNEP/ROE) and the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), at: www.unep.org/roe/; The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, at: www.undp.org/ozone; The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Minamata Convention on Mercury; Sound Management of Chemicals and Wastes and the SDGs; Existing mechanisms (MoPs, CoPs and other platforms) under UNECE Environment for implementing the SDGs

1. SDGs and MEAs Linkages

The 2030 Agenda connects the three pillars of sustainable development within the entire array of the SDGs. Some are more closely linked to the environment dimension, such as SDG 3 (healthy lives and well-being), SDG 6 (water and sanitation), SDG 11 (cities and human settlements), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production), SDG 13 (climate changes), SDG 14 (oceans, seas and marine resources), or SDG 15 (terrestrial ecosystems). The links to the environment dimension are balanced with the connectivity to other SDGs, which may be closer to the economic and social dimensions. This inter-connectivity exists among all SDGs and related targets, determining clear linkages within them.

Linkages also exist between the SDGs and environmental goals and objectives. Many organisations and institutions have comprehensively identified linkages between multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and the SDGs. A very good example is UNEPLive⁵, which provides an exhaustive analysis, demonstrating the inter-linkages between the SDGs and international environmental objectives.



Source: uneplive.unep.org

Building upon these identified linkages, it is possible to consider an inter-relation between the implementation of internationally agreed environmental objectives and the SDGs environment related targets. An attempt is made here with illustrative examples in three areas:

- **Sustainable consumption and production (SCP):** The achievement of the SDGs requires change in the way societies consume and produce. SCP is the axis of change. The most relevant goal is SDG 12. The corresponding international instrument is the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production (10YFP).
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Social and economic development depends on the management of natural resources and the conservation of fauna and flora. There is a strong linkage between

⁵ <http://uneplive.unep.org>

SDGs 14 and 15 and the Convention on Biodiversity. The key objective is to use the resources of the planet in a reasonable and sustainable way.

- **Chemicals and Wastes Management:** Chemicals and waste management produce negative impacts on human health and the environment. Chemicals and waste management are addressed in SDGs 3, 6, 11 and 15. The most relevant MEAs are the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions.

2. Processes to implement the SDGs and Environmental Objectives – Possible Synergies

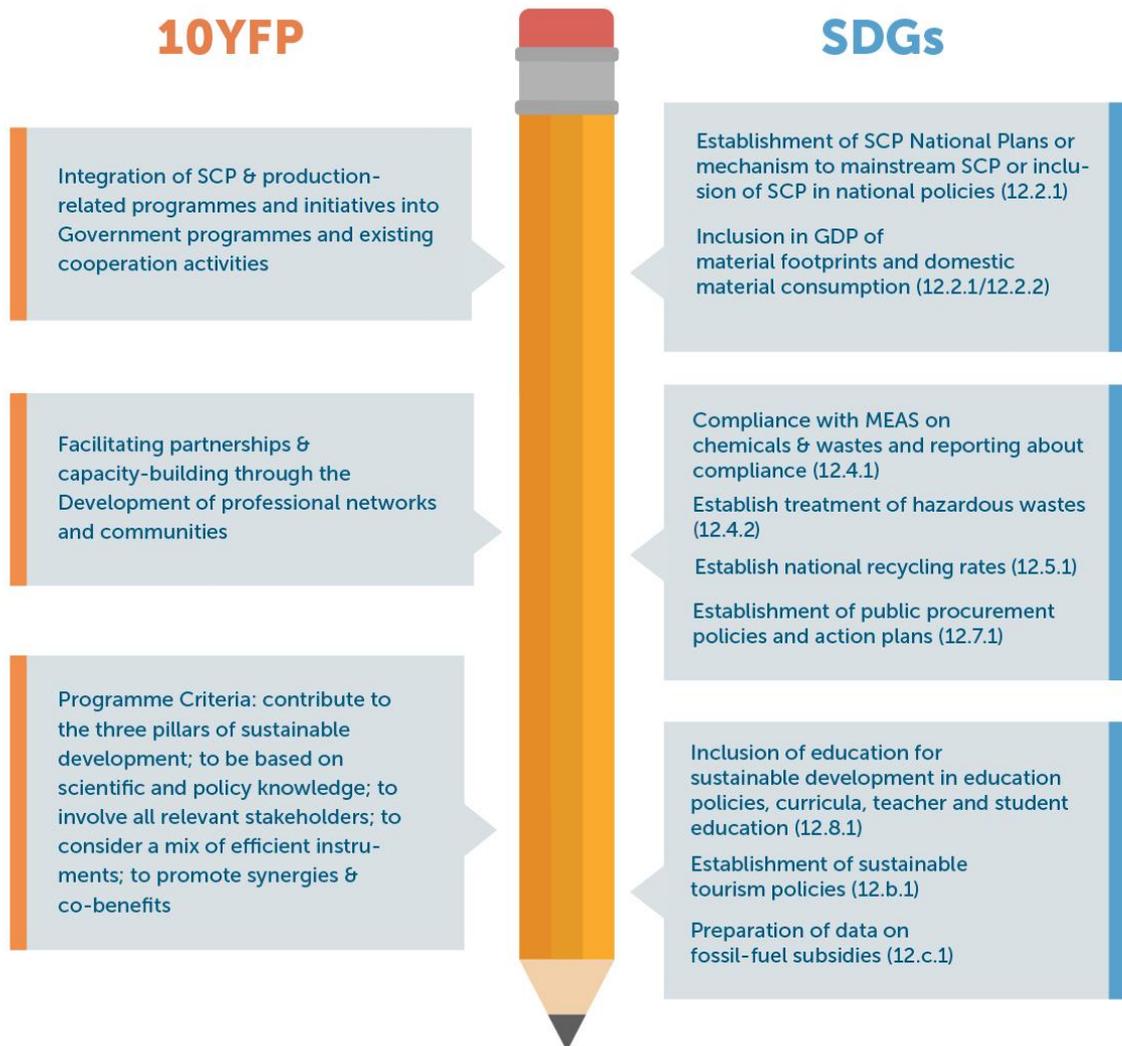
Agenda 2030 stresses the principle of national implementation. States decide about the implementation of the SDGs at the national level, reporting after, at the international level, about the measures taken. SDG 17 provides indications of how the goals and targets may be implemented at the national level, focusing on international cooperation and support:

- Financial measures: mobilize necessary financial resources and prepare investment regimes for achieving the SDGs;
- Technological measures: promote clean technologies;
- Planning: prepare national plans for achieving the SDGs;
- Capacity-building: prepare and implement effective and targeted capacity-building to support national SDGs plans;
- Ensure policy coherence for sustainable development;
- Establish multi-stakeholder partnerships, including effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships; or
- Promote the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data.

At the 2016 session of the HLPF in July 2016, 22 governments submitted voluntary reviews reflecting the early steps taken for the implementation of the SDGs. These reviews focussed on general actions and on institutional frameworks, they were not yet addressing specific SDGs and targets. Similarly, the linkages and synergies between the implementation of the SDGs' environment related targets and of the internationally agreed environmental objectives were not considered.

Seen in conjunction, the SDGs' and MEAs' specific implementation processes show that synergies are possible. As a way of example, this can be noted in the areas of SCP, biodiversity conservation and chemicals and waste management:

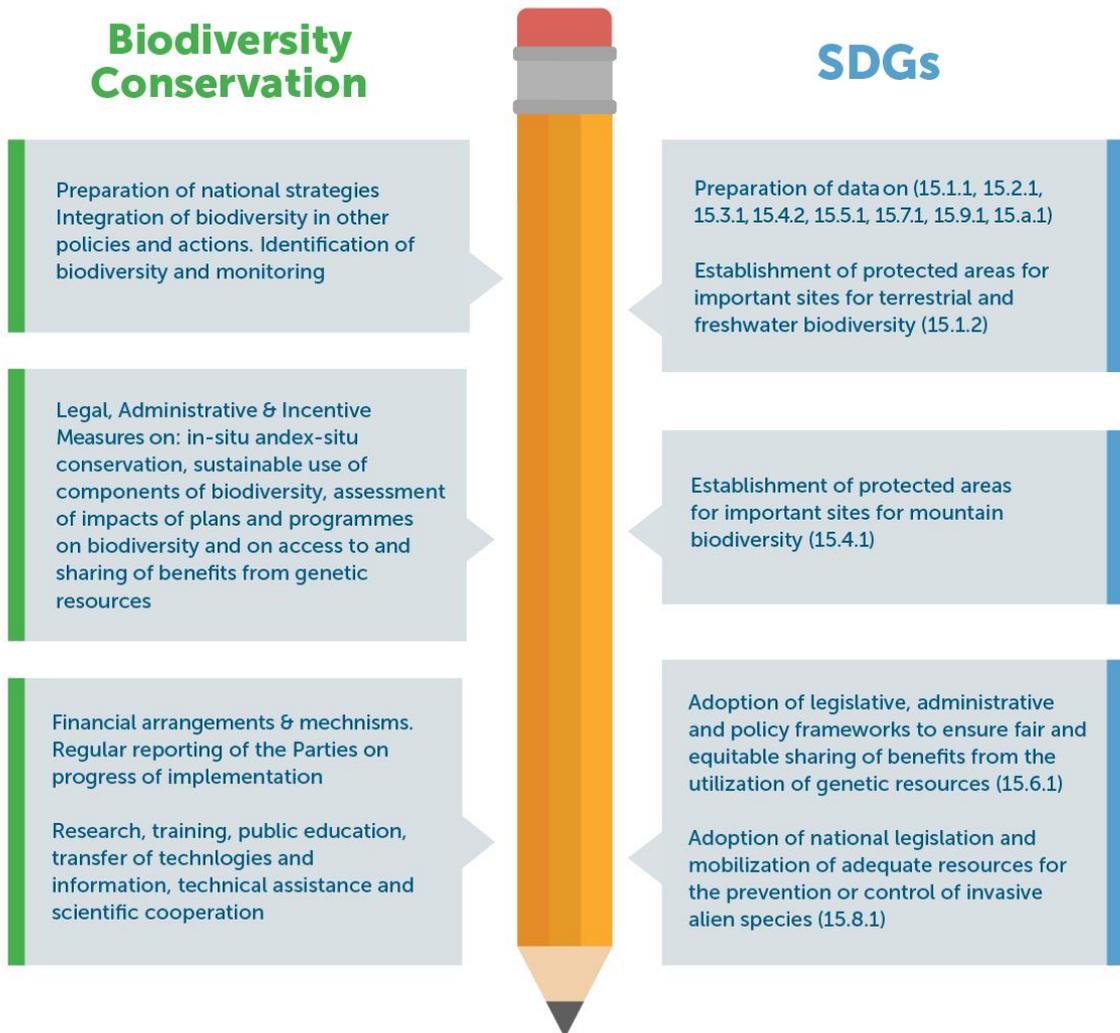
SCP IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES



- The objectives of the 10YFP can be the starting point to implement the SDGs targets on SCP.
- The Framework examines the planning and programming instruments, required by the SDGs.
- Further development in existing SCP plans and programmes related to targets and indicators, which in the past did not receive much attention, could contribute to the creation of a new definition for SCP and phasing-out unsustainable subsidies.

Biodiversity Conservation

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES



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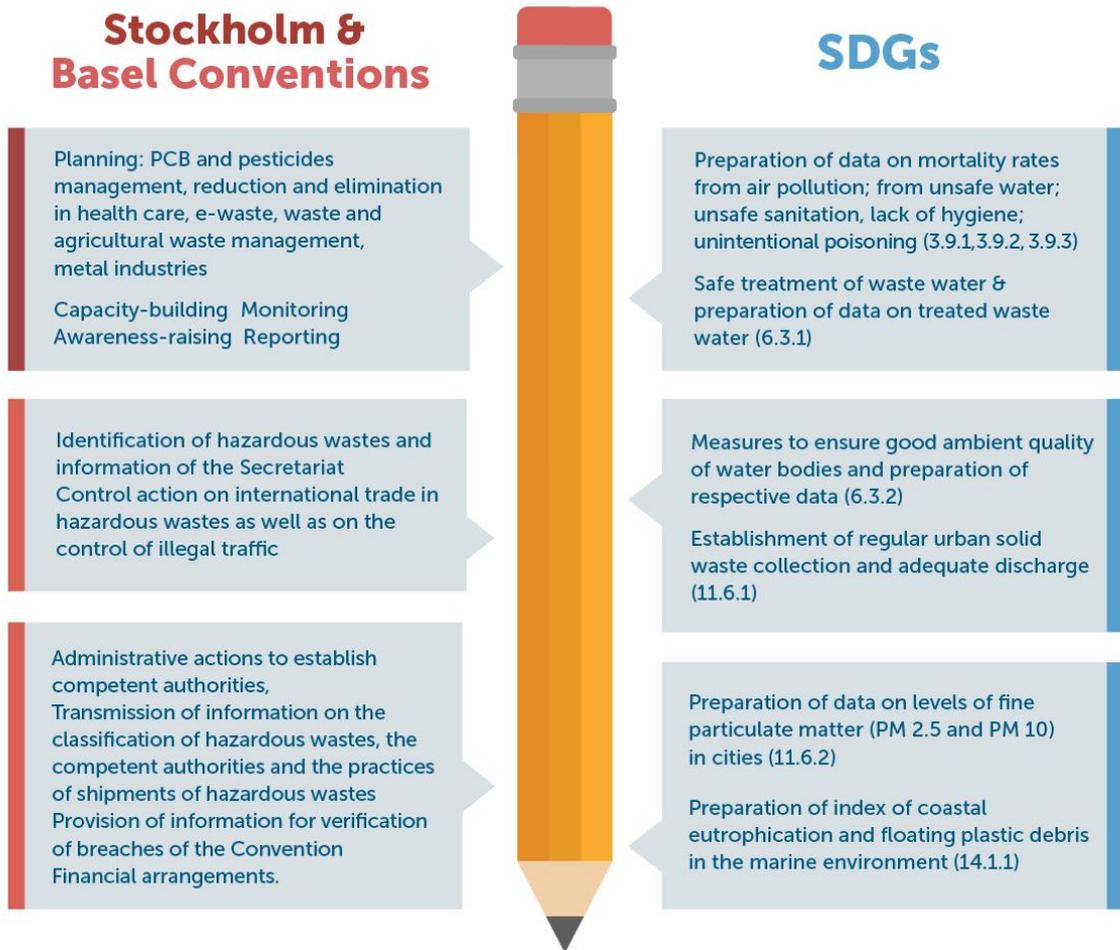
There are various MEAs and legal instruments in the field of biodiversity. The SDGs targets and indicators can be largely achieved through their implementation.
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The Convention on Biodiversity, the related Protocols, programmes and biodiversity targets cover extensively the SDGs targets and indicators on biodiversity conservation.
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Biodiversity conservation and sustainable use provides an example for integrating several interdependent planning tools in the SDGs' implementation: biodiversity strategies and action plans; sectoral plans on forestry, hunting, fishing, land-use and spatial planning; agricultural practices; and water resource management.

Chemicals & Wastes Management

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES



- The Implementation of the SDGs on chemicals and waste management can be considerably supported by the existing mechanisms. Several MEAs address the management of risks from chemicals. If implemented globally, with the necessary resources, they will effectively contribute to the SDGs' achievement.
- The Basel Convention is an example; it covers a wide variety of aspects related to solid waste management that are addressed in the SDGs.
- Data on air pollution, water pollution, and wastewater production are available and regularly updated by international organizations, especially UNEP, WHO or regional bodies, such as the UNECE. If integrated globally, the data can contribute to the respective SDGs implementation indicators.
- A challenge remains on effective measures to reduce air and water pollution and to treat wastewater regionally and globally. These aspects may require more attention in the framework of existing instruments.

SDGs National Voluntary Reviews 2016 – Lessons learned

The emphasis in the NVR was on institutional arrangements for approaching implementation effectively. The key aspects presented were:

Baseline reports

Some countries announced the preparation of a baseline report with a gap analysis about the implementation of the SDGs. The objective was to have solid information on the starting point of implementation.

Sustainable development strategies

Countries adopted or revised strategies for sustainable development and considered the preparation of a specific implementation plan for the 2030 Agenda, covering all the SDGs and targets. This implementation plan would provide the framework for the overall and sectoral plans to ensure planning coherence.

High-level status of sustainable development and the SDGs

Sustainable development and the SDGs are considered as fundamental policy goals, concerning all governmental policies, strategies, plans, programmes and actions. Wherever sustainable development had not yet been proclaimed as a fundamental national goal, it would be. The high-level status of sustainable development is ensured if included in the national constitution as a fundamental principle. Wherever this was not the case, the countries were considering the inclusion of a constitutional principle on sustainable development as reflected in the SDGs. It would enhance the status of the SDGs and help ensuring the policy coherence required for sustainable development.

Institutional arrangement and/ or reform

- Sustainable development recognized as a crosscutting issue, requiring institutional cooperation at the highest governmental level. The steering power should be at the level of heads of state or prime ministers.
- The need for high-level inter-ministerial cooperation is recognized. Some countries established high-level bodies, such as committees of secretaries of state.
- High-level advisory bodies were or will be established to advise governments or parliaments on the implementation of the SDGs. High-level advisory bodies would require proper advice with the necessary standing to propose effective actions.
- Countries stressed the importance of broad stakeholder participation on the implementation of the SDGs. Stakeholders at all levels, including regional and local levels, and all civil society actors should be involved. This assures good channels to communicate about the SDGs as well as opportunities to participate in their implementation.
- Establishment of an “SDG-Check” for specific institutional arrangements of governmental activities. Given the crosscutting nature of sustainable development, the SDG-Check could be introduced for policy-making, law-making and planning and programming in all sectors.

Measures to support SDGs’ implementation internationally

Countries announced measures to support the implementation of the SDGs internationally. These measures would assure that national actions consider the implementation of sustainable development at the international and regional level. Measures were taken to support other countries and international institutions to work towards sustainable development. Reports from developed countries addressed such measures.

Monitoring of and reporting on SDGs’ implementation

Monitoring and reporting will be based on an adequate set of indicators and coordinated using existing mechanisms. Countries referred to processes to “nationalize” the SDGs and integrate them with national priorities.

Groundwork for Synergies – Considerations

The SDGs environment related targets are linked to internationally agreed environmental objectives and so are their mechanisms and techniques of implementation. Explicit linkages between the SDGs and environmental objectives' implementation would make the SDGs' implementation more operational and effective. Conversely, all mechanisms to implement environmental objectives could take into account the relevant SDGs and targets.

Strategic Planning for Sustainable Development

The implementation of the SDGs and of the internationally agreed environmental objectives could be integrated as they can be mutually supportive. Such mutual support and integration could be facilitated and organized through strategic planning. New or updated sustainable development plans or specific SDGs' implementation plans could directly and pro-actively address possible synergies. SDGs' implementation could be explicitly linked to existing or updated plans and/ or programmes for the implementation of environmental objectives. These specific plans and/ or programmes could be part of the implementation of the SDGs or of the "SDG-Check", if such mechanism is established.

Implementation Mechanisms

As the SDGs are cross-sectoral, they could also provide guidance and orientation for MEAs' mechanisms. Existing strategies, programmes and plans could be revised or updated under the perspective of the SDGs' implementation. Present mechanisms could be connected or re-connected in a smart way so as they are individually effective, mutually supportive, and conducive to the overall goal of sustainable development.

International Level Implications

The implementation of the SDGs is the overall objective and guiding principle for government actors in policy-making, legislation and programming. International bodies with environmental mandates may wish to consider the contribution that MEAs could make to the implementation of the SDGs' environment targets and align their activities towards this task, including support to national governments. Guidance for national governments could focus on synergies between the SDGs and environmental objectives' implementation. In this sense, national reporting to SDG's implementation bodies could also cover the implementation of agreed environmental objectives. National reporting could be capitalized to assure a mutual supportive process of implementation between environmental objectives and the SDGs' related targets.

Opportunities for Synergies

- **Baseline Assessments**

MEAs parties are required to prepare assessments and to analyse the status of achievement of the objectives proclaimed in the agreement, before planning the implementation actions. The analysis includes a gap assessment of the respective objectives. Existing assessments, inventories, and analysis, carried out under MEAs can deliver data that are required for the implementation of the SDGs in the respective areas. To be mutually supportive, the SDGs in the respective areas can be included in the scope of assessments and analyses. The gap analysis can identify the necessary actions to achieve both—the objectives of the MEAs and of the SDGs' environment related targets.

- **Planning**

MEAs parties are required to plan for the implementation of the respective agreement. National strategies, plans and programmes for MEA implementation can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in certain areas. The SDGs and related targets could be taken into account in the planning instruments under the MEAs to make them more comprehensive, consistent, and effective. The same applies to the general strategies, action and sectoral plans, which may be necessary in a specific area. It would be essential that the MEA-related planning tools, developed and adjusted to the SDGs' implementation requirements, be integrated into the overall SDGs' implementation strategies or plans.

- **Institutional cooperation arrangements**

The subjects covered under MEAs are in most cases cross-sectoral, requiring institutional cooperation, coordination and communication. Existing institutional arrangements for MEAs' implementation could be further developed in view of SDGs' implementation. Institutional capacity, coordination and communication could be strengthened using MEAs' implementation mechanisms in the context of SDGs' implementation with win-win-effects.

- **Monitoring**

Most MEAs require regular and comprehensive monitoring mechanisms. These monitoring programmes could add the data required for monitoring the implementation of the SDGs.

- **Reporting**

Most MEAs require international reporting or information provision to their governing bodies. Reporting on MEAs' implementation can contribute to reporting on the SDGs' implementation. MEAs' reporting mechanisms could have a harmonized approach with harmonized indicators on specific areas so as comprehensive and consistent data can be transferred to the national SDGs' reporting mechanisms and the competent MEAs' international mechanisms.

- **Financial arrangements**

As long as MEAs' implementation is endowed with financial resources, their implementation processes can effectively contribute to the SDGs' implementation. It can be useful to assess to what extent the implementation of the SDGs require additional financial means in the short, medium and long-term. If gaps are identified, relevant information can be communicated to the overall SDGs' implementation planning processes. Strategic planning for the SDGs' implementation could then take into account the

need for additional financial resources to explore and identify potential sources, nationally and internationally.

- ***Public information and participation in decision-making***

The SDG 16 is considered to be a paramount of sustainable development. The implementation of aspects related to transparent and accountable institutions, access to information and inclusive participatory decision-making, reflected in the targets of SDG 16, can benefit from the implementation of MEAs provisions on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

- ***Legislation and administrative measures***

MEAs require the adoption of legislation and the establishment of administrative arrangements, including the adequate institutional framework to achieve the agreements' objectives. The binding nature of the MEAs goals and objectives may contribute to the implementation of environment related SDGs targets.

- ***Partnerships***

Transfer, exchange and promotion of technology development among different partners are essential for SDG's implementation processes. Partnerships between governments and other stakeholders, which are required under MEAs, can benefit from the inclusion of the SDGs and related targets, further boosting collaboration arrangements.

Conclusion

The SDGs' implementation will benefit from existing mechanisms to implement international agreed environmental objectives. They can be the starting point to SDGs' implementation. The implementation processes have the potential to contribute effectively to the achievements of the SDGs, if they are integrated and adapted. If implementation processes for the SDGs and MEAs are seen in context and brought together, the SDGs will support stronger MEAs' implementation as well as other existing processes.

Member States' strong commitments to achieve the SDGs can help mainstream the environmental objectives in the areas for which they were established. MEAs can also benefit from the political momentum and the limelight on the importance of the sustainable management of the planet's natural resource for inclusive sustainable growth and people's well-being.