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UN Environment Management Group Nexus Dialogues

COVID-19 and the Environment: A 3-Part Series of Nexus Dialogues

Pollution & Waste (14 July 2020)

Building Back Better – a Sustainable Future (15 July 2020)

System Resiliency & Health-Related Interdependencies (16 July 2020)

Virtual Series

The Rationale

“In COVID-19, the planet has delivered its strongest warning to date that humanity must change.” - [Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, May 6, 2020](#)

In late 2019, COVID-19 cases emerged with widespread socioeconomic and environmental implications. As it gained exponential virality, governments began a phased shut-down of travel, manufacturing, and service economies. With this derived an unforeseen finding – COVID-19 revealed the close interdependency of nature with human wellbeing, and underlining the importance of nature for sustainable development.

While short-term improvements and signs that reduced human and economic activity can help restore the environment - it is not [a silver lining](#), and one should not overlook the major implications of this crisis down the road. Indeed, even in the short-run, we are dealing with environmental damage in the form of long-standing adverse impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss that require our immediate attention and collective action.

While the immediate priority across the UN-system is to protect those affected and suffering from the pandemic, agencies will be supporting Member States in rebuilding a more resilient society, to ensure achieving of the Sustainable Development Goals. As iterated by the Secretary-General, [we must reaffirm our common responsibility to “recover better”, with more inclusive and sustainable models of development](#). This effort requires sound understanding of how COVID-19 is impacting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda’s environmental dimension and where opportunities lie for possible collaborative avenues across nexus topics.

Against this background, and as part of its nexus dialogues series, the UN Environment Management Group (“EMG”), offers its convening role to facilitate an exchange of multisectoral and multilevel stakeholder perspectives on the implications of the pandemic with focus on environmental dimensions and SDGs. The dialogues will provide an opportunity for UN agencies and other stakeholders to broaden its reach, share views and perspectives, capacity building efforts, innovative solutions and identify opportunities for collaboration in addressing COVID-environment and sustainable development issues.

In that regard, three virtual Nexus Dialogues are proposed, building on Secretary General’s recent report on the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19 and the UN Sustainable Development Group’s framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 as well as the UNEP [COVID-19 4-](#)



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[pillared response as the and SG’s COVID response](#). Specific issues to be addressed include waste management, valuing and investing in nature, rebuild the next generation of social, ecological and productive infrastructures, and modernizing environmental governance and multilateralism. An outcome report presenting the key findings will be shared as well as a recording of the event.

The 3-Part Series of virtual Nexus Dialogues aim to contribute to the incremental modernization of global environmental governance – which is characterized within the 2030 Agenda’s SDG Framework as the nexus between SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and the environmental SDGs including 6, 7, 13, 14, and 15. Moreover, the net-benefit of moving towards virtual meeting is furthering innovative applications of technology (SDG 9), reducing access inequalities to encourage broader stakeholder participation and engagement (SDG 10), reducing travel-related emissions (SDG 13), strengthening partnerships with member states and within the UN-system (SDG 17) and given current circumstances, preserve community health (SDG 3).

There will be three Dialogues, with focus on the following nexus areas:

1. Pollution & Waste (SDGs 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, and 15)

Some member states paused economic activity and encouraged manufacturing companies to redirect capabilities and capacities towards producing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for essential workers, particularly in healthcare. To comply with [infection prevention standards](#), PPE typically comprise [single-use synthetic materials](#), e.g. chloroethene polymer, nitrile, Tyvek, etc. WHO [estimates](#) that 89 million medical masks are required for the COVID-19 response each month, with an 40% demand for industry manufacturing capacity. As cities and member states begin to metabolize (SDG 11) the [unprecedented plastics consumption](#), we may see a correlated increase in hazardous solid waste (SDG 12), wastewater/microplastics pollution (SDG 6/14), and plastics pollution (SDG 15) – for which agencies and stakeholders need to prepare for.

2. Building Back Better – a Sustainable Future (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16 and 17)

The phrase: “Build Back Better” was referenced as a principle to view disaster as the trigger of creating more resilient nations and societies. It is a sentiment that is expanded, on April 23, 2020, by the [UN SG](#) to emphasize the concept of inter-generational equity as the framework for more inclusive and sustainable economies and societies, and by the [International Resource Panel \(IRP\)](#) to shift to a new paradigm of resource use that is socially equitable, economically resilient, and environmentally healthy. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected vulnerable groups (SDG 5 and 10), through loss of employment (SDG 8), higher infection risk (SDG 3), unequal access to quality education (SDG 4), and a rise in hate speech (SDG 16). Supported by the SG’s Call to Action, it is timely to reinforce the commitment of building back better by creating green jobs and encouraging the transition to a carbon-neutral future and long-term social reform – by keeping social sensitivity high and taking advantage of the crisis in its window of opportunity.

3. System Resiliency & Health-Related Interdependencies (SDGs 1, 4, 5, 8, and 16)

The adage: [“Flatten the Curve,”](#) is used often to refer to reducing the rate of new, confirmed COVID-19 cases, in order to ensure the rate of infection is within the healthcare industries’ capacity to treat. However, untimely lockdown measures have witnessed hospitals being overwhelmed with cases, leading to a healthcare system failure. As the healthcare system begins the fail, the resilience of the social, economic and political systems have begun to degrade – leading to issues arising in interdependencies and interlinkages, e.g. poverty risks (SDG 1), gender mainstreaming (SDG 5), educational systems (SDG 4), decent work and labour (SDG 8), and peaceful strong institutions (SDG 16), all of which significantly affect the governance of environmental natural resources. Therefore, the



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question is posed: how can we protect the resilience of various social, economic, and environmental systems?

Objectives

The 3-Part Nexus Dialogue Series aims to provide a reflective platform on the interlinkages and interdependencies between the COVID-19 pandemic and its environmental impact to foster a coordinated UN response. The main objectives of the 3 Nexus Dialogues are to:

- **Build Community-Wide Expertise:** Foster a better understanding of COVID-19's impact thus far on the environmental dimensions, raise awareness of the links between nature, health and sustainable living – including zoonotic threats and pandemic prevention, and exchange best-practices on what is already being done (e.g. recycling medical waste, improving virtual learning).
- **Understanding the System:** Identify systemic interlinkages and interdependencies so future policy development, decision-making and leadership is informed, e.g. economic recovery post-COVID-19 must not occur at the expense of pollution or biodiversity depletion or it may trigger further ecological collapse by surpassing additional planetary boundaries, increase poverty and access-related inequalities, thereby hampering the implementation of the SDGs.
- **Pool Collaborative Capacities:** Identifying entry-points for collaboration and partnerships within the UN-system, and between UN agencies and relevant stakeholders, in terms of expanding knowledge-sharing efforts, technical/innovative capacities, and aligning complementary workstreams and resources.

Outcomes

The Dialogue is expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Concrete recommendations including the identification of follow-up actions and of possible new or strengthened partnerships.
- Establishment of a network of focal points from interested agencies for further dialogue and follow up with respect to appreciate the short- and long-term impact of COVID-19 on environmental governance.
- Key messages to be considered in policy debates, implementation and for advancing the intergovernmental process post-COVID-19.

Structure and Content

Each of the three 2-hour Nexus Dialogues will be held virtually across three separate days and hosted and recorded on Zoom Webinar.

Provisional Agenda - TBD (*all suggestions for speakers/resource persons TBC*)

Below are general guiding questions, which can be considered as the overarching framework.

1. What have been your agency's recent Science-Policy discussions addressing [issue under focus, in each nexus dialogue.]



2. What are the key capacities and service provisions, at the national and global level that need to be strengthened?
3. What are the capacity gaps and challenges?
4. What are the possible areas and opportunities for collaboration?

Alternate Guiding Questions:

- *In the post-COVID intergovernmental process, what would be the immediate implementation concerns you would have in your agency’s capacity to continue fulfilling the objectives of your workstreams? What are some important considerations you’d like to share or emphasize?*
- *What nexus themes, agencies, and agendas do you foresee a natural collaboration with to pursue mutually beneficial workstreams by sharing capacities, resources, and expertise?*
- *Given that COVID-19 has paused some of the intergovernmental process and workstreams, what have you and your team implemented as adaptations and work-around in order to further your agency’s objectives in the Last Decade of Action?*
- *How can we invite multisectoral and multilevel stakeholders to voice possible concerns and solutions to ensure a collaborative, informed, and accountable process?*
- *1 take-home message from today / what is the main issue that should be addressed going forward?*

1. Pollution & Waste, Time, Date: 14 July 2020, Time: 8:00-10:00 EST

8.00-10.00 EST	<p>Introducing and welcoming by EMG outlining objectives and structure (5 minutes)</p> <p>COVID-19 and the Environment: Pollution & Waste. <i>There are 2 foci: 1. Improving the state of the environment, e.g. air pollution (due to the lockdown); 2. Observing the impact of an exponential increase in medical PPE production, and therefore medical waste.</i></p> <p>Some member states paused economic activity and encouraged manufacturing companies to redirect capabilities and capacities towards producing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for essential workers, particularly in healthcare. To comply with infection prevention standards, PPE typically comprise single-use synthetic materials, e.g. chloroethene polymer, nitrile, Tyvek, etc. WHO estimates that 89 million medical masks are required for the COVID-19 response each month, with an 40% demand for industry manufacturing capacity. As cities and member states begin to metabolize (SDG 11) the unprecedented plastics consumption, we may see a correlated increase in hazardous solid waste (SDG 12), wastewater/microplastics pollution (SDG 6/14), and plastics pollution (SDG 15) – for which agencies and stakeholders need to prepare for.</p> <p>Background document: COVID-19 Waste Management Factsheet, UNEP</p> <p>Panel discussion (90 minutes)</p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Kaveh Madani, Henry Hart Rice Senior Fellow, Yale University</p> <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Carlos Martin-Novella, Deputy Executive Secretary of the BRS Conventions • Ms. Jaqueline Alvarez, Head of Knowledge & Risk Unit, UNEP • Ms. Swati Singh Sambyal, Waste Management Specialist, UN-HABITAT INDIA
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Mushtaq Memon, Regional Coordinator for Resource Efficiency, Asia & the Pacific Office, UNEP • Ms. Ute Pieper, Expert Consultant on Waste from Health Care Settings, WHO <p>Q&A from Participants (15 minutes)</p> <p>Summary & Closing Remarks (10 minutes)</p>
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2. Building Back Better – A Sustainable Future, 15 July 2020, Time: 8.00-10.00 EST

8.00-10.00 EST	<p>Introducing and welcoming by EMG and any other partners),</p> <p><i>COVID-19 and the Environment: Building Back Better – A Sustainable Future.</i></p> <p>The phrase: “Build Back Better” was referenced as a principle to view disaster as the trigger of creating more resilient nations and societies. It is a sentiment that is expanded, on April 23, 2020, by the UN SG to emphasize the concept of inter-generational equity as the framework for more inclusive and sustainable economies and societies, and by the International Resource Panel (IRP) to shift to a new paradigm of resource use that is socially equitable, economically resilient, and environmentally healthy. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected vulnerable groups (SDG 5 and 10), through loss of employment (SDG 8), higher infection risk (SDG 3), unequal access to quality education (SDG 4), and a rise in hate speech (SDG 16). Supported by the SG’s Call to Action, it is timely to reinforce the commitment of building back better by creating green jobs and encouraging the transition to a carbon-neutral future and long-term social reform – by keeping social sensitivity high and taking advantage of the crisis in its window of opportunity.</p> <p>Background document: COVID-19 Green Jobs Factsheet, UNEP</p> <p>Panel discussion (90 minutes)</p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Kaveh Madani, Henry Hart Rice Senior Fellow, Yale University</p> <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Izabella Teixeira, Co-Chair, International Resource Panel • Ms. Cornelia Pretorius, Deputy Director of UNEP-WCMC • Mr. Lev Neretin, Team Leader for Safeguards and Climate Risk, FAO • Mr. Aik Hoe Lim, Director, Trade and Environment Division, WTO • Mr. Tim Scott, Senior Policy Advisor, Environment, Nature, Climate, Energy, UNDP • Ms. Verona Collantes, Intergovernmental Specialist, UN Women • Mr. Moustapha Kamal Gueye, Coordinator of Green Jobs Programme, ILO <p>Q&A from Participants (15 minutes)</p> <p>Summary & Closing Remarks (10 minutes)</p>
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3. System Resiliency & Health-Related Interdependencies, 16 July 2020, Time: 8:00-10:00 EST

8.00-10.00 EST	<p>Introducing and welcoming by EMG outlining objectives and structure (5 minutes)</p> <p><i>COVID-19 and the Environment: System Resiliency & Health-Related Interdependencies</i></p>
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The adage: [“Flatten the Curve,”](#) is used often to refer to reducing the rate of new, confirmed COVID-19 cases, in order to ensure the rate of infection is within the healthcare industries’ capacity to treat. However, untimely lockdown measures have witnessed hospitals being overwhelmed with cases, leading to a healthcare system failure. As the healthcare system begins to fail, the resilience of the social, economic and political systems have begun to degrade – leading to issues arising in interdependencies and interlinkages, e.g. poverty risks (SDG 1), gender mainstreaming (SDG 5), educational systems (SDG 4), decent work and labour (SDG 8), and peaceful strong institutions (SDG 16), all of which significantly affect the governance of environmental natural resources. Therefore, the question is posed: how can we protect the resilience of various social, economic, and environmental systems?

Background document: [COVID-19 Zoonotic Diseases Factsheet](#), UNEP

Panel discussion (90 minutes)

Moderator: Mr. Kaveh Madani, Henry Hart Rice Senior Fellow, Yale University

Panellists:

- Ms. Manal Azzi, Senior Specialist on Occupational Safety and Health, ILO
- Ms. Cristina Romanelli, Interagency Liaison on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Health, WHO
- Mr. David Cooper, Deputy Executive Secretary, CBD
- Ms. Maria Cristina Zucca, Coordinator - Environmental Governance, UNEP
- Ms. Monika MacDevette, Chief, Chemicals and Health Branch, UNEP
- Ms. Alice Ruhweza, Africa Region Director, WWF
- Mr. Robert Steele, Team Lead, Protection and Sustainable Use of Forest Ecosystems and Biodiversity (ProFEBII), GIZ

Q&A from Participants (15 minutes)

Summary & Closing Remarks (10 minutes)