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UN Environment Management Group

Nexus Dialogues

Addressing COVID-19 for the Environment:

A 3-Part Virtual Nexus Dialogue Series

Defining Green Recovery (27 April 2021)

Financing Green Recovery (4 May 2021)

Regional Nexus Approaches to Building Back Better (15 June 2021)

Virtual Series

The Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating impacts on the economy. In 2020, world gross product contracted by around 4.3%, representing trillions of USD of lost output and income ([UNDESA](#)). Foreign direct investments fell by 42%, from USD1.5 trillion in 2019 to an estimated USD859 billion ([UNCTAD](#)), and while the value of global merchandise trade is predicted to fall by 5.6%, the decline in services trade is even greater with a fall of approximately 15.4% in 2020 ([UNCTAD](#)). As a result, inequalities within, but also between countries have been reinforced and widened. Lockdowns around the world have disrupted labour markets and resulted in hundreds of millions of job losses¹. Meanwhile, the crisis has pushed well over 100 million people below the extreme poverty line of USD1.90-a-day, therewith ending more than two decades of progress against poverty ([World Bank](#)).

As COVID-19 is at the center of everyone's current concerns, Inger Anderson, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), has called the pandemic a warning from the planet: The three planetary crises – the climate crisis, the biodiversity and nature crisis, and the pollution and waste crisis – that threaten our collective future, might hold in store much worse than what we are currently experiencing. The year 2020 broke even with 2016 as the hottest year since records began. The impacts of this warming are already all around us, be it in the form of wildfires, floods or droughts. At the same time, as humans have altered 75% of terrestrial and 66% of marine areas, ecosystems that build the foundation of what makes well-being possible are being degraded. Today, one million out of 7.8 million species face extinction. Moreover, pollution and waste, which can be regarded as the toxic trail of continuous, unsustainable economic growth, cause millions of premature deaths every year ([UNEP](#)).

However, stimulus packages and recovery responses to the COVID-19 crisis provide a massive opportunity to not simply reset the world economy, but to transform it. "COVID recovery and our planet's repair can be two sides of the same coin", UN Secretary General António Guterres urged in

¹ ILO. (2021). *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Seventh Edition*.



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his State of the Planet speech in December 2020 ([UN](#)). Given the unprecedented amounts of public money injected into the economy – compared to 2008, developed countries spend 270 times, and developing countries 18 times more to recover from the COVID-19 crisis ([UNCTAD](#)) – the decisions and policy steps taken now are likely to have long-lasting effects on the global economy and will shape societies for decades to come. This is why it is important for countries to build back better, by accounting for nature and institutionalizing a sustainability agenda. According to the UNEP Emissions Gap Report, a “green recovery” could cut 25% of 2030 emissions, while we need to cut one-third of emissions by 2030 to get back on track of the Paris Agreement target of keeping global temperature rise well below 2°C ([UNEP](#)).

Part 1, Defining Green Recovery: 27 April 2021

Even though international organizations and governments widely agree with the fact that stimulus investments need to be anchored in collective intergovernmental agreements such as the Paris Agreement and the Agenda 2030 that provide a common roadmap for a more sustainable future, it remains undefined what a “green recovery” in the context of COVID-19 actually entails. For instance, there is no consensus on whether green recovery means green growth or a fundamental restructuring of our socioeconomic system to focus on wellbeing rather than growth. While UNEP understands green recovery actions as intimately linked with long-term goals for inclusive, green economy transitions – whereby an inclusive green economy is defined as an alternative to today's dominant economic model, which exacerbates inequalities, encourages waste, triggers resource scarcities, and generates widespread threats to the environment and human health ([UNEP](#)) – proposals for a “green recovery” vary widely. As countries continue to define “green recovery” in different ways, proving international comparisons to be extremely difficult.

Against this background, the timeliness and relevance of exploring “Defining Green Recovery” become evident. Reaching a better understanding of what “green recovery” means will help develop measurable, comparable and timely indicators that allow to effectively monitor, evaluate and verify the impact of recovery and stimulus measures on environmental outcomes and thereby ensure that recovery is well targeted and executed. Also, a clearer definition of “green recovery” creates transparency, increases trust and provides guidance in the context of current and future intergovernmental processes.

Part 2, Financing Green Recovery: 4 May 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic shows it is more important than ever to focus on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, issues such as resource mobilization, green fiscal policy reforms, illicit finance, debt and women's empowerment must be priorities. With hundreds of thousands abruptly unemployed, inequalities between countries and peoples are already worsening. The weakest economies will not be able to recover without immediate comprehensive, coordinated measures.

The effects of the global crisis will be long-lasting, but the crisis is also an opportunity to build back better. The shifts in the global financial system are a chance to set the world on track for a greener and more sustainable recovery to ensure there is financing for sustainable development for everyone. The private sector has an important role to play, in solid collaboration with the public sector but needs an accommodative environment created by public finance to scale and contribute effectively. This session explores the important role of the public sector, and fiscal policy in, that can support creating

a stronger and greener economic recovery, whilst creating a collaborative and enabling environment for the private sector to mobilize resources to build back better.

Part 3, Regional Nexus Approaches to Building Back Better: 15 June 2021

Inequality is the defining challenge of the current generation². Regional and local inequalities have been exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic^{3 4 5 6 7}, and necessitates a coordinated international and intergovernmental effort recover with resilience, in accordance with the UN Secretary-General's six climate-related principles to Building Back Better⁸.



Therefore, there is value to investigate and exchange nexus, multi-dimensional, and intersectional strategic approaches and best practices, in pursuit of regional cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and capacity-building. The UN Regional Commission will present a case study to showcase best practices and lessons learned on the topic of “Regional Acceleration of Climate Action and Decarbonization”, followed by a panel dialogue focusing on relevant integrated policy-making tools that observe all three dimensions, supporting an enabling public policy environment and closing implementation gaps by strengthening systemic, institutional, and individual capacities in light of the current unprecedented development situation.

² UN Secretary-General (UNSG), (2020a), “Nelson Mandela Lecture.”

³ Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab Region: An Opportunity to Build Back Better (July 2020) https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_arab_states_english_version_july_2020.pdf

⁴ Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific and Designing Policy Responses: An Excel-Based Model (12 January 2021) <https://www.unescap.org/resources/assessing-impact-covid-19-asia-and-pacific-and-designing-policy-responses-excel-based#>

⁵ Responding to the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UNECE region (2020) http://staging2.unece.org/net4all.ch/fileadmin/DAM/UNECE_COVID_Brochure_EN.pdf

⁶ Policy Brief: Impact of COVID-19 in Africa (20 May 2020) https://www.uneca.org/archive/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/sg_policy_brief_on_covid-19_impact_on_africa_may_2020.pdf

⁷ Report on the Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Latin America and the Caribbean (26 March 2020) https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45603/1/S2000312_en.pdf

⁸ Secretary-General Says COVID-19 ‘Wake-Up Call’ Demands Recovery Built on Green Economy, Marking Earth Day 2020 (20 April 2020) <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20051.doc.htm>



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Rationale

The UN Environment Management Group (EMG), in close collaboration with UNEP, UNEP-FI, UNESCAP, UNECE, UNECA, ECLAC, ESCWA, and RCNYO, will organize a 3-part series of virtual Nexus Dialogues on **Addressing COVID-19 for the Environment**. The introductory dialogue (**Defining Green Recovery**) aims at pushing the needle forward to frame the rest of the series through stronger operationalization, to effectively monitor, evaluate and verify the impact of recovery and stimulus measures on environmental outcomes. It is followed by a second dialogue (**Financing Green Recovery**) focusing on the important role of the public sector, and fiscal policy, that can support a stronger and greener economic recovery, whilst creating a collaborative and enabling environment for the private sector to mobilize resources to Build Back Better. Finally, the third dialogue (**Regional Nexus Approaches to Building Back Better**) presents case studies on “Regional Acceleration of Climate Action and Decarbonization” and exchanges surrounding nexus thinking and integrated policy-making tools.

There will be three online Nexus Dialogues in the series covering:

1. Defining Green Recovery (27 April 2021)
2. Financing Green Recovery (4 May 2021)
3. Regional Nexus Approaches to Building Back Better (15 June 2021)

Addressing COVID-19 for the Environment in the 2030 Agenda

The 3-Part Series of EMG 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).

The first two Nexus Dialogues will focus on **Defining-** and **Financing Green Recovery**, especially with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. Green Recovery is understood by its various stakeholders and constituents⁹, as delineating long-term policy to incentivize the transition into an inclusive and green economy, exemplified by the decent employment (SDG 8) and sustainable industry (SDGs 9 and 12) to drive urbanization (SDGs 9 and 11), and poverty eradication (SDGs 1 and 10), while maintaining the healthy functioning of the Earth’s ecosystems (SDGs 14 and 15) and climate (SDG 13).

⁹ Recent initiatives on green economy or green growth by [UNEP](#), the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs ([UNDESA](#)), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development ([UNCTAD](#)), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), the Partnership for Action on Green Economy ([PAGE](#)), the Green Growth Knowledge Platform ([GGKP](#)) the [Green Economy Coalition](#), Stakeholder Forum, the Green Growth Leaders and many others have begun to address its nuances.

The third Nexus Dialogue provides a platform to speak on the **Regional Nexus Approaches to Building Back Better**, emphasizing the Rio+20 outcome document¹⁰ which recognizes capacity building, information exchange, and experience sharing (SDG 17) as critical for implementing green economy policies. In pursuit of building back better, there is the emerging mainstreaming in the design and implementation of national green economy and green recovery strategies across the regions, including Africa, Latin America, Western Asia, the Asia-Pacific, and Europe.

Objectives

The main objectives of Addressing COVID-19 for the Environment, 3-Part Series are as follows:

- Defining and Financing Green Recovery:
 - Feed substantive thoughts into the EMG's interagency [consultative process on COVID-19 and the environment](#) to help the UN system define a coherent approach and identify opportunities for collaboration on a green recovery.
 - Define a common narrative for a Green Recovery in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.
 - Facilitate a dialogue and information exchange, i.e., on science and policy on COVID-19-environment nexus issues, including implications that digitalization may have for green recovery, e.g., fundamental data rights and cybercrime.
 - Identify gaps and opportunities for collaboration in the context of science, policy-making, and implementation.
- Regional Nexus Approaches to Building Back Better:
 - Facilitate knowledge-sharing on the topic of: nexus and integrated policy-making approaches, in pursuit of building the capacity and resilience of Regional Commissions to support their regional member states, including cross-boundary stakeholders.
 - Present regional best practices, and case study examples of successes, challenges, and lessons learned from efforts to transition into a Green/Circular Economy.
 - Inform Regional Commissions of one another's regional short- and long-term intersectional sustainable development priorities in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, and combine capacities/resources to identify synergies in common nexus topics.

Outcomes

The Addressing COVID-19 for the Environment, 3-Part Series is expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Identifying and developing inclusive and sustainable models of development for green and healthy recovery accelerate the implementation of the SDGs
- Discovering opportunities for collaboration and building partnerships among UN agencies on a green recovery.
- Identifying the ways UN can strengthen and facilitate inclusive green recovery by supporting countries and policy actors

¹⁰ United Nations. (2012). *The Future We Want. Outcome Document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20-22 June 2012*

Structure and Content

For safety and logistical reasons, the Nexus Dialogues will each be held virtually and hosted on Zoom Webinar. *Defining Green Recovery (27 April 2021)* will be 90-minutes long, *Financing Green Recovery (4 May 2021)* will be 90-minutes long, and *Regional Nexus Approaches to Building Back Better (15 June 2021)* will be 120-minutes long.

Provisional Agenda

Session 1: Defining Green Recovery, Time: 8:00-9:30 EDT, 27 April 2021

<u>Time Zones</u>	Introducing and welcoming by EMG and UNEP outlining objectives and structure (10 minutes)
8:00-9:30 EDT	<i>Addressing COVID-19 for the Environment: Defining Green Recovery</i>
14:00-15:30 CEST	<i>Moderator: Mr. Kaveh Madani, Visiting Fellow, Yale University</i>
15:00-16:30 EAT	Initial expert remarks on the following: (total of 30 minutes)
	<i>How do we define the essential and non-negotiable building blocks of a Green Recovery strategy in service of Building Back Better?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Steven Stone, Chief of UN Environment's Resources & Markets Branch (R&M), UNEP (5 minutes) • Mr. Daniele Violetti, Director, Finance, Technology and Capacity Building, UNFCCC (5 minutes) • Mr. Asad Naqvi, Head of Secretariat, PAGE Secretariat (5 minutes) • Mr. Kamal Gueye, Coordinator of Green Jobs Programme (GREEN), ILO (5 minutes) • Mr. Tim Scott, Senior Policy Advisor, Environment, Nature, Climate, Energy, UNDP (5 minutes) • Ms. Katja Funke, Public Financial Management Expert, IMF (5 minutes)
	Panel Discussion (40 minutes)
	Questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the UN system and international development community support member states to design and lead their own Green Recovery strategies? • What opportunities have been created by the response (e.g. spending) towards the COVID-19 pandemic, which can give new momentum to facilitating an inclusive, healthy, just, resilient, and sustainable green recovery?
	Concluding Remarks and Next Steps: UNEP and EMG (10 minutes)

Session 2: Financing Green Recovery, Time: 8:00-9:30 EDT, 4 May 2021

<p>Time Zones</p> <p>8:00-9:30 EDT</p> <p>14:00-15:30 CEST</p> <p>15:00-16:30 EAT</p>	<p>Introducing and welcoming by EMG outlining objectives and structure (5 minutes)</p> <p>Addressing COVID-19 for the Environment: Financing Green Recovery</p> <p><i>Moderator: Mr. Xavier Michon, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCDF</i></p> <p>Key remarks: Mr. Xavier Michon, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCDF (5 minutes)</p> <p>Initial expert remarks (total of 30 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Eric Usher, Head, UNEP Finance Initiative (5 minutes) • Mr. Edward B. Barbier, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Economics, Colorado State University (5 minutes) • Ms. Joy Aeree Kim, Lead, Green Fiscal Policy, UNEP (5 minutes) • Mr. Dirk Rottgers, Policy Analyst for Climate Finance and Investment, Environment Directorate, OECD (5 minutes) • Mr. Onno van den Heuvel, Global Manager, UNDP-GEF Biodiversity Finance Initiative (5 minutes) • Ms. Floske Kusse, Stakeholder Engagement Lead, ING (5 minutes) <p>Panel Discussion (30 minutes)</p> <p>Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What lessons can we learn from previous economic recoveries to build back better (and greener) this time? • How can public sector involvement build private sector confidence and support? What does public-private cooperation for greener recovery look like? • What has the private sector response been so far? What further collective action can be taken on environment, nature and energy? <p>Q&A (10 minutes)</p> <p>Concluding Remarks and Next Steps: UNCDF & EMG (10 minutes)</p>
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Session 3: Regional Nexus Approaches to Building Back Better, Time: 7:00-9:00 EDT, 15 June 2021

<p>Time Zones</p> <p>7:00-9:00 EDT 7:00-9:00 GMT-4 13:00-15:00 CEST 14:00-16:00 EAT 18:00-20:00 GMT+7</p>	<p>Introducing and welcoming by EMG and RCNYO outlining objectives and structure (10 minutes)</p> <p>Addressing COVID-19 for the Environment: Regional Nexus Approaches to Building Back Better</p> <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Yera Ortiz de Urbina, Deputy Director, Regional Commissions New York Office (RCNYO)</i></p> <p>Brief Case Study Remarks:</p> <p>“Regional Acceleration of Climate Action and Decarbonization” – Objective, Methodology, Impact & Results, and Lessons Learned (total of 25 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Jean-Paul Adam, Director, Technology, Climate Change & Natural Resource Management Division, ECA (5 minutes) • Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief of Food and Environment Policies, Sustainable Development, ESCWA (5 minutes) • Mr. Stefanos Fotiou, Director, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP (5 minutes) • Mr. Joseluis Samaniego Leyva, Chief, Sustainable Development and Human Settlements Division, ECLAC (5 minutes) • Mr. Marco Keiner, Director, Environment Division, UNECE (5 minutes) <p>Panel Discussion (60 minutes)</p> <p>Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has your Region experienced some success in building forward a Green/Circular economy? What are some lessons you can share? • In your Region, what are some short- and long-term intersectional sustainable development priorities identified in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis? • What nexus, multi-dimensional, and intersectional approaches, tools, and/or methodologies have your Regional Commission been using to support the balancing between short- and long-term policy responses? • In pursuit of Building Back Better, what does an “enabling” environment look like to support integrated and nexus policy-making approaches? <p>Q&A (15 minutes)</p> <p>Concluding Remarks and Next Steps: RCNYO and EMG (10 minutes)</p>
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