



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

EMG

Proposal by UNEP

A new Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability and Digital Transformation

Objective

To integrate opportunities for digital transformation to accelerate environmental sustainability in the work of the United Nations Environment Management Group (EMG) and its constituent organizations.

Background

The United Nations Secretary General has pointed to two megatrends where our collective response will largely dictate the future of humanity: on the one hand, climate change and environmental degradation, and on the other hand, the use and governance of digital technology. How we connect these two challenges and use digital technologies to shift behaviors and incentive structures to drive environmental sustainability will play a critical role in determining what kind of future emerges. We need to learn to build sustainable digital societies powered by digital technologies to accelerate sustainable growth patterns and lifestyles.

The Secretary General (SG)'s Roadmap for Digital Cooperation calls on the international community to connect all people through the global digital infrastructure by 2030; respect human rights online; and protect the most vulnerable from the potential perils of digital advancement. It also asks all UN agencies, funds, and programmes to deliver digital public goods in the form of actionable, real-time and predictive insights that can advance the SDG agenda. In this regard, it fully recognizes the importance of digital technologies for environment and climate action.¹

As a follow up track to the SG's Roadmap, the Coalition for Digital Environmental Sustainability (CODES) was launched in March 2021.² CODES is an open multi-stakeholder community of change makers and practitioners that seek to collaborate in accelerating a digital planet for sustainability.

¹ Paragraph 10 of the Roadmap states that "The recent advances in technology offer ground-breaking opportunities to monitor and protect the environment, as well as overall planetary health. By harnessing them appropriately, the digital revolution can be steered to combat climate change and advance global sustainability, environmental stewardship and human well-being". For reference: <https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/>

² The Coalition, initiated by UNEP, UNDP, the International Science Council, the German Environment Agency, the Kenyan Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Future Earth and Sustainability in the Digital Age, will lead a global multi-stakeholder process and convene a series of events to firmly anchor environmental sustainability needs within the Digital Cooperation Roadmap and catalyse a digital planet for sustainability. The aim of the CODES initiative is to bring stakeholders from the public and private sectors as well as academia and civil society who work on the environmental sustainability and digital transformation nexus to coordinate efforts, share

The establishment of CODES has highlighted the need for stronger system-wide collaboration and coordination across the UN system in relation to the many existing initiatives that hold stakes in the transition towards a sustainable digital future and the integration of environmental sustainability needs within broader global digital transformation strategies.³ As such, there exists an opportunity for the EMG to support such efforts.

Activities and scope

It is proposed to launch a new EMG Issue Management Group (IMG) on Environmental Sustainability and Digital Transformation to undertake activities that could raise the priority given to the digital transformation and environmental sustainability nexus with system-wide coherence and coordination.

The IMG could be an opportunity to increase UN engagement and participation, including from the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) in the digital sustainability discourse, by leveraging existing networks and initiatives such as CODES. It could widen the opportunity to collect and synergize brain power across the UN, enriching the environmental sustainability and digital transformation nexus with perspectives and insights resulting from the mandates, programmes and initiatives of the EMG members, thus leading to more synergized and coherent outcomes, including in support of UN Country Teams in the context of a reformed United Nations Development System. Furthermore, the IMG could amplify existing advocacy and stakeholder engagement efforts in support of a truly networked, inclusive multilateral system.

Some of the proposed thematic areas that the IMG could tackle through the provision of guidance/development of joint engagement strategies/ mutual capacity building and peer-learning opportunities include:

- Action area 1: Data and analytics to understand nature-human interaction;
- Action area 2: Nudging and incentivizing sustainable consumption practices;
- Action area 3: Measuring & disclosing environmental performance of supply chains;
- Action area 4: Aligning finance, investments and procurement to environmental sustainability goals and zero net carbon commitments; and
- Action area 5: Designing digital infrastructure and closing the digital divide in an environmentally sound manner.

If the EMG agrees to establish a new IMG on digital transformation and environmental sustainability, its exact activities and terms of reference would be discussed with all interested members of the EMG prior to and during its first meeting. It is envisaged that the IMG would operate for an initial period of 18 months with the possibility of extension.

lessons learned as well as mobilize resources and political commitments for action. The key outcome will be a shared Acceleration Plan for Digitalizing Environmental Sustainability and a series of political, technical and financial commitments to build a digital planet for sustainability. All information on CODES can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.sparkblue.org/CODES>

³ These initiatives, some of which have been included in past and present work of the EMG, include but are not limited to: the One Planet Network Programme on Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP); the Greening The Blue Initiative; the E-Waste Coalition and related Inter-agency Group; the ITU focus Group on Environmental Efficiency for Artificial Intelligence and other Emerging Technologies; the UNFCCC Resilience Frontiers Initiative; the Sustainable Digital Financial Alliance; the Global Environmental Data Strategy responding to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) Resolution 4/23 on Keeping the world environment under review: enhancing the United Nations Environment Programme science-policy interface and endorsement of the Global Environment Outlook; the World Environment Situation Room; and the Science-Policy Business Forum.