

Road map for preparation of the of UN system-common approach to transitioning towards a pollution-free planet

Concept Note

Prepared by 17 November 2022, updated after the first meeting of the Small Drafting Team on 17 and 18 January 2023

BACKGROUND

The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) placed pollution high on the global agenda with the adoption in 2019 of the global [Implementation Plan “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”](#). Achieving the Implementation Plan and other recently approved mandates from UNEA and other relevant bodies requires a UN system-wide, coordinated approach that targets the root causes and drivers of pollution and deliver deeper, broader impacts. Many UN agencies are currently addressing pollution through their mandates, expertise and operations. These existing efforts could benefit from stronger synergies, common narratives and more coordinated action for increased impact.

In that regard, the UN Environment Management Group (EMG)¹ Senior Officials decided, at their [27th meeting in October 2021](#), to establish a Consultative Process² to prepare a UN system common approach on pollution to provide a framework for collective action in support of the [Implementation Plan “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”](#). The common approach would help the UN align its efforts and mobilize the entirety of its relevant expertise and mandates to accelerate the sustainable, inclusive and just transition towards a plastic pollution-free economy, building on existing efforts undertaken by various UN and related entities.

PREPARATION OF THE COMMON APPROACH

The Consultative Process will engage to:

- a) Agree on this concept note outlining the process for the elaboration of a UN system common approach to transitioning towards a pollution-free planet.
- b) Map the existing efforts – identifying roles, mandates and opportunities in the UN system for strengthened efforts towards a pollution-free planet and an analysis of pollution-related capacity gaps.

¹ The United Nations General Assembly established the EMG in 2001, following the reform agenda of the Secretary-General to improve inter-agency coordination in the field of the environment and human settlements. Today, the EMG works to convene all of the UN system to foster system-wide coherence and effectiveness on the environment, curating the collective wisdom and expertise from 51 UN agencies around specific environmental issues and fostering system-wide efficiency through collaboration to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

² See [Annex I](#) for the members of the Consultative Process on a Pollution-Free Planet

- c) Prepare a UN system common approach to tackling pollution building on the results of the mapping of existing efforts.
- d) Prepare an implementation plan following the approval of the Common Approach.

METHODOLOGY

A) Concept note

The present concept note aims to outline the process for the elaboration of a UN system common approach to transitioning towards a pollution-free planet. Members from the Consultative Process, with EMG members in copy, will be invited to comment during the initial phase of the process in order to ensure ownership and accuracy.

B) Mapping

A desk review and mapping of existing efforts addressing air, water, land/soil, marine and coastal, and chemicals and waste dimensions of pollution³ across the UN system will be undertaken, taking into account the existing reports and information and through an online questionnaire. The mapping will build on but go beyond the findings of the 2022 EMG report "[Addressing marine litter and microplastics: UN system-wide contributions](#)", focusing on efforts from the UN bodies relevant to the topic of pollution. Among others, it will review UNEA resolutions, UNGA resolutions and other formal decisions from governance bodies of relevant UN bodies, as identified through the questionnaire sent to UN entities. The mapping will also identify roles and mandates of agencies, funds and programmes of the UN system, and UN interagency arrangements, partnerships, frameworks and initiatives that are directly relevant to achieving a pollution-free planet.

In order to ensure efficiency and alignment with activities conducted previously by the EMG and the Consultative Process, it is suggested that the mapping follows the following structure of the EMG [marine litter and microplastics report](#): grouping UN entities according to broad thematic areas and sectors based on the main focus of their activities in the topic of pollution: 1) International Instruments and Coordination Mechanisms, 2) Environment and Development; 3) Agriculture and Labour; 4) Business, Trade and Life-cycle; 5) Health and Sanitation; 6) Research and Training; 7) Funding and Financial Mechanisms.

This will facilitate the identification of UN efforts with coinciding or overlapping objectives, goals or beneficiaries in order to shed light on opportunities for synergies and collective work. In addition, structuring the analysis around the main focus of the agencies rather than the categories of the topic under assessment (in this case, pollution) allows cross-analysis with previous and future summaries of UN activities.

³ Pollution is to be understood as the presence of substances and heat, including chemicals and waste, in environmental media (air, water, land/soil, marine and coastal) whose nature, location, or quantity produces undesirable environmental effects. Adapted from:
<http://data.un.org/Glossary.aspx?q=pollution#:~:text=1.,%C2%A9%202022%20%2D%20Conditions%20of%20Use>

Through the mapping, implementation gaps and opportunities for further collaboration will be identified, guided by the action areas presented in the [Implementation Plan “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”](#): 1) Knowledge: science for evidence-based policy and action; 2) Implementation: capacity, incentives and integrated policies; 3) Infrastructure: technologies, innovation and circularity; 4) Awareness: outreach, communication, education and consumer information; and 5) Leadership: mobilization of stakeholders, leaders and partners to address different forms of pollution.

The draft mapping will be shared with members from the Consultative Process, with EMG members in copy, for comments prior its finalization.

C) Outlining the UN system Common Approach

Considering the findings from the mapping and building on UNEA's [Implementation Plan “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”](#), SAICM beyond 2020 process and other relevant resolutions, and with the active inputs of interested EMG members, a UN system-common approach towards a pollution free planet will be developed.

Pollution is one of the three planetary crises along with climate change and biodiversity loss. Noting that the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) has endorsed a [Common Approach to Integrating Biodiversity and Nature-based Solutions for Sustainable Development into United Nations Policy and Programme Planning and Delivery](#), with the aim of ensuring interlinkages among the areas of work and easing coherent reporting⁴, the common approach to transitioning towards a pollution-free planet could use a similar structure to the one used for biodiversity. Early lessons from the implementation of the Common Approach to Biodiversity will be captured so as to inform discussions on transitioning towards a pollution-free planet.

The common approach to pollution may include medium-term objectives to be pursued by the UN system in partnership with governments, industries, businesses and civil society. It may also suggest or reinforce coalitions of agencies in focal and/or priority areas to eliminate harmful practices and products, chemicals and waste that worsen air, freshwater, marine and coastal, land and soil pollution. In addition, it could address how the UN system itself can demonstrate its commitment to a pollution-free planet through its corporate functions, policies and programming.

A small drafting team with the participation of volunteer agencies from the Consultative Process will be created to support the elaboration of the common approach. Online and in-person meetings and workshops will be conducted as needed with the team to prepare the common approach. The draft common approach will be shared with members from the Consultative Process, with EMG members in copy, prior to its finalization.

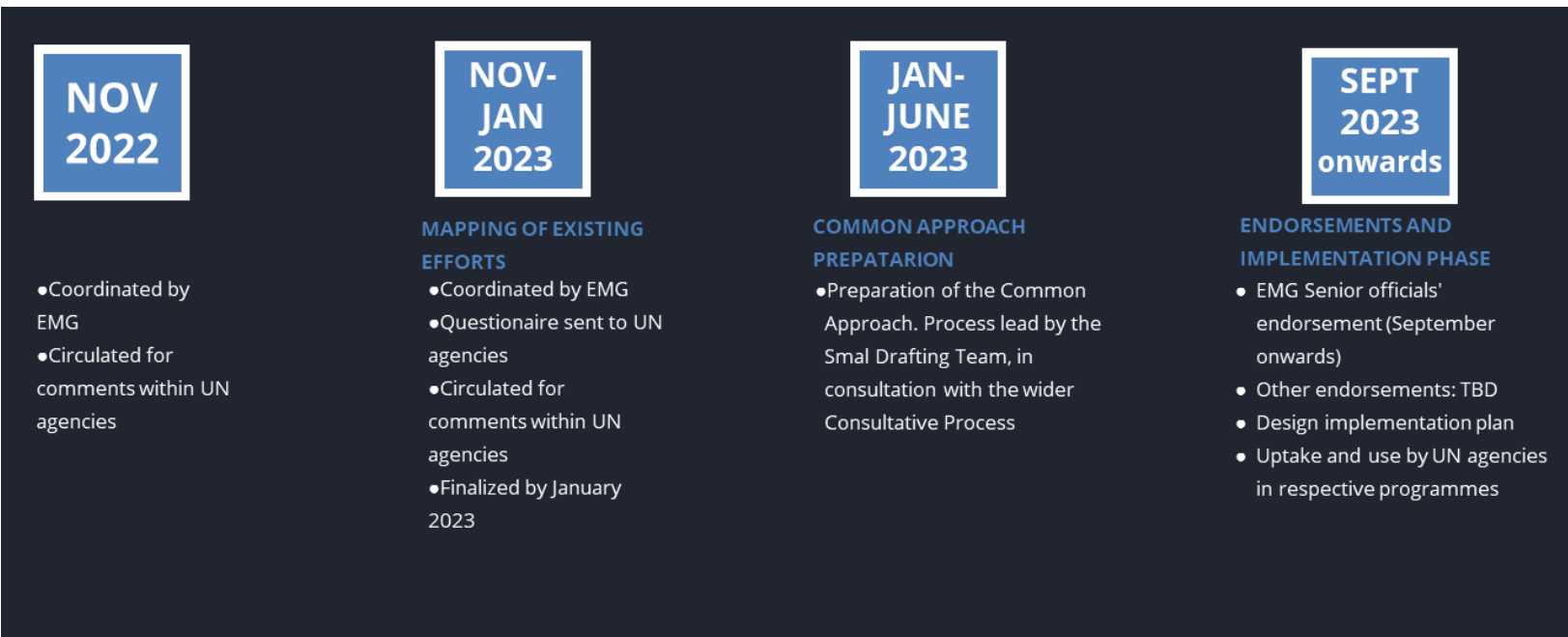
EMG senior official endorsement expected during the last quarter of 2023

⁴ The biodiversity common approach provides the normative framework, in a result-based structure, to organize collective action and joint delivery to mainstream biodiversity and nature-based solutions. It contains a set of outcomes and outputs at the global, regional, and country levels, with a view to ensuring that the approach can be used by all entities in the implementation of their respective mandates.

D) Implementation Phase

Once agreed upon the common approach, an implementation plan will be designed for its uptake and use by UN agencies in their respective programmes.

ROADMAP AND TIMELINE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A UN- SYSTEM COMMON APPROACH



Annex 1: Members of the Consultative Process on a Pollution-Free Planet

	Name	Organisation
1	Laetitia Sieffert	CBD
2	Alexander Trepelkov	DESA
3	Gu Baogen	FAO
4	Melissa Denecke	IAEA
5	Florence Descroix-Comanducci	IAEA
6	Moustapha Kamal Gueye	ILO

7	Tian-Bing Huang	IOM
8	Ana Batalhone	ITC
9	Vanessa Gray	ITU
10	Benjamin Schachter	OHCHR
11	Jerker Tamelander	Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
12	Claudia ten Have	Minamata Convention on Mercury
13	Henrique Pacini	UNCTAD
14	Xiaofang Zhou	UNDP
15	Ajiniyaz Reimov	UNDP
16	Marlene Grundstrom	UNDRR
17	Francesca Bernardini	UNECE
18	Kakuko Nagatani-Yoshida	UNEP
19	Tessa Goverse	UNEP
20	Maria Cristina Zucca	UNEP
21	TBC	UNEP
22	Meriem Bouamrane	UNESCO
23	Andre Dzikus	UN-Habitat
24	Desiree Raquel Narvaez	UNICEF
25	Smail Alhilali	UNIDO
26	Siri Bjune	UNODC
27	Sinead Brophy	UNODC
28	Jenna Dawson-Faber	UNODC
29	Samantha Stratton-Short	UNOPS
30	Kaveh Madani	UNU
31	Sofía Gutierrez	UNWTO
32	Dirk Glaesser	UNWTO
33	James Hale	UPU
34	Andy Cole	WFP
35	Agnès Lostis	WIPO
33	Ernesto Sanchez-Triana	World Bank
34	Yewande Aramide Awe	World Bank
35	Daniel Ramos	WTO