



Document I

UN common approach to pollution

- Overview -

March 2023

Pollution is one of the three major crises faced by our planet, together with climate change and biodiversity loss. Pollution has become a threat to all human rights, including to the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. It not only impacts the environment but also has tremendous health consequences, which together hamper the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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"¹. 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 October 2021, the UN Environment Management Group (EMG) Senior Officials agreed to establish a Consultative Process on this issue, aiming to prepare a UN system-wide approach 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.

It must be noted that a Core Working Group on Plastic Pollution has been established in February 2022 within the UN Environment Management Group (EMG), as requested by the UN Secretary-General, to unite efforts across the UN system and with external stakeholders on solutions for challenges posed by plastic pollution. Among the deliverables of the Core Working Group on Plastic Pollution are: joint messages for communication and advocacy, an overview of how UN entities provide sustainable solutions to the challenge of plastic pollution, and a UN common offer to support the sustainable, inclusive and just transition towards a plastic pollution-free economy, building on existing efforts undertaken by various UN and related entities. The common offer on plastics addresses the specifics and operational aspects of this type of pollution, while the common approach on pollution provides a strategic and overarching framework for UN agencies to coordinate their efforts towards a Pollution-Free Planet.

A small drafting team with the participation of volunteer agencies from the Consultative Process has been created to support the elaboration of the common approach. Resulting from interagency

¹ <https://wedocs.unep.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/35892/pfpip.pdf>

consultations, the present document proposes an annotated outline of the common approach to Pollution, organized under the following headings:

- a. Overview
- b. Current UN activities and initiatives related to pollution
- c. Key guiding principles
- d. Common approach to pollution
- e. Next steps

More detailed information, including references, are available in Document II (Annex).

Document II
UN common approach to pollution
- *Outline proposal* –

a) Overview

The overview will deliver background information related to pollution and its impacts. Additionally, it will provide with the rationale and mandates for developing the common approach. Through the common approach, the UN system will express a shared recognition of the urgency of acting and a commitment to mainstreaming pollution prevention and mitigation through collective action that will connect and build upon the strategies and programmes of work of UN system entities.

b) Overview of current UN activities and initiatives related to pollution

Within the EMG's Consultative Process on a Pollution-free Planet framework, a mapping exercise was conducted to identify existing efforts within the UN system addressing pollution from various angles. The mapping identifies roles and mandates of UN agencies, as well as interagency partnerships and initiatives that contribute to a pollution-free planet. It also identifies the impact that each agency has on the different dimensions of pollution: air; water; soil; marine & coastal; and chemicals and waste².

This section will provide a summary of the main capacity gaps and opportunities for further collaboration vis-à-vis action areas for addressing the gaps and challenges associated with pollution as defined in the Implementation Plan: i) knowledge; ii) implementation; iii) infrastructure; iv) awareness; and v) leadership.

c) Key guiding principles

This section will provide with a list of key principles that will guide the development and implementation of the common approach to pollution.

d) Common approach to pollution

This section will provide a structure for the UN system to organize collective action and joint delivery to mainstream action on pollution and contribute to the realization of a common goal or vision (see Figure 1)

² These dimensions have been previously worked in UN pollution related documents such as EMG Marine Litter and Microplastics report and the Towards a Pollution-Free Planet Background



Figure 1: Structure of the UN system-common approach to transitioning towards a pollution-free planet

The common approach will be organized around impact, objectives, outcomes and outputs. Together, all these elements aim to achieve the goal³.

Impact are those fields where long-term change is expected to be achieved. They provide the structure for the rest of the elements.

The objectives are specific achievements that will address a specific action area or multiple action areas to reach the goal. They are aimed to be achieved collectively among member states, UN system and entities, and other stakeholders.

The outcomes are the added value resulting from the outputs. They are expected to represent changes in behaviour, attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, or skills. An outcome is the use (i.e., uptake, adoption, application) of an output by intended beneficiaries, observed as a change in institutions or behaviours, attitudes or conditions.

The outputs are tangible deliverables from the common approach. These could be completed projects, services, products, interventions or other deliverables produced from activities conducted by UN system and entities. They act to 'spark change' or act as the catalyst for the outcomes. They are normally fairly easy to measure and can often be quantified.

e) Next steps

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

³ Definitive terminology is currently being debated.