



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

EMG

United Nations System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment

**A summary of key United Nations system
contributions to the environmental agenda**

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1. Introduction

The United Nations System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment (SWFS) is a collaborative framework prepared following the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and at the request of the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA).¹ It aims to achieve greater synergy, collaboration, and coherence in the United Nations system's work on the environment to support Member States in the delivery of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The Framework was endorsed by the Senior Officials of the United Nations Environment Management Group (EMG) and launched at the second session of UNEA in 2016.

In reporting on the implementation of the Framework, a [Synthesis Report](#) was published in 2017, which gauged the strategic alignment of 51 United Nations member agencies to 2030 Agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The [Second Report](#) was prepared in 2020 as a thematic report on the United Nations system's contribution to the biodiversity agenda. This note is prepared by the EMG Secretariat for the information of the sixth session of UNEA providing an update on key collaborative initiatives on the environment under the Environment Management Group since the first SWFS report. It aims to provide a synoptic view of United Nations system efforts in enhancing environmental multilateralism for sustainable development, addressing the triple planetary crisis, and how these efforts can be enhanced in support of Member States.

¹ UNEA Resolution 1/11, 2014



2. Core contributions of the United Nations system on the environment

Over the last four decades, the United Nations (UN) has played a key role in advancing the environmental agenda. The integration of environmental activities within the broader United Nations system has mirrored the escalating emphasis on environmental issues by its various governing bodies. This evolution has shaped the United Nations system, encompassing a range of programs, agencies, secretariats, and coordinating mechanisms, into a collective capable of effectively addressing environmental challenges. This capacity is pivotal in confronting the three interconnected global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Effectiveness and coherence in tackling these challenges are achieved through system-wide measures complemented by interagency cooperation. This integrated approach is central to the goal of executing "effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions" to combat these critical global challenges, under the wider SDGs.

A growing number of United Nations entities are increasingly gathering environmental data through research, modelling, monitoring, and observations, placing the United Nations at the forefront of international environmental assessments critical for addressing the triple planetary crisis. These efforts, within a well-designed governance structure, ensure both scientific independence and policy relevance. The United Nations system also includes various intergovernmental scientific and technical advisory bodies, many linked to multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

The UN system's collaboration and coordination on the environment is facilitated by a number of inter-agency mechanisms including the UN EMG, established in 2001 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/242 in July 1999. EMG was mandated to identify, address and promote the application of cross-sectoral solutions in order to collectively resolve specific problems, issues and tasks on the environmental and human settlements agenda that require enhanced inter-agency cooperation in a given timeframe, through facilitating effective and collaborative involvement of the relevant United Nations system agencies, programmes and organs and of other potential partners, as appropriate.

The EMG membership consists of 51 specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations, including the MEA secretariats. The EMG identifies issues on the international environmental agenda that warrant cooperation and finds ways to engage its collective capacity in coherent management responses to those issues.

The Secretary-General's commitment to the 'One UN' approach to address the triple the triple planetary crisis has led to coordination mechanisms such as the EMG to dedicate efforts towards the cohesive environmental action and strategic development. Considering the results of past and ongoing EMG processes, in 2022 the EMG established a [Strategic Narrative 2023-2030](#) to guide its work with focus on three thematic areas. The first theme aims to prepare the EMG for future challenges, enhancing global environmental governance and responding proactively to issues like the triple planetary crisis. The second theme promotes partnerships to strengthen the implementation of the SDGs and its environmental dimension. The third theme is dedicated to elevating the United Nations leadership in sustainability management by promoting internal sustainability and fostering an environment of innovation and dialogue within the United Nations system.

Under its Strategic Narrative 2022-2030, the EMG aims to promote multilateral and multisectoral policy discussions with respect to the international environmental and sustainable development agenda. Additionally, it endeavours to prepare policy and normative guidance, guidelines, and tools within the United Nations system. The EMG seeks to support the Chief Executives Board (CEB) for Coordination, and work with the High-Level Committee on Programmes, High-Level Committee on Management, and the UN Development Cooperation Office in mainstreaming and implementing environmental priorities across UN policies, programming, management, and operations, including in United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs). Furthermore, the EMG is committed to preparing UN system-wide strategies and common approaches to enhance policy coherence.



3. Key recent system-wide approaches on the environment

System wide Approaches on the environment through Coalitions and common approaches provide results-oriented normative frameworks that streamline the organization and quicken the pace of collective actions and joint initiatives. They aim to effectively integrate biodiversity, nature-based solutions, and pollution control across various levels - global, regional, and national - while aligning with the strengths and mandates of each involved entity. These frameworks support the coherent execution of diverse initiatives, considering inter-agency mechanisms and partnerships. They aid in medium to long-term planning, benchmarking, and reporting, ensuring comprehensive system-wide coordination to support implementation of global frameworks, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the new Global Framework on Chemicals and the Implementation Plan, "Towards a Pollution-Free Planet" in collaboration with the United Nations development system, thereby enhancing their impact across geographical landscapes. Furthermore, these Common Approaches signify a concerted effort by United Nations entities to integrate MEAs into their strategic planning, policy-making, and operational activities at global, regional, and national levels. The section below highlights examples of the evolving strategies, initiatives, and common approaches since the initial synthesis report of the SWFS.

United Nations Coalition on E-Waste

The transition to clean energy systems, essential for achieving the SDGs, such as Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7) and Climate Action (SDG 13), relies heavily on technologies like solar photovoltaics, wind farms, and electric vehicles. These technologies, which have significant potential from a sustainability perspective, demand significant quantities of rare earth minerals such as among others lithium and cobalt, underscoring a major shift in energy resources. Simultaneously, managing the generated e-waste becomes crucial. Recycling e-waste is not only environmentally friendly, reducing the need for new ore extraction and preventing toxic leaching, but it also aligns with the SDGs by promoting sustainable resource use and environmental protection. Effective recycling as one element of sustainable production and consumption patterns, contribute to the recovery of these critical minerals, closing the loop in resource utilization and mitigating environmental damage, thus sustaining the clean energy transition vital for achieving the SDGs.

The United Nations has committed itself to progressively address the problem of e-waste. The varied nature of this waste stream demands the involvement of many specialised entities from different backgrounds to address the entire life cycle of electrical and electronic equipment. Maximising United Nations system-wide collaboration and effectively supporting Member States on the issue of e-waste is central to the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

In 2016, the EMG established an Issue Management Group (IMG) on Tackling E-waste to emphasise the attention of United Nations entities' projects, programmes, and mandates towards the early stages of the life cycle of electrical and electronic equipment, such as design and production, whilst at the same time ensuring that all stages were considered from design, through use, to final disposal. These actions aim to alleviate the challenges for Member States in achieving the SDGs, particularly relating to SDG-targets 3.9, 8.3, 8.8, 11.6, 12.4 and 12.5. In addition, the group demonstrated the United Nations system's commitments and duty to internalise these principles and to ensure that internal e-waste generation is minimised and managed effectively.

The first milestone was the publication of a report, **United Nation's System-Wide Response to Tackling E-waste** (2017), which signalled increased coordination and collaborative efforts to maximise system-wide coherence towards eco-design and a life-cycle approach to sustainably tackling e-waste globally. It showcased efforts by EMG members who have already undertaken various successful activities in the e-waste domain. The report highlighted the areas that still required improvement, or where efforts were lacking, and offered recommendations.

The report emphasized that insufficient attention is paid to the reduction of e-waste and to the poor practices during the design and production stages. The report suggested a need to increase engagement with the private sector to address business responsibility in the production of electrical and electronic equipment as well as an increased focus on repair and refurbishment activities to tackle the global e-waste problem more effectively.

Building on the recommendations of the report, to increase collaboration, the IMG: 1) developed concrete goals for collaboration on tackling e-waste with the support of a lead entity or entities; 2) established a joint work plan on e-waste; 3) identified an inter-agency coordination mechanism, which included the development of a knowledge management platform for United Nations e-waste related initiatives; and 4) increased support through the provision of expertise for United Nations internal e-waste management work, through the support for guidance on e-waste management and the procurement of electrical and electronic equipment within the United Nations system, and its use and disposal.

In March 2018, a non-binding **Letter of Intent** was signed by 10 organizations from the United Nations system that are active in addressing the global e-waste challenge. **The UN E-waste Coalition** was shaped in line with the Letter's aims of committing to increased collaboration, building partnerships, and supporting Member States' actions to address the global e-waste challenge. The Coalition has three core functions: advocacy, including awareness raising and campaigns; knowledge and best practice sharing; and the development of a joint intervention model for the implementation of e-waste work at the country level.





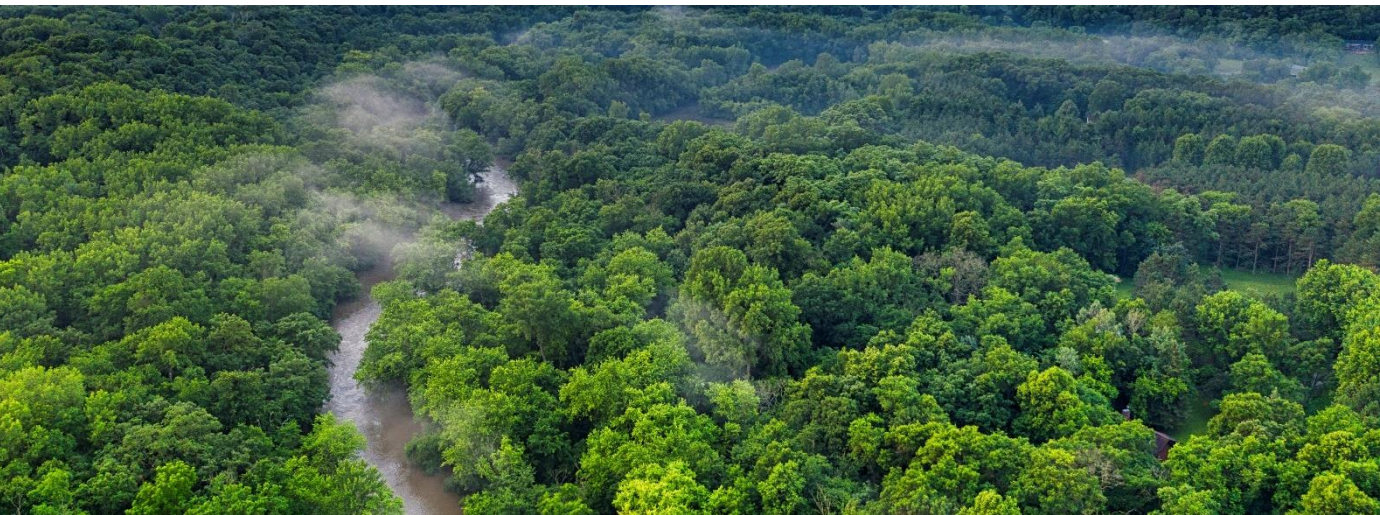
Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms

Through several United Nations General Assembly resolutions, the United Nations has expressed considerable concern about the growing threat of sand and dust storms (SDS), which affect sustainable development in its economic, social, and environmental aspects. Their significant effects on the environment, health, agriculture, livelihoods, and socio-economic stability are cause for global concern. While these storms are part of the Earth's natural cycles, climate change and human actions like poor land management, and inefficient water use exacerbate them. SDS also contribute to climate change and air pollution. These storms impact all regions of the world, both in developed and developing nations, and present significant obstacles to achieving various SDGs, specifically goals 2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, and 15. The transboundary nature of SDS underscored the need for a stronger partnership and strengthening of cooperation.

In response, the [United Nations SDS Coalition](#) was launched during the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification's 14th session of the Conference of the Parties held in 2019, in India, committing the United Nations system to a proactive approach to combat SDS, and to enhance cooperation and coordination on SDS at global, regional, and sub-regional levels. The SDS Coalition brings together the expertise of a group of more than 15 agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and affiliated members, to offer targeted cross-sectoral and cross-cutting technical support through a disaster risk management approach. Its mandate is: to coordinate a United Nations system response; exchange knowledge, data, and best practices; recognise the complementarity of existing initiatives and promote collaboration; facilitate dialogues amongst affected countries and the United Nations system; and facilitate the capacity building of Member States in critical regions. In addition, the SDS Coalition aims to coordinate and strengthen the activities of SDS monitoring, forecasting, and early warning among Member States. In 2020, the SDS Coalition

adopted its first Action Plan and a Strategy. Under the Action Plan, Coalition members agreed to work together in four working groups in four key areas: inter-agency collaboration, awareness-raising, knowledge and information exchange and resource mobilization. The working group's activities focus on the life cycle of SDS through a disaster management approach.

The SDS Coalition is currently coordinated by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) providing a platform for technical expertise and resources to strengthen preparedness measures and strategies for risk reduction; consolidated policy and innovative solutions; production of a suggested global response to SDS; convening and delivery of dialogues which enhance collaboration among affected countries and United Nations system agencies; identification of entry points to support affected countries and regions in the implementation of risk reduction and response measures for SDS.



Common Approach to Biodiversity and Nature-based Solutions

In 2020, the interrelated consequences of environmental degradation, including biodiversity and habitat loss, climate change, air, land and water pollution, illegal exploitation, and increasing disaster risk and the rise of zoonotic diseases, demonstrated the need for a reimagining of the human relationship to nature as a symbiotic one. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic underscored how this extraordinary interconnectedness underpins the stability of social, economic, and financial systems. In its report prepared by the EMG [“Supporting the Global Biodiversity Agenda”](#) the United Nations system recognised the urgency of acting and committing to mainstreaming biodiversity and nature-based solutions through collective action.



In the spring of 2021, the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) endorsed the [Common Approach to Integrating Biodiversity and Nature-Based Solutions for Sustainable Development into the United Nations Policy and Programme Planning and Delivery \(Common Approach\)](#). By leveraging the convening power and expertise from across the United Nations system, the Common Approach supports the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, and contribute to the realization of the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity. The Common Approach provides a unique opportunity for the United Nations system to act as one to propel the biodiversity agenda forward.

Through this Common Approach, the United Nations system also commits to catalyse collective action to address the drivers of biodiversity loss, restore ecosystems and promote living in harmony with nature. It provides the normative framework in a result-based structure to organize collective action and joint delivery to mainstream biodiversity and nature-based solutions. Given the scope of the task at hand, the Common Approach is structured to achieve impact over the next decade in three areas: (a) human rights, peaceful societies, and planetary stability; (b) a green and inclusive economic recovery; and (c) strengthened institutions, accountability, and justice.

To accelerate transformational change in these three areas, the Common Approach on Biodiversity is focused on creating opportunities for collective action and joint delivery of initiatives at the global, regional, and country levels, while pursuing alignment within the respective entities, and takes into consideration the strengths and mandate of each entity and relevant inter-agency mechanisms and partnerships.

In 2021, the UN system developed a living compendium entitled [“50+ Ways to Integrate Biodiversity and Nature-Based Solutions”](#) which identified existing actions and potential opportunities for greater collaboration and practical interventions that can be pursued jointly as part of the Common Approach.

The EMG’s IMG on Biodiversity is currently following up on the implementation of the common approach by collecting UN knowledge products on biodiversity to make it available to UN agencies including UN country teams and developing an accountability framework to monitor the progress achieved by the UN system in creating coherent and collective actions on biodiversity and nature-based solutions. In 2024, the IMG on Biodiversity is expected to produce a Mid-Term report on the implementation of the Common Approach.

Common Approach Towards a Pollution-Free Planet

Pollution is one of the major crises faced by our planet. The WHO states that environmental risks contribute to 23 per cent of global deaths. Low- and middle-income nations are disproportionately affected, particularly impacting children, women, and vulnerable populations. Every year 19-23 million tonnes of plastic waste leak into aquatic ecosystems, polluting lakes, rivers, and seas. Addressing pollution not only lessens disease burdens but also enhances the environment, improves quality of life, especially for women and children, diminishes negative health and human capital impacts, and reduces income and productivity losses. In addition, addressing pollution at regional, national, and local levels is a crucial contribution to realizing the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Given their cross-cutting nature, many Environment Assembly resolutions related to chemicals, waste, and pollution, including on environment and health, have increased the need for synergistic thinking on chemicals, waste, and pollutants. In 2017, Member States adopted a Ministerial Declaration calling for heightened efforts to address pollution and requested UNEP to prepare an implementation plan for this purpose. The implementation plan [“Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”](#), developed in consultation with Member States, was endorsed by UNEA4 in 2019 as the key vehicle for implementing the Declaration. Following the publication of the implementation plan, many agencies began to address pollution through their mandates, expertise and operations. To enhance these existing efforts, the EMG Senior Officials agreed in 2021 to establish a Consultative Process, to develop stronger synergies, common narratives and increase coordinated action on the issue.

In October 2023, the Senior Officials of the EMG endorsed the [UN System Common Approach to Transitioning Towards a Pollution-Free Planet](#) (Common Approach to Pollution), produced by the Consultative Process. This Common Approach paves the way for a stronger, more coordinated global response towards a pollution-free planet – to act on air, water, soil, marine and coastal pollution and sound management of chemicals and waste, by leveraging and advancing existing interagency arrangements that address pollution-related issues, and by transforming and strengthening capacities – globally, nationally, and subnational.



The Common Approach to Pollution is structured to achieve impact in three areas: (a) People: focusing on the protection and promotion of human rights, health, and well-being of individuals, groups and communities; (b) focusing on maintaining and restoring healthy and productive ecosystems to support life on Earth, and to provide valuable resources for society; and (c) Inclusive and sustainable growth: emphasizing the importance of fostering economic and societal transformation that balances the short-term needs of today's generation with the longer-term needs of future generations. The Common Approach to Pollution presents 11 medium-term Objectives and 30 Outcomes that contribute to the realization of the Goal.

A newly established IMG on Pollution within the EMG is currently working on the implementation plan of the Common Approach to Pollution.



Human Rights and the Environment

The **Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights**, issued in February 2020, contained a dedicated section on rights of future generations, especially climate justice, highlighting as a key action going forward to "increase United Nations support to Member States at field level for laws and policies that regulate and promote the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and for effective individual and collective access to justice and effective remedies for environment-related concerns."

This enhanced focus on the human right to a healthy environment aligns with developments in the work of the human rights treaty-bodies, in judicial decisions, and in environmental law and policy through e.g. the Escazú Agreement, the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollution Release and Transfer Register, the Paris Agreement, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, as well as in the resolutions of UNEA.

These and other developments have led the core group of Member States, in 2021, to sponsor the HRC resolution on human rights and environment to plan a consultative process towards a potential HRC resolution (adopted in 2022) that would universally recognize the human right to a healthy environment, including environmental justice and intergenerational equity. In this context, and with the COVID-19 crisis further exposing the need for immediate, evidence-based action to protect both people and planet while recovering better and greener, the EMG embarked on the opportunity to support efforts to ensure a more coherent and consistent United Nations system-wide approach to human rights and the environment in line with the United Nations Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights.

The EMG's IMG on Human Rights and the Environment was mandated in 2020 to integrate the human right to a healthy environment into the work of the United Nations to ensure a coherent and rights-based approach to environmental action throughout the United Nations system. The IMG focuses on: promoting the integration of human rights to a healthy environment in the work of the United Nations; responding to and aiding recovery from COVID-19; facilitating enhanced coordination and information sharing; discussing and identifying measures to improve protection for environmental human rights defenders; promoting inclusive participation, particularly from women and youth, including minority, vulnerable or marginalised groups; and furthering a better understanding of the interdependence of human rights and the environment. The IMG has three focus areas: (1) Joint and integrated policy and programming support on human rights and the environment at the country level and to regional Development Coordination Offices; (2) Integrating human rights into multilateral environmental agreements; and (3) Global deep-dive webinars and training on human rights and the environment.

In 2022 the EMG has developed a [Common Narrative on the Human Right to a Healthy Environment](#) as a part of the broader efforts to respond to the planetary crisis in a systemic way. Additionally, the EMG has developed tools and guidance on several environment-related issues such as climate change, biodiversity, desertification, and organized webinars on the different dimensions of the triple planetary crisis.



Supporting the Environment in the Context of the UN Development Reform

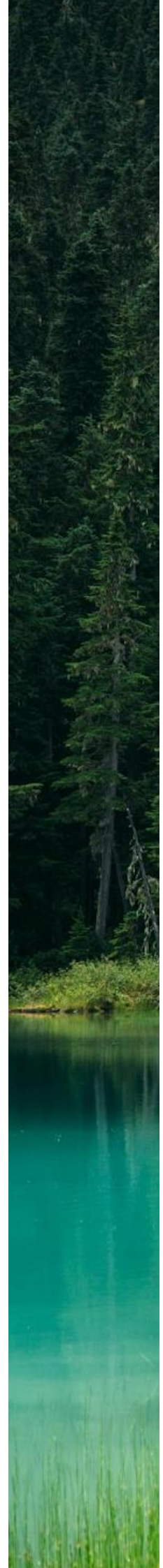
In 2018, the United Nations development system embarked on a road of reform that reinvigorated the Resident Coordinator System and replaced the United Nations Development Assistance Framework with a Common Country Analysis (CCAs) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs).

In 2020, for the first time, the 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review contained strong environmental mandates for the United Nations system. The EMG recognised this area required greater systematic and more robust support to UNCTs to promote integrated solutions within and across climate, biodiversity, and sustainable use, to support countries' just transition to green economies.

For UNCTs, developing and implementing cooperation frameworks in coordination with national governments, depend on systemic analyses and policy-making processes. Yet, national analytical and policy-making architecture is often fragmented and siloed. National governments undertake environmental efforts under a plethora of multilateral environmental agreements, often siloed within the Ministry of Environment, with little coordination with ministries pertinent to economic growth or social inclusion, or with the UNCT in the design and implementation of the cooperation frameworks. As strategic convenors and custodians of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UN Resident Coordinators (RC) were uniquely positioned to support UNCTs in "bridging the conventions" by engaging the breadth of the national policy frameworks and transforming fragmentation into integration via next generation of cooperation frameworks.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) Core Group requested in early 2021 that the UN Development Cooperation Office (DCO), UNEP and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) co-lead a workstream on strengthening the United Nations system-wide support to UNCTs and RCs to tackle the triple planetary crisis. The key activities of the UNSDG Core Group included; the establishment of a direct feedback loop that provided a tailored system-wide response to the needs of Resident Coordinator Offices (RCO) and UNCTs; the identification of opportunities to address the triple planetary crisis within Common Country Analysis and cooperation frameworks; strengthened awareness, knowledge and capacity on entry points for integrated programming; the testing and operationalisation of approaches in selected UNCTs; and strengthened interagency collaboration and coherence.

In 2022, the EMG established a workstream, in line with the broader UNSDG Core Group, which focused on: 1) Mapping existing United Nations initiatives and knowledge products to provide a consolidated overview of system-wide activities, identification of opportunities to strengthen the knowledge base; 2) Strengthening awareness, knowledge and capacity of RCOs/UNCTs on key entry points for integrated programming and the provision of a EMG Nexus Dialogue series to stimulate discussion on addressing any gaps; and 3) Testing, operationalizing and monitoring support to select RCOs/UNCTs. These efforts strengthen the added value of synergies within and across existing EMG workstreams related to the triple planetary crisis response, including green recovery, human rights, the Common Approach on biodiversity, and pollution, as well as the EMG nexus dialogue series.



This enables the United Nations system to improve environmental mainstreaming in CCA's and the Cooperation Frameworks. Hence there was an increase in the uptake of biodiversity in the outcomes of cooperation frameworks developed in 2022 as well as an increase in uptake of actions on National Biodiversity Action Plans although much progress remains to be made including on the uptake of pollution in the CCA's and cooperation frameworks.¹

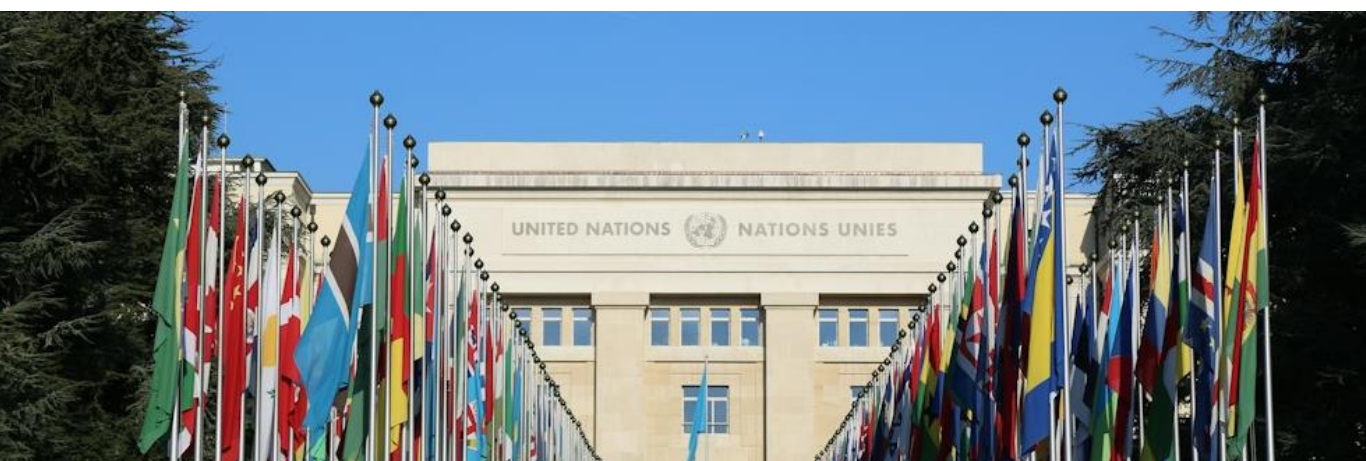
During the latest meeting of the Senior Officials of the EMG, in 2023, the Senior Officials highlighted the need to motivate UNCTs to assist countries in improving their planning systems and building their capacity to align CCA's with the implementation of environmental conventions. For example, Nationally Determined Contributions could be more synergistic and integrate nature-based solutions that support obligations associated to the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Stockholm+ 50: Reinvigorating System-Wide Coordination and Collaboration on the Environment

In 2022, to commemorate the 50 years since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, the United Nations General Assembly convened an international meeting entitled "Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity". The EMG contributed a report on **"Delivering on the vision of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"** to Stockholm+50 which provided a United Nations system-wide perspective on delivering on the vision of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The report summarised that despite some progress, efforts to meet the commitments to limit environmental damage have largely failed, highlighting that today's increasingly unequal and resource-intensive development model degrades and surpasses the Earth's finite capacity to sustain human well-being. The report outlined that the well-being of present and future generations depends on an urgent and clear break with current trends of environmental decline through an integrated approach and whole-of-system thinking.

Stockholm+50 provided an opportunity to renew inclusive, networked multilateral cooperation among all stakeholders. Subsequent discussions can be framed along an interconnected pathway of regeneration, recovery, rebalance, renewal, and reimagination of humanity's relationship with the planet and with itself. Building on the commitments and actions set out by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the report culminated in suggestions of areas for focus and for accelerated action, including by the United Nations system towards a healthy planet for the prosperity of all.



Internalisation of Sustainability in the United Nations System

In December 2018, the Secretary-General of the United Nations called on the Organization to raise the level of its internal ambitions and intensify its own efforts to combat climate change. As part of the United Nations' commitment to support nationally-owned sustainable development results, the UN system renewed and expanded its commitments towards “walking the talk” on environmental sustainability and climate change; and to internalize the principles it stands for – leading by example and maintaining credibility as a partner in sustainable development. The United Nations has set its ambitions towards becoming a global leader on sustainability.

A key element of achieving these commitments and ambitions is to enhance the environmental and social sustainability of the United Nations' programmes, operations and facilities.

In 2019, the EMG endorsed the development of an internal sustainability vision and strategy for the United Nations beyond 2020 to enhance the Organization's leadership in internal environmental and social sustainability and to show that the UN aligns its own performance with the principles that it has pioneered internationally and to leave a positive legacy. The EMG and UNEP's Sustainable United Nations (SUN) Facility formed a Task Team that developed the UN Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030.

Later in 2019, the CEB endorsed the [UN Strategy for Environmental Sustainability in the Area of Management](#). It focuses on the continued reduction of environmental impacts by the systematic consideration of risks and benefits to the environment from United Nations activities in relevant corporate management decisions of all United Nations entities.

In 2021, the EMG Senior Officials, the United Nations High Level Committee on Programmes, the United Nations High Level Committee on Management, and the CEB endorsed the full Strategy for sustainability management in the United Nations system, 2020-2030. [The UN Sustainability Strategy: Towards Leadership in Environmental and Social Sustainability](#) aims to mainstream fundamental environmental and social sustainability principles into every aspect of the United Nations system, from ensuring that management functions, programmes, and partnerships respect sustainability principles to joint reporting on the sustainability of the United Nations system. The Sustainability Strategy builds on more than 30 existing United Nations system-wide strategies and action plans that are already in place and aims to foster greater coherence. It consists of a comprehensive set of environmental and social sustainability principles that are to be mainstreamed across all functions of the United Nations system. The reporting framework is currently being finalized and will report on implementation of the Strategy by 2025.

Progress has been made in the operationalization and implementation of the United Nations Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030, including the establishment of its governance structure and the development and piloting of a monitoring and reporting framework. UNEP SUN Facility continues to provide support to the implementation and reporting of the Strategy for Environmental Sustainability in the Area of Management in the United Nations System 2020-2030 by hosting and facilitating the interagency Working Group on Environmental Sustainability in Management.

The integration of sustainability into individual entities remains at the forefront of Senior Officials' attention at a system-wide level. In 2023, Senior Officials highlighted that entities should take action to embed the corporate sustainability strategy into the core of the entity's organizational strategy and program of work, so that it becomes an integral part of implementation of all programs. The Senior Officials agreed to strengthen their commitment and actions to implement the United Nations Sustainability Strategy.

During the latest meeting of the Senior Officials of the EMG in 2023, the Senior Officials suggested that the UN can demonstrate that it is 'walking the talk' and increasing internal action to address climate change, by implementing a variety of short-term, mid-term and long-term changes.



System-wide Accountability and Reporting: Greening the Blue

The United Nations System continues to engage, at all levels, in the transition to integrate environmental consideration into UN management decisions and actions through the UN-wide initiative [Greening the Blue](#), managed by UNEP SUN Facility. **This initiative engages and supports the UN System in the transition towards greater environmental sustainability in the management of UN facilities and operations.** It stimulates United Nations entities to 1) Measure their environmental performance, 2) Reduce their environmental impacts, and 3) Offset their residual greenhouse gas emissions. The interventions of the UNEP SUN Facility focus on the environmental footprint resulting from facilities and operations. The Facility provides technical assistance and capacity building, as well as services to support knowledge-sharing and reporting.

The last progress report of the greening the blue, issued in December of 2023, highlighted the environmental impacts of 308,000 personnel in 57 reporting entities across headquarters, field offices, and in operations on the ground. For the 2022 calendar year, the UN system emitted 1.4 million tonnes of CO₂eq which is an increase of 12% from the previous year but still below 2019's system-wide GHG emissions. 92% of these residual emissions were offset via the UNFCCC's clean development mechanism. Facilities (47%) and air travel (38%) are the largest contributors of GHG emissions. The UN system is improving in its use of renewable electricity (31% of system-wide use), increase in personnel training on environmental sustainability in operations and facilities, and some progress in the implementation of Environmental Management Systems (EMS)

That 2022 air travel emissions levels are not back to those of the pre-pandemic years of 2019 and 2018 suggests that there has been a shift in operational modalities to other travel methods and/or that travel has been somewhat replaced with other meeting formats such as virtual and hybrid meetings. The changes implemented during the pandemic have demonstrated, however, that the UN system has a variety of ways to work and collaborate that can help reduce negative work-related environmental impacts.

4. Challenges and opportunities

Despite the above referenced efforts in aligning and integrating environmental aspects of the SDGs within the United Nations system, increasing coherence, and strengthening coordination in environmental action continue to be challenges. While showcasing the United Nations' competence and capacity to support Member States, this alignment also brings governance challenges, including effective coordination, optimal use of limited funding, accurate reporting on implementation, and delivering tangible results at the country level. There is a growing necessity to enhance coherence throughout the United Nations system to ensure efficient service delivery and to align national strategies with the directives of various United Nations entities. To achieve enduring change, improved collaboration and cooperation are essential across the United Nations system. The EMG is dedicated to supporting the United Nations system in overcoming these obstacles.

At their 29th annual meeting in October 2023, the Senior Officials of the EMG emphasized their dedication to strengthening United Nations collective action, from enhancing policy coherence to executing joint actions in response to the triple planetary crisis. They recognized the need for a transdisciplinary approach and synergy across various levels to address this crisis, highlighting the importance of building capacity in RCs and RCOs for integrated, systems thinking approaches. This involves incorporating environmental considerations into economic policy development and sustainable development discussions with various stakeholders. The Senior Officials have also committed to employing their agencies' resources for awareness, best practices dissemination, and capacity building concerning the Common Approaches to biodiversity and pollution.

They emphasized the crucial integration of these approaches into national priorities, reflecting UN agencies' intensified implementation efforts, aiming to establish the United Nations as a leading agency in sustainability by 2030. This leadership involves embedding sustainability strategies at the core of organizational strategy, focusing on resilience-building, inclusion, innovation, and localization, and understanding the interdependencies between the SDGs and the triple planetary crisis. Furthermore, the Senior Officials reflected on the value of normative frameworks and international legal instruments, such as MEAs, in creating policy and driving action within legal frameworks. They highlighted the need to strengthen synergies among these agreements and emphasized the implementation of existing frameworks through an environmental and social lens. Incorporating a human rights perspective, with a particular focus on gender equality, was also deemed crucial.



The Senior Officials noted the necessity for collective action based on shared data and language for effective monitoring and reporting. They also identified the need for more robust collaboration and synergies in financial resources, advocating for expanded funding for green projects and broader green economies, and engaging new partners. The UN system is committed to strengthening collaboration and cooperation, extending beyond the United Nations to include partnerships with external entities like the private sector and other stakeholders. The private sector's engagement can be leveraged through policies and incentives. This necessitates a reflection on the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the private sector and on how the UN and the private sector can best capitalize on each other's strengths to achieve effective results. The convening power of the EMG could be a powerful instrument to mobilize such public-private collective action.

The Senior Officials suggested building on UNEA and the UNEA platform to strengthen the science-policy interface and take it to the country level, specifically focusing on spatial planning and analysis.



International cooperation, including in the United Nations system, is critical. Through each agency's respective mandate, and collective and coordinated action, impact at scale can be reached and the United Nations can better respond to the needs of countries. This enhanced approach is critical for overcoming existing challenges and driving meaningful progress in environmental governance and sustainable development. More specifically, there are opportunities to:

- Support strengthened coordination across ministries and agencies that deal with environment, climate change, disaster risk reduction, and other sectors such as rural development, urban planning, infrastructure, and energy.
- Listen to the voices of civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth.
- Actively and systemically facilitate discourse among local communities, decision-makers, and the private sector on local priorities, solutions, and evidence on impacts.
- Avoid duplication and use existing frameworks, like the SDGs, to build on what exists and improve it.
- Promote better integration at the national level through streamlining MEA reporting and increasing collaboration among national focal points for the different MEAs.

- Build platforms to connect and convene local, national, regional, and international actors where different MEAs and other programmes can be better integrated and discussed together.
- Ensure that the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and its targets lead to greater coherence and allow MEAs to align their strategic plans.
- Enhance synergies in means of implementation, including science, data, technology, and access to funding.
- Provide resources to help countries build capacities, raise awareness, and improve legal frameworks and institutions to pursue justice against those that commit crimes that affect the environment.
- Identify further opportunities to improve the UN system's own environmental performance and resource efficiency, and design systems and processes that are scalable over time to achieve progressively stronger outcomes to support and protect the environment.

Looking ahead, the EMG is poised to be a cornerstone in bringing together the UN's continued support for Member States, addressing governance challenges and ensuring the delivery of impactful environmental services. The EMG's dedication to overcoming obstacles and fostering lasting change is a testament to the United Nations system's unwavering commitment to a sustainable and equitable future for all.

