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Conference Room 1

Agenda Item 4: Contribution of the Environment Assembly to the High Level Political Forum

Note to Member States addressing the questions put forth by the President of the Economic and Social Council on the theme of the 2017 High Level Political Forum

Introduction

As a response to the invitation from the President of the Economic and Social Council, H.E. Ambassador Frederick Mussiwa Makamure Shava, the UN Environment Assembly is submitting its input to the 2017 High Level Political Forum showcasing its contribution towards the 2030 Agenda in general, particularly for the Sustainable Development Goals and respective targets that are most relevant to the UN Environment Assembly's work. The paper is structured around the template provided by the President of Economic and Social Council. The UN Environment Assembly reported the outcomes of UNEA 2 to the High Level Political Forum in July 2016.

1. Paragraph 3 of General Assembly's resolution 71/231 on the report of the UN Environment Assembly, Member States sent a consensual message around the relevance of the participation of the President of the Environment Assembly in the High-level Political Forum.
2. In delivering on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, Member States at the UN Environment Assembly committed to contributing to the effective implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in an integrated manner, through setting the global environmental agenda, providing overarching policy guidance and defining policy responses to address emerging environmental challenges, undertaking policy review, dialogue and exchange of experiences, fostering partnerships for achieving environmental goals and resource mobilization; Highlights of Resolution 2/5 of the UN Environment Assembly 2.
3. The resolution also highlights UN Environment's important role in the follow-up and review of the progress in implementing the environmental dimension of sustainable development including the provision of policy relevant information through assessment processes such as the Global Environment Outlook, as a contribution to the Global Sustainable Development Report, and to the annual Sustainable Development Goals Report, all of which should support the High Level Political Forum's work.
4. UN Environment conducted an alignment of its strategic planning with the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs through the Medium Term Strategy 2018-2021 and Programme of Work 2018-2019. This is materialized by an alignment of the Medium Term Strategy with the goals' and indicators set out in the 2030 Agenda.
5. Highlights on targets of the Sustainable Development Goals that are the most relevant to the work of UN Environment.

6. In this regard, the UN Environment Assembly commits to convey the main messages of its sessions to the High Level Political Forum to support its function in the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The following section responds to the specific questions from the Economic and Social Council president's template:

A) An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level;

1. UN Environment Assembly takes a right-based approach to leaving no one behind, meaning peoples' rights to a clean environment, clean water and access to information. Human rights and equity have been recognized by UN Environment as one of its four core principles underpinning its approach to the 2030 Agenda.
2. Universal commitment to leaving no one behind means shared concerns for reaching everyone, including the most vulnerable, marginalized and excluded populations. In this sense, universality is closely linked to the principle of equality and non-discrimination, requiring equal rights for all, including the right to an adequate standard of living. UN Environment adheres fully to these principles that are reflected in all resolutions tackled at the last UN Environment Assembly in May 2016.
3. In delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UN Environment stresses the importance of respecting, protecting and promoting human rights and gender equality and recognising the role of indigenous peoples and local communities in delivering the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda.
4. The interrelationships between human-rights and the three dimensions of sustainable development need to be recognised, understood, taken into account and fully embraced for “ensuring that no one is left behind”.
5. The right to a healthy environment is now recognised in many national constitutions and regional instruments.
6. Mention the policy and Strategy for Gender equality and environment and Environmental, Social and Economic Sustainability framework and Indigenous peoples policy for UN Environment that need to be used when developing all projects;
7. Link between poverty and severity of health impact of a degraded environment on individuals. In most developing countries urban outdoor and indoor air quality is degrading due to increase population and greater use of biomass among poor populations.

B) The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges;

1. Pollution in all its forms is the biggest environmental risk to health and an obstacle for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;
2. Mention the rule of law gaps at national level that keep us from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;
3. Mention the lack of gender disaggregated environmental and health impact data.
4. Addressing this Nexus will require urgent attention to an iterative procedure of integrating poverty-environment objectives into policymaking, budgeting and implementation processes at national, sub-national and sector levels and is referred to as poverty-environment mainstreaming.

5. There are many other factors affecting global poverty, which affect some or all of the poor, especially those in rural areas at the nexus between poverty and environmental sustainability. These evolve mostly around the issue of good governance and generally include gender discrimination and social inequality in the context of:
6. Appropriation of arable land for investment projects;
7. Lack of land rights for female smallholders;
8. A high prevalence of water and sanitation related diseases leading to increased child mortality;
9. Vulnerability to natural disasters
10. Lack of access to adequate education and health facilities and financial institutions;
11. Climate change is a factor that can affect both rural and urban populations. Long term climate change can also have effects on land areas as a result of sea level changes, desertification, etc. Experience from the Poverty Environment Initiative suggests that one way to address climate change impacts on the poor is by integrating adaptation responses into development planning (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003).
12. The macroeconomic costs of the impacts of climate change are highly uncertain adaptation costs are likely to increase sharply over time even if the world succeeds in limiting a global rise in temperatures to below two degrees Celsius by 2100.
13. Monitoring poverty - environment nexus and gender - environment nexus;
14. The Minimum Set of Gender Indicators adopted by the Statistical Commission in 2013 does not include any gender environment indicators.
15. UN Environment is working with the Inter Agency Expert Group on Gender Statistics on a review of the minimum set of indicators to include the area 'Environment'.
16. UN Environment work on measuring gender and the environment is at a very early stage. There is a need for additional research on the topic to study roles and norms that position women and men differently in relation to environmental protection.

C) Valuable lessons learned on eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity;

1. Poverty and the environment are inextricably linked. This inter-action between the two areas indicates that poverty cannot be fully alleviated without ensuring natural resources are used in a fully sustainable manner.
2. When precise linkages and their causes are understood, there are improved chances to design policy and practice in more integrated and innovative ways, as well as to ensure policy coherence.
3. Integrated evidence coupled with institutional capacity building support contributes to more sustainable policies across sectors.
4. The more we know about the multiple dimensions of poverty and its links to environmental sustainability, the better we will be able to tackle the connected Sustainable Development Goals.
5. Unsustainable use of natural resources and climate change is costing African countries up to 22% of the total annual Gross Domestic Product. Soils, forests, fisheries, water and biomass fuels are the principal sources of income, social protection, employment creation and human capital development for many men and women living in poverty.

D) Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of poverty eradication and achieving prosperity;

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states that “eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development”.
2. The Paris Agreement on climate change has also raised significant challenges, which need to be addressed if 2030 Agenda goals are to be achieved.
3. Many developing countries need to address several key issues if they are to develop inclusive and sustainable growth within the specified time frame. One of the main problem areas involves the emphasis countries currently place on purely economic growth. It is essential that governments achieve the right balance between economic growth, inclusiveness and the sustainable use of the environment and its natural resources if poverty is to be eradicated over the long term. In many cases, progress on these critical issues is being hindered by lack of willingness to implement change and/or weak institutional capacity resulting from limited knowledge of the links between poverty and the environment and natural resources.
4. Poverty and the environment are intimately linked. This is especially true in rural areas where many people are dependent on a continuing supply of natural resources to sustain life. For instance, large scale clearing of forests has deprived many of ready access to resources they depend on for a livelihood. The situation has also been exacerbated by some so called ‘development’ projects diverting or polluting local water supplies thus depriving the poor of adequate clean water.

E) Areas where political guidance by the high level political forum is required;

1. With the political weight of the General Assembly's resolution, there is hope for UN Environment Assembly to have the necessary receptivity from the Economic and Social Council President ;
2. The High Level Political Forum will be expected to provide guidance, trigger discussion, put into light and improve understanding on the diverse interlinkages that exist under each theme between the different goals as well as between the three dimensions of Sustainable Development.
3. The guidance of the high-level political forum could be valuable in the identification of policy options to support countries in the coherent observation of international obligations in the social, environmental and economic fields, in a way that is conducive for the achievement of the 2030 for Sustainable Development.
4. The High Level Political Forum should also provide a space for sharing and providing policy relevant information, including the Global Environment Outlook assessments as well as information on trends in global sustainability to support informed decision-making with regard to strengthening implementation.
5. The High Level Political Forum provides an outstanding opportunity for Member States and other stakeholders to exchange lessons learnt and to share, disseminate and encourage the adoption of good practices with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The forum is a unique place to raise awareness about emerging issues that will need to be tackled through global action.
6. The High Level Political Forum is also expected to provide space for discussing and addressing remaining implementation challenges.
7. The High Level Political Forum will trigger discussion on how to best foster integration for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and what needs to be done for effectively applying the integrated approach in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as well as a platform to share experiences regarding monitoring and reporting systems.

8. The High Level Political Forum should provide space for countries and other stakeholders to share efforts and progresses made towards the improvement of statistical systems and databases at all levels in order to track Sustainable Development Goals more effectively.
9. The High Level Political Forum could provide guidance on the development of a global approach to support countries reporting requirements especially developing countries that are most in need of resources and technical support.

F) Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in poverty eradication;

1. More access to land tenure rights for women in certain locations would lead to less poverty among women and girls and better management of the agricultural resource base;
2. Better management of fresh water and energy resources (biomass) would reduce the time needed by women and girls in the daily collection of these resources, allowing for more time for education and less poverty.
3. Better management of nitrogen fertilizers would reduce the pollution of fresh water resources, leading to less disease and poverty among subsistence farmers.
4. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress on poverty eradication (findings from the Global Gender and Environment Outlook in particular).
5. The inter-related nature of many of the Sustainable Development Goals indicates that overall progress is unlikely to be achieved unless a full integrated approach is used to address the many areas involved.
6. Application of multi-sectoral approaches that transcend sectoral silos and facilitate integrated policies, plans, strategies, programmes and budgets (where ministries of planning/finance, environment, agriculture, fisheries etc. constructively coordinate their activities);
7. Encourage central governments to fully consider Sustainable Development Goals at the local level in order to address local economic, cultural and environmental needs ;
8. Ensuring coherence between national, sector and district level plans, strategies and their budgets ;
9. Assist governments to strengthen financial management and budgeting practices to ensure public revenues are available to fund critical investments to benefit the poor while sustaining the environment and natural resources;
10. Enhance regulatory processes to enforce compliance and social and environmental safeguards;
11. Assist in the development of integrated institutions (practices, procedures and sometimes organisational change) within and across government, business and civil society.

Contact person: Elizabeth Mrema, Director, Law Division United Nations Environment P.O. Box 30552 00100 Nairobi, Kenya
