



**United Nations
Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment
Programme**

**United Nations Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment Programme**

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**Contributions to the meetings of the high-level
political forum on sustainable development**

**Progress in the implementation of resolution 3/3 on
contributions of the United Nations Environment Assembly to
the high-level political forum on sustainable development**

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report provides an update on the implementation of paragraph 6 of United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 3/3,¹ on contributions of the Environment Assembly to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which seeks to enhance the contributions of the Environment Assembly to the forum with a view to providing the overarching environmental perspective of sustainable development and promoting the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system. The forum takes place annually in July, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, and every four years in September, with participation by Heads of State and Government, under the auspices of the General Assembly. In 2019 the forum will take place in both July and September, with the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. The present report outlines the steps taken to provide meaningful contributions to the forum and suggests concrete steps for further enhancing these contributions.

I. Introduction

1. At the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, held in May 2016, parties adopted resolution 2/5 on delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which the Environment Assembly committed itself to conveying the main messages of its sessions to the high-level political forum on sustainable development to support its function in the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda. The Committee of Permanent Representatives subsequently dedicated an agenda item to the matter at its fourth annual subcommittee meeting, held in Nairobi in March 2017. The discussion on the item focused on both the modalities and the substance of the contributions of the Environment Assembly to the forum and highlighted the importance of having the President of the Assembly formally present key political environmental messages at the forum. The discussion,

* UNEP/EA.4/1/Rev.1.

¹ UNEP/EA.3/Res.3.

supported by the sustained interest of member States, culminated in the adoption of resolution 3/3 at the Assembly's third session, in December 2017.

II. Implementation

2. In paragraph 2 of resolution 3/3, the Environment Assembly decided to include as a standing item on its meeting agendas its contributions to the meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, with the aim of considering in its deliberations the Sustainable Development Goals under review at the annual meetings of the forum. Accordingly, the item is on the provisional agenda of the Assembly's fourth session.

3. In paragraph 3 of the same resolution, the Environment Assembly decided to provide timely, substantive inputs to the annual meetings of the high-level political forum. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has followed a relatively well-functioning process since 2017, whereby it prepares draft inputs for initial consideration by the President of the Environment Assembly, followed by a series of consultations with the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The inputs are prepared in accordance with the template provided by the president of the Economic and Social Council for assessing progress, challenges encountered and lessons learned in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in relation to the overarching theme of each forum.

4. In paragraph 4 of the resolution, the Environment Assembly encouraged the continuation and strengthening of interaction between the high-level political forum and the Environment Assembly. Toward this end, a representative of the president of the Environment Assembly participated in the Economic and Social Council preparatory meeting on the theme "Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all", held in Prague in March 2018. The representative met separately with the president of the Council to discuss concrete ways of enhancing meaningful consideration of the annual contributions of the Environment Assembly in the work of the high-level forum on sustainable development.

5. In paragraph 5 of the resolution, the Environment Assembly recommended that the president of the Assembly actively participate in, and convey the main messages of the Assembly to, the high-level political forum. The current president of the Assembly, Mr. Siim Kiisler, was accorded a separate slot for addressing the ministerial segment of the forum. He reported on the outcomes of the third session of the Assembly, highlighting the grave impact of pollution on the environment and human health and providing policy recommendations for tackling pollution at various levels of governance.

6. The secretariat is of the view that the inclusion of the president's address in the high-level segment of the forum reflects the recognition of the important role played by the Environment Assembly in integrating the environmental dimension in the implementation of sustainable development. Given the symbolic significance of a minister for the environment addressing other ministers with wide-ranging portfolios such as planning and finance, as well as parliamentarians and other high-level officials, it would be valuable to follow this precedent at the annual meetings of the forum. This would require close cooperation with the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which provides secretariat functions for the forum and, more importantly, strong political support from member States.

7. In paragraph 7, resolution 3/3 also requested the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources, to ensure that the UNEP regional offices work closely with member States and the regional economic commissions to provide timely inputs in preparing for the annual meetings of the regional forums on sustainable development. In response to that request, the secretariat is planning to develop a corporate strategy on UNEP contributions to the regional forums on sustainable development that would enable different regional offices to provide consistent, coherent messages, taking into account specific regional circumstances and priorities. Where appropriate, the proposed strategy would also promote more effective coordination and channelling of inputs, facilitated by the secretariat, from the regional forums of ministers for the environment and environmental authorities to the regional forums on sustainable development. Such efforts would be aligned with resolution 2/2, on the role and functions of the regional forums of ministers for the environment and environment authorities, in which the Environment Assembly requested the Executive Director to support and facilitate the convening and/or strengthening of existing regional forums of ministers for the environment and environment authorities and the convening of new regional forums at the request of the regions.

8. In addition, specific activities undertaken by the regional offices in support of the respective regional forums on sustainable development held in 2018 include the following:

(a) In Africa, the regional forum on sustainable development was held in May 2018 in Dakar under the theme “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”, in line with the theme of the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development. The regional forum was jointly organized by the Economic Commission for Africa, together with the Government of Senegal and in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and UNEP. During the forum, the Regional Office for Africa led thematic discussions on its contributions to the implementation of Environment Assembly resolutions. The Regional Office also prepared a thematic paper on the implementation of sustainable consumption and production strategies, an area which member States agreed will require an integrated approach that necessitates, among other things, inter-ministerial coordination and the involvement of non-traditional actors.

(b) In Asia and the Pacific, UNEP co-led the convening of the round table on Goal 15, on protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managing forests, combating desertification, and halting and reversing land degradation and halting biodiversity loss, as part of the regional forum on sustainable development held in Bangkok in March 2018. The round table also considered issues raised at the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Summit on the Environment, organized jointly by UNEP and the Regional Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, which was held in Bangkok from 5 to 8 September 2017. The Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific also provided substantive input for the organization of round tables on the other Goals under in-depth review by the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The round tables identified regional priorities and issues, which were then incorporated into the outcome document.

(c) In Europe, UNEP organized three round tables at the regional forum on sustainable development held in Geneva in March 2018. A round table on Goal 12, on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, focused on successful approaches to achieving sustainable consumption and production by 2030, including innovation for sustainable value chains with a link to the circular economy, while discussing challenges and opportunities in the areas of policy and financing to accelerate the transition to sustainable consumption and production. The round table also showcased the work of the One Planet Network in implementing the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns. For the round table on Goal 15, the Regional Office for Europe worked with the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to highlight how ecosystems and biodiversity underpin sustainable development and the urgent need to mainstream biodiversity into different sectors. In addition, the Regional Office supported a preparatory meeting with civil society aimed at sharing lessons learned from the engagement of civil-society organizations in the implementation of the Goals.

(d) In Latin America and the Caribbean, the president of the Forum of Ministers for the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean conveyed the main messages and policy recommendations to the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, which took place in Santiago de Chile in April 2018. UNEP made substantive contributions to that regional forum on sustainable development, including supplying the moderator for the forum’s round table on environmental challenges for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and speakers for various side events. The outcome document of the forum specifically recognized the importance of the environment as one of the three dimensions of sustainable development and acknowledged the special contributions of the Forum of Ministers for the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean in following up on the 2030 Agenda. The Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean also organized a side event during the regional forum, called “Beat Plastic Pollution: Innovative Solutions for Plastic-Free Lifestyles”, which helped showcase the outcomes of the Environment Assembly.

(e) In Western Asia, UNEP, jointly with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the League of Arab States, led the organization of the annual Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, held in Beirut in April 2018. Prior to the forum, UNEP provided technical support for a preparatory meeting on environmental and natural resources held in Cairo in early April 2018. The Regional Office for West Asia is also working with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia to develop the second edition of the Arab Sustainable Development Report, to be published in 2019. In partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Statistics Division and the European Environment Agency, the regional office also organized a workshop on environmental statistics and information for sustainable development in the Arab region that was held in Beirut in November 2018, followed by a dedicated workshop for major groups and stakeholders in the Arab region held in Amman, also in November 2018.

9. In General Assembly resolution 71/223, on the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, adopted in December 2016, special consideration is given to the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns. This framework was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, with UNEP serving as the secretariat and as an implementing partner for all programmes.² In paragraph 11 of resolution 71/223, the General Assembly designated the Economic and Social Council to receive reports from the Board and the secretariat of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns and affirmed that due consideration should continue to be given to sustainable consumption and production at the meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Council. As the provider of secretariat services for the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, UNEP has submitted a progress report on the framework to the high-level political forum on sustainable development annually since 2014.

III. Recommendations and suggested action

10. In the interest of promoting more effective international environmental governance for sustainable development, recommendations to enhance the contributions of the Environment Assembly to the high-level political forum on sustainable development are as follows:

(a) Member States may wish to task UNEP with assisting countries in assessing the extent to which they are integrating the environmental dimension into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and identifying opportunities for supporting countries in bridging any gaps in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

(b) Given the importance of the regional dimension of sustainable development, each meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development has a session on the implementation of the Goals at the regional level, in which the Executive Secretaries of the five United Nations regional commissions provide an overview of progress made in their respective regions, identify challenges and share policy lessons. The session is complemented by a session on reporting on regional forums, where the ministerial chairs of the respective regional forums on sustainable development present the key outcomes of their meetings. (In 2018, the president of the Environment Assembly addressed the forum immediately after this reporting.) Member States may wish to consider instituting a similar practice at the Environment Assembly, in which the ministerial chairs of the respective regional forums of ministers for the environment and environmental authorities would be invited to inform on the outcomes of their work, including those relevant to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. This reporting on regional forums of ministers for the environment and environmental authorities could then be captured in the outcomes of the Environment Assembly and conveyed to the high-level political forum. It would also be necessary to explore concrete mechanisms for strengthening the relationship between the regional forums for sustainable development and the regional forums of ministers for the environment and environmental authorities. Where possible, in consultation with the regional commissions, the regional forums for sustainable development could consider inviting the ministerial chairs of the regional forums of ministers for the environment and environmental authorities to shed light on emerging environmental challenges in the region and areas for cooperation and partnership.

² UNEP/EA.2/Res.8.

(c) On the written inputs submitted to the president of the Economic and Social Council that become part of the “Synthesis of voluntary submissions by functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies”, it was suggested that UNEP encourage the multilateral environmental agreements that it administers to provide inputs to the high-level political forum through the Environment Assembly. As with the recommendation in subparagraph (b), it might be useful to institute reporting by the multilateral environmental agreements, whereby representatives of the conferences of the parties to the agreements provide an update to the Environment Assembly on their work and policy recommendations related to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, with a summary presented to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.
