

Revised consensual elements for the theme for the fifth Session of the UN Environment Assembly

Updated on 28 November 2019, following consultations with Member States

1. This proposal for consideration of the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly is based on consultations on the theme held in various fora and groupings, including during the [UN Environment Assembly Bureau held on 1st October](#), the [CPR sub-committee meetings held on 12 September, 31 October and 26 November](#) 2019, and consultations with regional and political groups in the margins of the Annual Sub-Committee held from 8-10 October, as well as taking into account written inputs from member States and Stakeholders, which are available on a dedicated [website](#). The discussions were guided by a letter from the President of the UN Environment Assembly and a “[thought-starter](#)” entitled “Finding the right theme for the 2021 UN Environment Assembly”.

2. Based on those consultations and considerations abroad consensus has emerged for a theme for the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly related to nature-based solutions in the context of sustainable development.

3. The following title for the theme has been developed in consultation with Member States and stakeholders and is hereby proposed for decision of the UN Environment Assembly Bureau:

Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

4. In the course of the consultations with the Committee and taking into account inputs and preferences from Member States and stakeholders, including in writing and at regional group meetings, the President of the Assembly, with the support of the Chair of the CPR, have noted three common messages which have been considered in the consensual elements in this note. The main common messages are:

a) **The majority of member States support a theme that is related to nature-based solutions in the context of sustainable development.** Such support builds on the tentative thematic area 1 set out in the thought starter. There is also interest among stakeholders for such a theme. In addition, many have expressed interest in a holistic approach, which would also allow for inclusion of elements from the other tentative thematic areas outlined in the thought-starter (namely “Blue Planet: Transformative actions to protect our freshwater and oceans” and “Addressing the water–energy–food interlinkages for sustainability”). Member States have also expressed a preference for a more practical approach regarding “nature-based solutions”, taking into account the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme and existing definitions of the concept. This will be considered in the next phase as the theme informs the further preparations for the fifth Environment Assembly.

b) **The overarching principles and criteria in the thought-starter have been endorsed and expanded upon.** These include action- and solution-oriented outcomes; broad and inclusive consultations; building on the outcomes of previous assemblies; a strong scientific grounding; and easily communicable and compelling. Member states have also been clear that the theme should contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the eradication of poverty and the promotion of sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

c) **The UN Environment Assembly should connect and consolidate environmental actions within the context of sustainable development and give significant impetus to more effective implementation.** The approach should aim to mobilize, motivate and energize member States and stakeholders into sharing

and implementing successful approaches and solutions, while avoiding duplication and overlaps with the mandates of other fora.

5. In summary, the feedback from the consultations and inputs signal a strong preference from Member States for a theme that upholds the vital role of nature and the solutions nature provide for our ability to reach the Sustainable Development Goals in its three complementary dimensions (social, economic and environmental).

6. From a communications perspective, selecting a theme that connects people with nature has the potential to invite all stakeholders to think about how we are part of nature and how intimately we depend on it. The theme could challenge millions of individuals to understand, experience and cherish this vital relationship. There is also a significant potential for the UN Environment Assembly and the Environment ministers to demonstrate to other sectors in their government and society, including local communities, the multitude of ways that a healthy environment underpins a thriving economy and society, and how actions to keep or enhance them are important part of the solutions to the challenges of their portfolios. As sustainable development is premised on an integrative approach, the theme should build our understanding of the benefits of nature to all the dimensions of sustainable development, *inter alia* combat climate change and its impacts, halting the loss of biological diversity, reducing pollution and halt and reverse land degradation, including by contributing to the ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, with a view to contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. In this regard, the fifth UN Environment Assembly will provide, under this theme, a platform to identify and capture bold transformative actions, especially within nexus areas, building on commitments made in relevant international fora. In addition, the selection of such theme will allow to highlight the contributions from relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

8. The process of consultations has also generated relevant suggestions and ideas of potential areas on which the fifth UN Environment Assembly can promote tangible international action. The Presidency has compiled these areas in the list contained in the annex below. Those areas can be useful going forward to identify areas which may be of relevance for resolutions or to be addressed during the high level segment. In this regard, Member States could consider them as inspiration for a limited number of concise and operative resolutions with a strong implementation approach, submitted in line with applicable Rules of Procedure and Assembly decisions.

Next steps

9. This proposal is made available to all Member States in the spirit of open and inclusive consultations that have characterized the process to identify the theme, in view of a final decision that will be made, in accordance with [decision 2 of the 4th session of the Assembly](#), by the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly at the joint bureaux meeting to be held on 3 December 2019.

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Annex: Non-exhaustive list of possible areas that could be formulated with a strong implementation focus under this theme

Bearing in mind that several issues will be followed up at the next Environment Assembly regardless of the chosen theme, due to mandates from previous sessions of the Assembly, and also taking into account complementarities and synergies with international processes in other intergovernmental fora, the President of the Assembly proposes that member States could consider action in some of the following areas:

- a) Enhancing ecosystem services for inter alia sustainable food, water and energy systems;
- b) Improving the state of our ocean and freshwater environments, and promoting sustainable management of ocean resources, in support of economic and social development;
- c) Promoting pathways to prevent land degradation and desertification, and achieve sustainable land use;
- d) Taking action to promote sustainable waste management and to detoxify land, ocean and freshwater, to allow ecosystems to perform its services to humanity;
- e) Safeguarding the multi-benefits of marine and aquatic vegetation, such as mangrove, wetland, peat, seagrass and kelp ecosystems;
- f) Considering further measures for the sustainable management, use and conservation of natural resources;
- g) Identifying innovative solutions and enabling mechanisms such as sustainable finance and natural-capital accounting that have multiple environment benefits and so are cost-effective;
- h) Means of implementation for nature-based solutions;
- i) Facilitating the implementation of the post 2020 biodiversity framework;
- j) Promoting energy from renewable resources in a way which is also mutually supportive of the objective of halting biodiversity loss.

This list of issues is not exhaustive, and further ideas and clarifications will be welcome during the next steps, including to ensure more cross-cutting and integrative outcomes.