

Canada's comments on the UNEA 5 Concept Note - UNEP/CPR/150/3

5 May 2020

GENERAL COMMENTS

We thank the Executive Director and UNEP for this useful and robust note that kick starts our collective thinking on how best to **focus UNEA-5 on its nature theme** towards relevant outcomes **and a process that will allow Member States to better manage the number of resolutions without compromising the strategic and important work that Member States must agree upon at UNEA5** . We have focussed our comments on the proposed action areas.

The note does a good job linking the current **global context** with a number of other key and relevant UN processes and highlighting how UNEA-5 can support broader recovery efforts while keeping a clear focus on the role of nature and how we need to consider the impacts of our actions on it. The pandemic is teaching us that the theme of nature is more relevant than ever. Canada would like to see UNEA-5 and its outcomes as critical pillars of the global policy ark required to fight against biodiversity loss and ecosystems degradation, as well as advance climate and other environmental priorities.

With the understanding that our work complements existing multilateral agreements to promote innovative action oriented measures for environmental governance and protection, we welcome the proposed **four action areas** where UNEA-5 could focus its impact (Nature for Economy and Jobs, Nature for Health, Nature for Climate and Nature for Food Systems). They provide coverage of keys areas for action that can be linked to both the post-COVID recovery and ongoing environmental efforts while keeping a clear focus on the role of nature and ecosystems and relevance to the already agreed theme.

Canada is pleased that nature for **health** is one of the proposed four action areas for UNEA-5. We believe that this is a critical action area to achieve the sustainable development goals and to mitigate future public health risks. We suggest the health area be reframed as "**Human and ecosystem health**" in order to capture the full range of issues in the proposed area. We also recommend activities related to abating **air pollution** also be specifically mentioned in the health theme (and in the section about continued relevance of the theme) in particular given the links between air pollution and the spread of COVID-19. In addition, air pollution mitigation activities can also help to achieve results in this action area since air pollution has a significant impact on health, biodiversity and ecosystems.

We have some concerns that the **ongoing multilateral processes for climate and plastics** are not adequately reflected in the note, notably:

- The language is not aligned with the Paris Agreement because it suggests that NDCs can be used as a mechanism for securing new or enhanced commitments related to nature, as well as finance for nature (see detailed comments and suggestions below).

- The reference to plastics would need to carefully capture the ongoing processes and not prejudge outcomes (see detailed comments and suggestions below).

Forests, a key piece of all four action areas, are only mentioned once in the text, in addition in a rather limited “tropical forest” context – we recommend to underscore their role better. Similarly for the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration which will begin in 2021.

As explained in the detailed comments below, we also would like to see references to **adaptation and resilience** through investing in nature, and **climate smart agriculture**.

Finally, we suggest to make note of the importance of working with **women, youth and local communities** to spur more gender-responsive and inclusive processes. Our approach cannot be “business as usual” and therefore we need to ensure that all stakeholders, including UN organizations, take into account the importance of environmental processes that include the voices of those that are often underrepresented in policy dialogue.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Canada would suggest that more **SDGs** should be captured under each of the action areas. For example:

- Area 1: include SDG 7 (Energy), SDG 12 (SCP), SDG 13 (Climate) and SDG 14 (Life under water).
- Area 2: include SDG 13 (Climate) and SDG 15 (Forests, land degradation)
- Area 3: include SDG 14 (Life under water) and SDG 15 (Forests, land degradation)
- Area 4: include SDG 13 (Climate)

Area 2 (Health)

As mentioned above, Canada would like to see the Health action area renamed to include *both human and ecosystem health*.

Chemicals:

- We also are pleased to note that there is a reference in the document that: “*Ensuring the adoption of a Post-2020 Chemicals and waste management framework matter more than ever*”. In our view, UNEA-5 can contribute to keeping the global momentum for adoption of a post-2020 framework and set the stage for a successful outcome at the Summer 2021 Fifth Session of the International Conference on Chemicals management.

Plastics:

- The description referring to a “global collective structural response” would benefit from a more detailed description to ensure a common understanding and care should be taken to not presuppose the outcome of the UNEP’s own Ad Hoc Expert Group on marine litter and microplastics;

- We share the view that more research is needed to determine the potential impacts of plastics on human health and note that human health should not define exclusively how member states deal with plastic given its broad environmental impacts on ecosystems and the need for sustainable socio-economic measures to manage plastic waste.
- Proposal for alternative language: “Identifying a global response to address the threat of marine litter. This should build on the outcomes of the ad hoc expert working group on marine plastic litter and microplastics established by UNEA to take stock of existing actions and resources, and evaluate the effectiveness of response options at all levels.”

Oceans and freshwater:

- Suggest a more expansive wording that would address the importance not only of managing ecosystems, but also of protecting, rehabilitating, and expanding these ecosystems.

We recommend that activities related to abating air pollution also be specifically mentioned under the health theme, in particular given the links between air pollution and the spread of COVID-19 and given the positive impacts of air pollution mitigation for human and ecosystem health.

Area 3 (Climate)

- We support climate as an action area. That said, the language is not aligned with the Paris Agreement because it suggests that NDCs can be used as a mechanism for securing new or enhanced commitments related to nature, as well as finance for nature. It would be more appropriate to frame potential linkages between the implementation of NDCs and nature more generally. For example, under the Nature For Climate action area, UNEA could promote the implementation of holistic policies and measures which can help countries reduce their emissions toward the achievement of their NDC while at the same time advancing nature protection/conservation.
- This section could use more attention to adaptation and resilience issues. Investing in Nature will not only help mitigate GHGs, preserving, rehabilitating, and expanding nature-based solutions such as coral reefs and mangroves helps to increase resilience of vulnerable coastal communities.
- The section could also include a reference to climate smart agriculture which contributes to achieving multiple objectives of food security, economic development, climate mitigation and adaptation, and poverty reduction.