

5th UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY

Proposals for Ministerial Declaration

Vulnerable SIDS like Mauritius is committed to rise to the challenges of meeting its national and international commitments. However, in order to fulfil these goals while ensuring an inclusive economic development, there is need to overhaul its environmental policy framework at national, regional and international levels, strengthen support: technical, financial and otherwise to vulnerable states in achieving the ambitious targets set in the Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Pragmatic approaches and nature based solutions are those that will contribute the most to achieve the targets of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Key issues and challenges are foremost related to solid waste and hazardous waste management, plastic wastes, pollution control including marine pollution, coastal zone management and climate change.

1. Climate Change

The world faces an unprecedented threat from COVID-19. It is a global crisis unlike any in recent history and one that is causing human suffering, destabilizing the global economy and upsetting the lives of billions of people around the globe.

However, the climate emergency has not taken time off for the coronavirus pandemic. Nor will it prevent extreme weather events and other climate related impacts, which are also still causing suffering and casualties.

Therefore, never has the need for enhanced climate ambition been more crucial, specifically raising ambition on mitigation, adaptation and finance, including building on the work of the 2019 Climate Action Summit and COP25.

The actual situation calls for accelerated work towards fulfilling commitments to meet objectives of the Paris Agreement. We need to recall that time is a luxury we simply cannot afford.

In the wake of Climate Change, the ecosystem-based approach is at the heart of environmental protection and sustainable development measures adopted by Mauritius. This approach is in line with the Mauritius Nationally Determined Contributions which has identified sectors such as tourism, fisheries, coastal zone and biodiversity as key adaptation sectors and agriculture, land use and forestry as key mitigation sectors.

Proposals:

Effective and concrete technical and financial supports be provided by developed countries parties and relevant international organisations to developing countries like SIDS and countries of Africa to help promote the nature based solution approach as follows :-

- i) Promote nature-based solutions to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change at the expense of more costly and less effective hard measures with

- respect to inland flooding, coastal inundation, drought, and beach erosion and lagoon degradation;
- ii) Support strategies to integrate environmentally sensitive areas consideration in the national development strategies, by assessing ecosystems services in development projects and reflect natural capital accounting in the cost of production;
 - iii) Protect Environmentally Sensitive Areas from the impacts of future development by mapping them and enforcing respective legislation;
 - iv) Avoid construction in Environmentally Sensitive Areas as a disaster risk reduction strategy;
 - v) Promote strategies to reduce invasive species;
 - vi) Support initiatives to promote agro-forestry projects on mountainous region to enhance food security;
 - vii) Enhance preparedness programme to deal with risks from climate change by setting up or upgrading existing early warning systems;
 - viii) Support creation of green spaces to increase the sink capacity of development projects and enhancing forest cover and blue carbon sink including mangroves, marshes and sea grass.
 - ix) Promote greening of the urban and rural areas.

These proposals are timely to bring nature into development, biodiversity and climate solutions in a coherent way and at unprecedented scale. The more so, it will be in line with World Environment Day 2020. Country parties can set out new ambitions to stop biodiversity loss and demonstrate climate commitments to meet objectives of the Paris Agreement. This can also pave the way for the success of the United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030.

2. Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and Green Economy.

With the support of UNEP and other development partners, Mauritius has made significant stride in the implementation of policies and initiatives on sustainable consumption and production. There are also several success stories with regard to the greening of the economy in the context of the SWITCH Africa Green programme. The adoption of circular economy is now viewed as an opportunity to enhance resource efficiency and waste minimisation, in particular for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) where scarcity of resources is a major challenge. To achieve this transition, there is need to strengthen commitment to effectively shift from business as usual and to scale up action with regard to green measures. The mainstreaming of SCP policies and strategies in key economic sectors need to be more meaningful keeping in mind the targets and indicators set in the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on SCP and Goal 12 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Proposals:

- i) To accelerate the implementation of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) through the formulation of effective policies and strategies and the adoption of concrete measures to build a sustainable and inclusive economic model.
- ii) To improve access to reliable sustainability information to both consumers and producers to drive the supply chain for sustainable products and services and sustainable procurement opportunities.
- iii) To encourage the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices to support sustainable, resilient and inclusive food systems that protect, enhance and restore biodiversity and natural resources, ensure food safety and security, and sustain livelihoods. The COVID -19 pandemic has clearly indicated the need to enhance local food production to ensure food security.
- iv) To strengthen support of development partners for capacity development and technology transfer.

3. Sustainable Waste Management

Waste generation and the emergence of new waste streams represents a serious challenge to all countries and in particular for SIDS. As we are all conscious, plastic waste and especially marine plastic litter is a growing global environmental problem today and no country is spared from the devastating impacts, especially to the unique and splendid biodiversity of the marine ecosystem. The commitment of all governments need to be secured towards effective management of single-use plastic and commodities whilst seeking sustainable alternatives that will, in a meaningful manner, mitigate environmental impacts.

Proposals:

- i) To formulate comprehensive national frameworks to ensure sustainable waste management in order to achieve transformational change and integrate circularity in the economy;
- ii) To identify, develop innovative solutions including resource efficient measures, and further increase the reuse, recycling and recovering of ‘waste’ to prevent and reduce waste generation.
- iii) To commit to significantly reduce use of single-use plastic and commodities by working in collaboration with the private sector to make the best use of investment and with NGOs to tap on innovation opportunities for the development of affordable and environmentally friendly alternatives. The coronavirus crisis is showing that there is no system for reusable to-go, take-out, and food delivery, which may lead to an explosion of single-use products as restaurants scramble to shift to food delivery to survive, and people shift to dining at home instead of eating out.
- iv) To shift from a highly consumerist take and throwaway society to become self-sustaining independent eco –communities.

- v) To encourage research and development on impacts of plastic pollution on the environment and its resulting effects on human and ecosystem health; alternatives to plastic and promote local resources; and to support the recycling industry.
- vi) To invest in education and awareness-raising for circular economy, with a strong focus on women and youth.

4. Conservation of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

A concerted effort is needed now, more than ever, to implement collective and bold actions to achieve environmental protection including biodiversity conservation. It requires a renewed common global commitment to stop and reverse the trend in biodiversity loss. For this to happen, a major scaling up is required concerning the adoption and implementation of a nature-based or ecosystem-based approach.

Proposals:

- (i) To identify, value, preserve and protect areas of rich biodiversity that provide significant ecosystem services (for example by declaring these sites as protected areas).
- (ii) To exert strict control on development and ensure that development takes place within the carrying capacity of nature and ecosystems, does not destroy habitats and does not disrupt the provision of ecosystem services.
- (iii) To implement a robust and sustainable ecosystem restoration programme and ensure that people benefit from the ecosystem services they provide (provisioning, regulating and cultural services).
- (iv) To encourage research and development on nature-based solutions/technologies for mitigating coastal erosion and disaster management.
- (v) To promote women empowerment in environmental protection and nature-based sustainable livelihoods.
- (vi) To promote traditional knowledge and traditional practices in nature protection.
- (vii) To consider giving nature its legal right. There has been generation of environmental rights but mainly centered to the welfare of human. It's time to give nature its legal right.
- (viii) To encourage paradigm shift from business as usual to include contribution of the economy to the conservation and sustainable use of nature. Nature based solutions should be used in an integrated manner.

5. Monitoring and tracking progress

Quality and reliable data is fundamental to monitor implementation of measures and track progress. The Voluntary National Reporting (VNR) exercise undertaken by several member states has indicated the challenges faced by several countries in making reliable assessments due to lack of time series data. SIDS have even more limited capacity and data to ensure efficient monitoring of policies, programmes and projects.

Proposal:

- i) Call for strengthened collaboration to enhance capacity for the generation, collection, analysis, sharing and dissemination of quality and reliable data to allow for improved monitoring and tracking of progress for reporting purposes.