

## Report from the sixth UN Environment Assembly, UNEA 6

### SSFA /2023/6917 Activity 2 - Summary of Convening of networking discussions during UNEA-6 and coordinated engagement of stakeholders

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#### Introduction to the report

I participated on behalf of Stakeholder Forum on a Sustainable Future (SF) in the sixth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 6) in Nairobi, Kenya which took place at the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) headquarters in Gigiri, from 26th February to 1st March 2024. My presence at UNEA 6 revolved around several tasks, the most pronounced were identifying issues that were relevant to the project that SF is developing on Communities of Practice, CoPs. My activities relating to the CoPs are written in Section II on Activities, as the penultimate 'chapter-paragraph' (page 33.)

The project is financed by the European Union (EU) and in collaboration with UNEP. It is focussed on several overarching themes, among them are:

- Integrating environmental and nature-based aspects in implementing the SDGs,
- Identifying stakeholders with an interest in accelerating the implementation of the SDGs,
- Identifying issues related to nature-based solutions (NbS) and the triple planetary crisis (pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss),
- Making efforts to understanding what UNEP is currently working on,
- Contributing, to the extent possible, to the Summit of the Future.

These elements guided my work and focus at UNEA 6. It also appeared important to try to get an impression of the general political mood relating to global environmental policies as expressed through the work of delegates and Major Groups at the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) as well as at UNEA 6.

The following report from UNEA 6 is not an academic work analysing the resolutions, but a descriptive analysis of what took place during the 5 days of UNEA 6. It follows a chronological process as it unfolded.

I chose a few resolutions which I followed closely and have written a narrative analysis of these resolutions as they are related to the current project which SF is working on. I also followed side events that covered the themes of these resolutions. I have used more space and time on presenting the resolution on NbS, as that is an expression of what Member States think about nature and the environment in the context of a global political institution. It was unfortunate that this resolution, which was proposed by Cameroon, was withdrawn.

Even though I compare UNEA 5 and UNEA 6 at times, the comparison is not a substantive analysis, but gives all the same a good enough impression of what UNEA 6 was, compared to its predecessor.

In a couple of summary sections, I also provide views of delegates with whom I have established a good rapport over years and who negotiate these resolutions. The report consists of two sections: one on analysis of UNEA6 and other activities that I attended.

The report does not reflect any official opinion of the Stakeholder Forum, but is also the responsibility of its author.

Jan-Gustav Strandenaes

## SECTION I - ANALYSIS OF UNEA 6

### A busy UNEA 6

Under the banner of ‘Driving the action we need’, UNEP’s own official view of UNEA 6 is listed as a success. UNEP writes: “The sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) was held from 26 February to 1 March 2024 at the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme: ‘Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution’. Through its resolutions and calls to action, the Assembly provides leadership and catalyses intergovernmental action on the environment.”

And they were two busy weeks in Nairobi. The CPR commenced its deliberations on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> of February. UNEA 6 began its official session on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> of February, and officially closed on the evening of Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> March.

For the opening, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres presented an encouraging and hopeful message on video from New York, saying: “This Assembly plays a vital role in driving environmental action. And you have shown before that you can unite and deliver - most recently with your historic decision to negotiate a plastic treaty. I urge you to do so again - and go further. There are many important resolutions before you. So, please, take this chance to drive multilateral solutions.” Inger Anderson, UNEP’s Executive Director (ED) echoed his optimism, stating at the closing session that: “This spirit of multilateralism - true, inclusive multilateralism - was evident throughout this vibrant Assembly.”

UNEA 6 discussed 19 resolutions and two decisions. They covered a range of issues, including circular economy; effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions towards climate justice; solar radiation modification; sound management of chemicals and waste, and sand and dust storms.

In its official statements, UNEP identified 6 elements they named “moments that defined UNEA 6”.

1. Countries re-affirm commitment to tackling triple planetary crisis.
2. Nations adopt broad set of resolutions.
3. The celebration of multilateralism.
4. Scientific reports take centre stage.
5. Youth take up the environmental mantle.
6. The world acknowledges time is running short.

UNEP's official press-release picked up other highlights from the closing session referring also to the UNEA 6 President, Leila Benali the Minister of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development of Morocco and UNEP's ED. Minister Benali did not have an easy job and managed despite a number of perhaps unexpected challenges to guide UNEA 6 to a conclusion even before the planned closing of UNEA 6 on Friday evening. The President observed emphatically in the closing session that: "I am proud to say this was a successful Assembly, where we advanced on our core mandate: the legitimate human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, everywhere. We have agreed on 15 resolutions, two decisions and a ministerial declaration." UNEP ED, Inger Anderson, chimed in: "The world needs action, the world needs speed. The world needs real and lasting change. UNEA-6 has delivered an extra boost to help us deliver this change so that every person on this planet enjoys the right to a safe and healthy environment."

A busy UNEA, but not everything was a success. Success does not come easily to anyone, least of all to an organisation with universal membership, now also burdened with a changing geopolitical world.

### **A slow process at UNEA 6**

Several people observed that there were many new people in the delegations and even though it is needed, several delegates pointed to lack of negotiating experience as one of the obstacles slowing down progress at this UNEA. This was presented as one of the explanations to the fact that CPR had not been able to solve all contentious issues despite an intense negotiating week preparing for UNEA 6.

Another reason for being so far behind with agreements was that almost each of the proposed resolutions had longwinded preambular texts, and with new and inexperienced people in the seats, they had often begun to discuss the intros to the resolutions which by and large were previously agreed texts. When UNEA 6 began, several of the resolutions were in a difficult position, and many feared some would simply be withdrawn. This was indeed to be the fate of the NbS resolution.

Two years earlier, the Norwegian Minister of Environment and President of UNEA 5, Mr. Espen Barth Eide had declared - 'we have brought nature back into the room' and brought the gavel down and resolution 5.5 on NbS was agreed unanimously. Everybody in the plenary had been happy then. But now, as many remarked, the energy and euphoria from UNEA 5 was gone.

### **The largest UNEA ever**



UNEA 6 was a busy one. There were more tents around the UNEP compound than ever before, illustrating, according to official UNEP counting, a larger attendance than ever before. UNEP estimated that close to 5500 persons from 190 countries including representatives from all nine Major Groups were present. 170 Ministers participated in the High-level segment and an impressive array of African Heads of State attended the official opening. These numbers heralded some sort of success. Participation by countries meant taking the issues seriously. If nothing else, it sent a message. There were many new delegates, but also new faces in Major Groups. Many young people were present as a special youth event had been organized prior to UNEA, but the question arises whether the youth are really being taken seriously or just courted and allowed to speak freely and critically without any real consequences for the official outcomes.

Well over 100 side events were organised during the two UNEA 6 weeks, a couple of well-designed exhibitions, numerous special events also covering key Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) important to UNEP, in addition to rsvp based events, sundry press conferences, special dinners and receptions and all the official meetings, group discussions and plenaries. During these busy two weeks, a long awaited expansion of the UNEP/UNON compound was announced. It would be the fifth expansion of the UNEP infrastructure. The organisation had certainly come a long way since its inception at Stockholm in 1972. Based at it was in the early 1970s in downtown Nairobi in one of the first high-rises in the city, in the landmark Kenyatta International Convention Centre. It moved in 1975 to an old coffee plantation in a neighbourhood named Gigiri, where it is still headquartered. And now, the announcement stated, a new pavilion would be built to house the expanding secretariat and increased number of delegates. The new building is to be inaugurated in 2030.

### **What was UNEA 6 all about?**

UNEA 5 had been a high point - the decision to develop the resolution regulating the use of plastics and disposing of plastics waste was agreed to. The breakthrough on nature had taken place with the agreement of the resolution on NbS, an agreement to establish a high level council on chemicals on par with IPCC was also agreed to.

The Earth Negotiation Bulletin (ENB), the conference daily, summarised UNEA 6 and its work in an analysis by writing that: “UNEA-6 never quite measured up to its predecessor (UNEA 5). Many called some of the resolutions (at UNEA 6) “weak from the beginning,” even before they were watered down even further in efforts to reach consensus. Some raised concerns that perhaps UNEA was more focused on the quantity of resolutions over their quality.”

In the end, UNEA 6 agreed to the following 15 resolutions:

1. Circularity of a resilient and low-carbon sugar cane agro-industry.
2. Amendments to the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility.

3. Enhancing the role and viability of regional forums of environment ministers and United Nations Environment Programme regional offices in achieving multilateral cooperation in tackling environmental challenges.
4. Promoting synergies, cooperation or collaboration for national implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and other relevant environmental instruments.
5. Environmental aspects of minerals and metals.
6. Fostering national action to address global environmental challenges through increased cooperation between the United Nations Environment Assembly, the United Nations Environment Programme and multilateral environmental agreements.
7. Combating sand and dust storms.
8. Promoting sustainable lifestyles.
9. Sound management of chemicals and waste.
10. Promoting regional cooperation on air pollution to improve air quality globally.
11. Highly hazardous pesticides.
12. Environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict.
13. Effective and inclusive solutions for strengthening water policies to achieve sustainable development in the context of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.
14. Strengthening international efforts to combat desertification and land degradation, restore degraded land, promote land conservation and sustainable land management, contribute to land degradation neutrality and enhance drought resilience.
15. Strengthening ocean efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss and pollution.

19 resolutions were identified in the run up to the Assembly with an additional 3 pertaining to UNEA 7. 19 were subsequently reduced to 15. Three were withdrawn, and two basically covering the same issues had been merged into one.

Another important issue were MEAs, which received a key focus during UNEA 6.

### **A fifty-year old debate is still not resolved.**

The Summit of the Future (SotF) received little attention at UNEA 6. In some ways it could be understood as this was seen as primarily a process run by UN Headquarters in New York. Even among the Major Groups interest was low. The Baha'i International Community did however sponsor and conduct a well-attended side event on the issues which were to be covered on the SotF agenda. Civil society groups had already expressed their concerns related to the zero draft outcome document of SotF: the Pact for the Future, asserting that neither environmental issues nor civil society were given enough attention in the document. The panel at this side event consisted of persons who were also in the lead among civil society organisers working on the SotF. Stakeholder Forum was also invited to speak at this side event. Some attention was focussed on the planned civil society conference on the SotF to take place in Nairobi in May this year.

Member States who had proposed resolutions for UNEA 6 had duly registered these by December 2023. Countries had begun preparing their political analysis of the resolutions during

the autumn of 2023, highlighted by work of CPR, and UNEA delegations in respective countries. They had been hard at work on these resolutions in conference rooms since the 19<sup>th</sup> of February. By Wednesday, the third UNEA 6-day, preliminary results from the negotiations on the resolutions were brought to the attention of UNEA 6 participants. Several expressed concerns about a seeming lack of energy in the rooms, and it was expected that some of the resolutions would be withdrawn. This was to be the fate of the NbS resolution. The EU expressed concerns about the latter issue fearing that nature and environmental issues would now be given a lower priority among the SDGs. This was in some ways corroborated by informal statements expressed by developing nations, which in their turn feared that too strong a focus on nature issues could be framing the projects to implement the 2030 Agenda leading to lower priority on social and economic growth issues and in consequence undermining efforts to fight poverty. They kept referring to earlier UN conferences where the developed countries had pledged larger sums of money to help developing countries meet targets in connection with climate and environmental issues, and not owned up to their pledges. As a consequence, developing countries thought less money would be available for poverty reduction and traditional economic development and also less for green transition of energy supplies.

On the other hand, negotiations continued on circular economy and sugar cane production resolutions with interesting arguments being brought forward. Comments around coffee tables, seem to illustrate that the more than 50-year-old debate on what serious environmental issues were, had not been resolved. Fifty years and more since UNEP was founded, and quite a few developing countries still thought that the natural environment was a northern concern, a green conditionality.

## **What was contentious in the resolutions?**

### **Climate justice**

19 resolutions were subsequently reduced to 15. Two were merged into one, and three were withdrawn. A few were weakened, and one that was agreed to was a surprise to many. Two of the resolutions that were withdrawn disappointed Major Groups and many delegates - especially the youth; one was on NbS and the other on climate justice.

In no surprise to any at UNEA 6, the Youth had invested much energy in the resolution on climate justice, originally proposed by Sri Lanka. The resolution was withdrawn as delegates failed to agree. ENB in their Summary of UNEA 6 wrote: “Youth delegates, who were encouraged by Inger Andersen “to be in every room and speak up,” were crying as they witnessed the climate justice resolution fall apart late on the penultimate day of UNEA-6, after it had been progressively diluted to the point that “climate justice” was replaced with “climate action” in the latest version of the text.”

How serious was this failure to accept a resolution on climate justice? From the point of view of perception, it may seem serious. Anything related to climate and global warming these days must be agreed to, it seems. For UNEA not to accept an issue related to climate justice, must appear as a failure to newcomers and to the outside world. Any apparent set-back on climate

must appear as an unwillingness of the older generation including authorities not to take these issues seriously. The question is if the withdrawal of this resolution spoke to these concerns.

The resolution contained several issues which were not well formulated or explained. There were serious and reasonable concerns about the lack of clarity about the proposed forum on climate justice for vulnerable countries. Also, others pointed out to the lack of a definition of climate justice, and finally several delegates asked about whose responsibility climate issues belonged to. Was UNEP to take on an overarching responsibility for climate issues when these were properly dealt with by the climate COPs, UNFCCC and IPCC? The debates on synergies and responsibilities across agencies within the UN was a recurring theme at this UNEA, not the least because of the debates and discussions around MEAs. Solid arguments were made to UNEP's responsibility for the triple planetary crisis, and climate issues is an integral element of the atmosphere and that issue was properly dealt with in the resolution on "Promoting regional cooperation on air pollution to improve air quality globally." The climate issue also received proper and accentuated importance in the resolution on "Strengthening ocean efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss and pollution." Even the resolution on "Combating sand and dust storms" covers significant elements pertaining to the climate issue. Even though the resolution on "Effective and inclusive solutions for strengthening water policies to achieve sustainable development in the context of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution" primarily had a focus on water policies, climate change issues were an integral element in this resolution as well.

Perhaps the reaction to the withdrawal of climate justice resolution was a reaction to the withdrawal of 'climate justice' as a concept rather than the substance on climate issues, which was dealt successfully in other resolutions. If one subtracts the emotional and moral implications of 'justice' from the debates which at times displayed some drama, it was also felt that UNEA 6 dealt with climate issues within its mandate. But that may not be enough these days.

### **Solar Radiation Modification (SRM)**

Three other resolutions created enduring debates - one was on the issue of solar radiation, another was on circular economy, and the third was on NbS, and they were all withdrawn.

The issue of SRM was also a difficult one, as countries expressed a strongly felt fear of what these 'utopian ideas about solar radiation mechanisms could mean to life on earth', as one delegate expressed it. One reason behind the proposal was to develop control mechanisms for such ideas. Was this not an issue for the science panel at IPCC, was a question posed by many. As ENB summed up the debate: "Delegations were reluctant to discuss the text since many had concerns about the lack of science, the technological and scientific gap between developed and developing countries with regards to understanding SRM, duplication of work already being conducted under UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the IPCC, and fear that, if passed, the resolution will possibly signal that SRM technologies are an acceptable practice." Delegates could not reach consensus, and the resolution was withdrawn.

## Circular Economy

Circular economy has finally entered the negotiation rooms and is being discussed seriously. An early contribution to this concept was made in the book by the British-German economist E. F. Schumacher “Small is beautiful. A study of economics as if people mattered”, published in 1973. UNEP and its former ED, Achim Steiner tried to introduce the concept of green economy at Rio+20 back in 2012 and were reprimanded by the World Bank indicating that economy was not part of UNEP’s mandate. But academia has long since picked up the issue and the Secretary General of the UN, Guterres, has repeatedly criticised the GDP and economic growth as being a ruinous way to measure development. Those of us who were present in Stockholm during Stockholm+50, in 2022, commemorating UNEP’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, remember Guterres’s passionate plea to discard economic growth as a measure of development. That the issue was discussed seriously as a resolution at an intergovernmental multilateral conference, shows the strength of UN’s and UNEP’s mandate to influence and even set the agenda.

The EU had proposed the resolution on circular economy and called it:” Stepping up efforts to accelerate transitioning domestically regionally and globally to circular economy”. Even though this should be seen as a follow-up to the resolution on the same issue agreed to at UNEA 5, it was clear from the beginning that delegations were not ready to agree to significant elements in this new resolution. The EU pointed to earlier UNEA agreements on the issue, still countries disagreed with many elements: what circular economy really is, reference to trade was not accepted, even connecting circular economy to reduced waste was questioned. The resolution was withdrawn.

As often at these conferences, what happens in one room, may not happen in another room. Two other resolutions dealt substantially with circular economy, with language that would be used later when discussing circular economy issues. These two resolutions are “Circularity of a resilient and low carbon-sugar cane agro-industry” and “Promoting sustainable lifestyles.”

Several delegates who had eagerly supported language on circular economy, and accepted defeat by the EU sponsored resolution, expressed surprise at the content and language in the ‘sugarcane’ resolution proposed by Cuba. Sugar-cane production is a significant contributor to the economy in 80 countries with millions of people depending on the industry for their economies. A large number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are involved in the production of sugar.

ENB gave a short summary of some of the decisions:

“In the final resolution on circularity of a resilient and low-carbon sugar cane agro-industry (UNEP/EA.6/L.4), UNEA, among others:

- acknowledges that pursuing circular economy approaches as a pathway to achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns can contribute to addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, water stress, pollution and their impact on human health, thus contributing to the achievement of related goals under the 2030



Agenda for Sustainable Development and other internationally agreed environmental goal.

- recognizes that international exchanges, shared experiences and means of implementation can help in the implementation of circular economy approaches to achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- welcomes efforts to advance circular economy approaches, noting in this context the establishment of national, regional, and global initiatives.”

This particular issue will be revisited at UNEA 7. The resolution requests UNEP to “in consultation with Member States, members of specialized agencies and relevant stakeholders, in particular the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN to continue to collect information and conduct further analysis on circular economy approaches in the sugar cane agro-industry, among other crops, and report to UNEA-7.”

The resolution on sustainable lifestyles, introduced by India, makes the same references to circular economies and also has a strong reference to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The resolution also requests UNEP through its One Planet Network Programme on Sustainable Lifestyles and Education based in Paris to carry out regional dialogues with the UN Regional Commissions and submit a report to UNEA 7 on the dialogues with stakeholders and the regional commissions on “progress on the present resolution”.

### **Nature Based Solutions**

As mentioned above, UNEA 5 adopted NbS resolution 5.5. At UNEA 6, the proposed resolution on NbS was withdrawn. Delegates could not agree to the proposed text. What had become so difficult?

To get an idea of the discussions and final disagreement over NbS, a little background may be needed. It appeared that the most contentious issue about NbS during UNEA 6 was simply how one could and should understand NbS? Resolution 5.5 from UNEA 5 provides a definition, albeit a very general one:

- a) “Decides that nature-based solutions are actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits, and recognizes that nature-based solutions: (a) Respect social and environmental safeguards, in line with the three “Rio conventions” (the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), including such safeguards for local communities and indigenous peoples.

- b) (b) Can be implemented in accordance with local, national and regional circumstances, consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and can be managed adaptively.
- c) Are among the actions that play an essential role in the overall global effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including by effectively and efficiently addressing major social, economic and environmental challenges, such as biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, desertification, food security, disaster risks, urban development, water availability, poverty eradication, inequality and unemployment, as well as social development, sustainable economic development, human health and a broad range of ecosystem services.
- d) Can help to stimulate sustainable innovation and scientific research.”

Resolution 5.5 also directed UNEP to organise a set of regional consultations on NbS and prepare a report for UNEA 6. Two global and ten regional consultations were held in preparation for UNEA 6. The governments of Costa Rica and Nigeria were asked to co-chair the process.

The two co-chairs compiled all regional reports into a final document and pointed to three elements that stood out:

- Measuring benefits and costs of NbS
- Policy for NbS
- Obstacles and opportunities: NbS for climate mitigation

They commented on this by stating that: “The first two issues emerged because many participants thought that measuring the benefits and costs of NbS and developing appropriate policy for NbS were important for the scaling up of NbS. The third issue became prominent because it was a topic where there were significant divergences between participants. The Co-Chairs note that UNEA Resolution 5/5 encouraged the consultations ‘to address divergences’”.

Participants in the consultation process did refer to resolution 5.5 on NbS, and its definition of NbS. But no sooner had they referred to this definition, they also said there was a need to further define and frame this concept. As of yet, this issue has not been resolved. In their final report the two co-chairs wrote: “There was broad consensus that standards and criteria are important and can contribute significantly to building a common understanding of NbS, can assist in determining how to apply the theory to practice, and are required in order to determine what best or good practice is in NbS.”

Judging from the report, it is evident that countries did engage in the deliberations and gave substantive input and provided ideas on how to best understand and contextualise NbS. Reading through the documents one thing becomes quite clear - NbS must be connected to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The co-chairs said that: “Many participants noted the importance of aligning NbS policy with existing national commitments, such as to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and other instruments, such

as Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.”

There seemed to be consensus among participants that there was a need for a more precise definition including criteria and guidelines for how to use the concept of NbS in national planning and strategies. The report covers this extensively and sums it up. Criteria, standards and guidelines were noted as a means to:

- differentiate NbS from other similar and traditional approaches.
- support capacity building: by applying the standards and criteria to specific cases, it is a way of “learning by doing”.
- institutionalise NbS in national contexts.
- assess the benefits and impacts of NbS.

In the concluding sections of the report, the co-chairs wrote that: “Some participants felt that there is a need for Member States to agree on a new, global set of standards and criteria to serve as a tool to guide the application of NbS and to govern all NbS activities. The Africa group put forward the view that a new multilateral process is required to develop standards and criteria. This process should be country driven, taking into consideration the work that is done under the Convention on Biological Diversity and other relevant fora and entities.”

Except for the deliberations over the Cameroon sponsored resolution, the NbS issue cannot be said to have dominated UNEA 6. However, one major, official side-event on the issue was organised, and there were also a couple of more side events on the same issue. International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) played a major part in organising the official side events on NbS and given the discussion on criteria which had taken place during the NbS consultations during the remains of 2023, the way IUCN presented their approach to NbS seemed rather patronising as they intimated during the side events that there was no need to develop new standards as they already had developed global standards and criteria on NbS. The report by the Co-chairs noted this, and the report referred to this issue by saying that: “It was suggested that the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions is an important resource. It was noted that while these were launched in July 2020, these will be revised in 2024. However, some Member States pointed out that the Global Standard was developed before UNEA Resolution 5/5. Thus, it is not applicable to NbS as defined in that resolution. Further, it was felt that as not all Member States are members of IUCN, thus the Global Standard cannot be adopted by all Member States. It was highlighted that some guidelines that do not refer directly to nature-based solutions may still be relevant and could be applied to NbS. For example, CBD Decision 14/5, which includes voluntary guidelines for the design and effective implementation of ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction was mentioned in this regard. FAO reported that they have created a sector-specific framework for conceptualising NbS options in agricultural landscapes and are developing practical tools to support the design and monitoring of NbS.”

Reading through the resolution put forward by Cameroon on NbS, it seemed as if it contained all elements from the consultations. It also asks for an Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) to be established with all stakeholders involved - governments as well as Major Groups - and asked for support from UNEP to develop the OEWG.

The two Co-chairs from Costa Rica and Nigeria together with UNEP organised a side event on NbS on Monday, the first day of UNEA 6. The room was packed, and the side event had a long list of speakers. The event was opened by the two co-chairs who presented 8 recommendations to be included in the proposed resolution from Cameroon. They were all in line with the main issues in the co-chairs report. However, when the representative from Cameroon spoke, he stated among others that the 8 recommendations were not agreed to. He then listed the main objections:

- The issue of implementation and how to carry this out.
- We need a common understanding of the concept as it also has a direct implications for the implementation of NbS.
- We also need a global framework for NbS and emphasise that it is entirely voluntary to ascribe to this framework.
- The concept is also in need of a robust framework for the implementation otherwise the entire issue becomes just another greenwashing process.
- The process must be member state driven.
- And there is a need to establish an OEWG to hammer out all these issues.

His statement also pointed to the different cultural standards and the ensuing narratives in a country that could lead to differences of understanding the NbS - hence there is a need for a better and more concise definition of NbS including clear criteria for contextualizing this issue.

Bearing this in mind, including the repeated calls for definition listed in the co-chairs report, it appears that IUCN - seen as an official representative of the North - would quite possibly have contributed in a more positive way to the UNEA 6 deliberations with a more modest presentations of their own merits.

The issues listed above by the Cameroonian delegate summed up the contentious points, over which the delegates could not reach agreement.

The process will go on - and hopefully see more development until and through UNEA 7. UNEP has a designated person responsible for the NbS process,

### **Environmental consequences of armed conflicts**

For the past UNEAs, and since the unprovoked invasion of Russia back in 2014 in the Eastern part of Ukraine, the Donbas and Luhansk areas, Ukraine has been adamant at bringing this issue to the agenda. This UNEA was no different. What actually became a surprise to most delegates, was the fact that the resolution was accepted - even with the support of Russia which, as was pointed to by many, attacked Ukraine in an undeclared war in February 2022.

The resolution, which was tabled and agreed to, was simply called “Environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict.”

Delegates were mindful of earlier resolutions on the issue, and at the outset, they were far from each other in efforts to reach consensus. UNEP’s legal adviser was also brought in to the negotiations to help steer this work through troubled and uncharted waters. The delegates were also reminded that there were actually more armed conflicts than the war of aggression by Russia and its uncalled-for attacks on Ukraine and the war in Gaza. Thus, the resolution held validity in more areas than for these two.

These are the main points from this resolution (UNEP/ EA.6/L.15), UNEA:

- Urges Member States to adhere to the rules of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, human rights law, and international humanitarian law, as applicable, in relation to the protection of the environment in areas affected by armed conflict.
- Invites Member States to take note of the International Law Commission’s principles on protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts, as applicable; and
- Encourages Member States to consider how to increase the effectiveness of environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflicts.

UNEA also requests UNEP, in consultation with Member States, to include environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflicts in the development of UNEP’s Medium-Term Strategy for the period 2026-2029, to be considered at UNEA-7 and to report on the implementation of this resolution.

### **Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)**

A number of other events took place prior to or alongside UNEA- 6. The Major Groups and Stakeholder Forum on a Sustainable Future (SF) event, with the accredited major groups took place on the weekend prior to UNEA 6. UNEP had helped organise the Youth Environment Assembly, there were meetings of the International Resource Panel, the Climate and Clean Air Conference, the United Nations Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment, the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, and the Cities and Regions Summit.

This UNEA also focussed on MEAs relevant to UNEP’s work. Following up on requests by earlier UNEAs, the President of UNEA 6, mandate by decision 5.4 of the Bureau, requested that UNEP’s ED add an agenda point on the MEAs to “strengthen and promote coherence between the resolutions of the Environment Assembly and the decisions of the governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements. The aim of the agenda item was to facilitate such contributions to and participation in the Environment Assembly of multilateral environmental agreements, while providing an opportunity for dialogue among multilateral environmental agreements and with Member States, with a view to enhancing effective environmental governance.” (22 March 2023, UNEP/EA.6/15)

Consequently, Wednesday, 28 February, became the MEA day. They were all present - the executive directors of the MEAs with direct relevance to UNEP. In a presentation and debate similar to the one which was organised in Stockholm during the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UNEP, back in 2022, the directors presented convincing views on the merits of the MEAs. A recurring issue was coordination and synergies, respect for the autonomy of each of the MEAs as well as the problem of duplication of work. No one questioned the importance of the work of the MEAs, and ministers and Major Groups alike emphasised the centrality of work performed by the MEAs.

Another of the recurring themes among discussions in plenary, in break-out groups and at side events was implementation at the national level. ENB refers to this key element in the summary of the MEA debate from the well-attended meeting on “Strengthening cooperation between UNEA, UNEP and MEAs to enhance effective implementation at the national level including through means of implementation.” Nearly all “speakers drew attention to the challenges to implementation of MEAs at the national level: the lack of communication and coordination among ministries at the national level, including due to their different visions for the same ecological challenges. Many praised the Bern process, which seeks to strengthen cooperation and collaboration between MEAs”.

### **High-level segment, Leadership dialogues, and Multistakeholder Dialogues**

These issues have of late become standard agenda points. There is some success to this, shown by the fact that 170 ministers dealing with the environment were present at UNEA 6. Several engaged in the dialogues, and from what could be observed, more engaged in bilaterals.

The multistakeholder dialogues where Major Groups are allowed to speak with delegates were also well attended, and in fact, official delegates also found their way into these sessions. Though, it must be noted, the vast majority of participants in the room were from Major Groups.

### **Authorities, mandates, governance and complexity**

What authority and which mandates pertain to UNEP? These questions, or similar questions that relate to these fundamental themes were raised frequently by different people this time. The questions touch on central areas of governance mechanisms, and it was obvious that delegates needed clarity on them. The discussion on the resolution dealing with environmental consequences of armed conflicts became entangled in formalistic issues and needed assistance from the Legal Office to sort things out. The complications arose when the UNEP resolution needed to be harmonised with the text on the similar issue which had been agreed to by the UN General Assembly (UNGA). One central issue seemed to be - which part of the UN had the formal and legal authority to deal with such issues, as the content of the resolution also pertain to other elements in conflict resolutions than restoring the environment.

In one sense it boils down to who does what in the expanding world of interrelated multilateralism. The discussions which centred around the MEAs and UNEP/UNEA illustrated

this complexity. And even at this UNEA delegates faced the same problem: texts were discussed in parallel rooms on different resolutions, but which also touched on seemingly diverse, and at the outset separate issues, but ended up in parts of the deliberations to deal with the same themes and complex issues. After all, everything at UNEA is related to the environment and to UNEP. This forced delegates to consider what jurisdiction UNEA and UNEP would have over these issues. ENB puts it succinctly: “In this climate of interlinked issues, cross-sectoral approaches, and an overarching 2030 Agenda which underlines the indispensability of the interconnectedness of the SDGs, it was clear that delegations were trepidatious to draft overly ambitious resolutions for UNEA that would undermine their likelihood to be achieved.”

Would an overambitious text in a resolution at UNEA undermine the possibility of a resolution to be implemented? One unresolved concern which has existed for decades is how the resolutions agreed to at each UNEA also have relevance for the Medium Term Strategy, and UNEP’s work programme. The Bureaux of UNEA are supposed to oversee the work programme of UNEP and look at the overarching theme of the recent UNEAs - the triple planetary crisis. Several of the resolutions at UNEA 6 did cover elements of this theme - but not all. How well are the new or different resolutions taken care of? The ED does give a report on performance and implementation, but in some cases, it appears that UNEP is overwhelmed by tasks given by Member States.

Will the crises that the global environment is in, lead ambitious delegates to come up with resolutions that are considered too ambitious to be implemented, or irrelevant to the existing UNEA theme? If we add the concept of morals and ethics into this stark political reality, a reality that has to reflect the geopolitical situation, the situation can become rather dark. I am reminded of what delegates told me when I co-chaired the preparatory meeting for the upcoming HLPF in 2023 at the UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD): “I had to manage my expectations, and not be too ambitious.” If such an attitude is part and parcel of mandates given to delegations before a global conference, I can well understand the sadness, anger and frustration of the Youth when the climate justice resolution failed to get approval. How can ambitious and forward-looking resolutions be an integral part of a complex institutional governance system and at the same time get approval of ‘rational politics’?

Which synergies are obvious and should be emphasised? Which are the trade-offs we need to be aware of? How conscious are we in relation to the institutional and thematic complexity - a complexity which will increase as we move forward. If we do not understand this complexity and are not aware of its ramifications, and have a fragmented governance system, the challenge to our environmental governance institutions may not be overcome by just infusing more money into the system. What is needed is also continuous studies, scrutiny of the systems, oversight and protection of what works and deletion of what does not. If you add to this, challenges and complexities of artificial intelligence (AI), and the issue of good governance becomes even more important to the functionality of environmental mechanisms that we fight for to protect the natural environment. The MEA day also illustrated the need for a wide variety of expert institutions which need to work well within its expert silo, but



also needed to reach out to institutions working on related issues. On the other hand, the failure of the NbS resolution can be seen as the writing on the wall. When the system - and its people do not fully understand - it drags its feet. And to paraphrase ED Anderson - implementing the protection and safeguarding of the environment need speed.

## **Closing of UNEA 6**

On Friday evening, 1 March shortly before 7 pm local time in Nairobi UNEA 6 came to a close. A new President for UNEA 7 - Abdullah Bin Ali Amri, Chair of the Environment Authority of Oman was elected together with a new Bureau, and the plenary decided that the seventh meeting of the UNEA 7 will take place from 8-12 December 2025 at the UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The UNEA 6 President closed the meeting. She thanked all members who had contributed to the outcome, and with a final and heartfelt plea for peace everywhere, which was met with standing applause from the plenary, she closed the meeting.

## **Summary of impressions**

“I think that as the outcome was not pushed further back in terms of substance and language than it was, UNEA 6 can be counted as a success” a delegate told me.

It may very well be that UNEA 6 will be considered a hiatus in a progressively positive understanding of the need to safeguard the environment which was begun in earnest at UNEA 5. As was mentioned in several meetings - the side events or the official plenaries - the global geopolitical situation must be considered one reason for this. Progressive elements are now pushed into a corner due to the geopolitical situation of the world with conservative and right-wing policies dominating the thinking of a growing number of decision-makers. We have seen that this leads to downgrading the importance of environment, especially if there is talks about regulation and conservation of nature. Climate issues - other than climate justice, as we saw at this UNEA - have been more commonly accepted. There are obvious reasons for this. There are reports broadly accepted on the climate which clearly outline devastating consequences for all, rich or poor, if climate issues are not addressed. There is also a growing market for new technologies impacting the climate issues in a positive way, which also will accrue profit for those developing and producing these technologies.

On one hand, in view of the geopolitical situation, the resolution on environment and armed conflicts was perhaps the biggest surprise at this UNEA. On the other hand, withdrawing NbS was an unexpected disappointment since the issue was brought back to UNEP by UNEA 5 after 50 years as explained above. It is also a reminder that it took 50 years for the right to a clean environment to become a human right.

Several of the resolutions also had direct and adequate references to the next Medium Term Strategy of UNEP and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda. Thinking back to the first UNEAs following 2015, decisions then did not have substantive or concise references to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Still, as several delegations in plenary observed, there was too much push-back on language. The EU deplored that their resolution on circular economy was withdrawn. However, with regard to language on circular economies,



the picture may not be all that bleak. There was quite interesting language in resolutions which actually dealt with other thematic issues but touched directly on circular economy. Some found the fact that India proposed a resolution on sustainable lifestyles quite interesting.

The presence of nearly 170 ministers of environment is a sign of success, also giving a unique opportunity for bilaterals. UNEA as such provides a true open space for informal talks among ministers and several ministers were observed taking advantage of this opportunity. The ministers also participate in the high-level dialogues. Their presence in the plenaries was also felt. The high-level dialogues is a phenomenon fraught with high hopes and some felt disappointments. It seems that several intergovernmental meetings are organising events trying to emulate the success of panel dialogues at Davos between CEOs. A hired moderator for the high-level dialogues, often a well-known media person, and equally often with little knowledge about the real environmental issues, tries to entertain the audience by attempting to get ministers to speak. After every such event questions are raised about the need to popularise complex messages. Serious delegates often observe quietly that politics should not be reduced to glib entertainment. Meaningful dialogues are hugely important, and perhaps traditional roundtables under Chatham House Rule where Major Groups are also invited would serve the purpose of ministerial dialogues in a better way.

The MEA discussions were enlightening and interesting. They revealed aspects of governance and thematic complexities as well as espousing the autonomy of the different MEAs. To what extent is there a need for organisational autonomy with the kind of expert knowledge that each of the MEAs do have within the field of environment, and does this conflict with UNEP's mandates and work programmes on the same fields? These issues were discussed but without any conclusion. The MEA meetings were well attended, and it was obvious that the audience found it fascinating to hear how such issues were pronounced by executives and delegates alike. As referred to earlier, discussions on mandates, legalities and formalities were raised several times during the entire UNEA. In the discussions on climate justice and the proposal to establish an OEWG, negotiators spent hours in trying to find out if an OEWG in a Programme, which UNEP is, would jeopardise and undermine the position of UNFCCC and IPCC which have different organisational standing within the UN family. In this context it is tempting to ask the following: if UNEP had been a Specialised Agency, would such discussions have taken place? Perhaps then the relevant MEAs would have been integrated subsidiaries of UNEP as an Environmental Agency? There is at this moment no discussion on upgrading UNEP to an Agency level. Nor is there a formal opportunity to do so at the moment. Such a formidable change of the status of a unit can only be handled by a formal Summit. One might think back to 2012, at the Rio+20 Summit, when the question of upgrading UNEP to an Agency took place. The efforts to give UNEP a better political and organisational status did result in the establishment of the UNEA with universal membership. But make no mistake, that was a compromise, which was not welcomed by all Member States.

And even if there is no immediate opportunity to upgrade UNEP at the moment, there will be a Summit in 2030. With the focus on the environmental urgency today, which is very different from what it was in 2012, the situation for a discussion on the political and formal status of



the UN's organisation for the environment might be more opportune in 6 years' time. The environmental urgency, which is not going to go away soon, might convince people that environmental problems really need an organisation with political authority and impact. It could be a tempting thought to begin now and research and discuss an upgrade of UNEP and propose it for the 2030 Summit. 6 years of proper preparation, looking into institutional, governance and financial challenges, might produce a different result than it did in 2012. Perhaps it could even be the finalisation of a process which was begun in 2012 at the Rio+20 Conference?

The issue of the private sector and its growing presence at the UN was discussed in more informal contexts. The private sector is needed, and it is willing to be involved. However, there is a need to discuss how it should be included. The presence of the private sector in UNEP's science context seems to be somewhat reduced. UNEP does need an independent science unit with high credibility. This was also pointed to in the official summaries from UNEA 6 and by several delegates, that there is a need for a stronger science sector in UNEP.

The new Bureau with Oman as the Chair and with members from Ethiopia, Zambia, Iran, Hungary, Georgia, Peru, Belgium and Sweden will constitute the new Bureau for UNEA 7. The plenary decided that the seventh meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) will take place from 8-12 December 2025 at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The new Bureau will face new challenges. There will be new resolutions proposed, NbS resolution will be revisited, the New Medium-Term Strategy will be discussed and agreed to, and there will be new and daunting environmental challenges. Will the new Bureau represent strong proponents of the combination of environment and rights-based approaches? The new UNEA rapporteur - the Minister of Environment of Saint Kitts and Nevis may play a key role.

UNEA 6 did not create the euphoria which UNEA 5 had resulted in. The UNEA 6 resolutions were weakened during the deliberations at UNEA 6, some even seriously weakened, but all the same, nearly all ministers who spoke during the high-level segment did express strong support for UNEP, for multilateralism and for safeguarding the environment. And that has to account for something. But participants at UNEA 6 also felt that the lack of progress this time revealed political undercurrents that did not bode well for a holistic understanding of environmental issues, let alone the entire scope of sustainable development. The global political situation threatens the multilateral system, good governance is still tolerated, but an increasing number of questions are being asked about the necessity of having right-based approaches and good governance principles.

Still, to repeat, all ministers who spoke at UNEA 6, stated their strong belief in and support for the multilateral system and were committed to solve the environmental problems. Hence, it is possible to state that there had been some progress, albeit small steps forward this time. But forward all the same.

## SECTION II - ACTIVITIES REPORT FROM UNEA 6

### INTRODUCTION

This section covers the events that I attended. I have tried to elicit the main points of each event, as they were presented to all participants during the side events, and I have also included - for informative reasons - the descriptions written by the organisers for their respective side events in order to give an overview of the event.

The intended content, as presented by the organisers, did not always reflect what I felt was the content, and I have at the end of each event added a few of my own comments and impressions.

The activities report shows in chronological order the events I attended. More details of the entire impressive programme can be found here:

[https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea6/programme?gad\\_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA0bWvBhBjEiwAtEsoWzby5de1gYWx0lWvzXUMSXokLBcHC1jazklSzwuh-l4095Udhsgv6hoCcPQQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea6/programme?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA0bWvBhBjEiwAtEsoWzby5de1gYWx0lWvzXUMSXokLBcHC1jazklSzwuh-l4095Udhsgv6hoCcPQQAvD_BwE)

Between the events in which I participated, I also attended the plenaries as well as the negotiations on NbS resolution - and I also had several bilateral meetings. These bilateral meetings are important to the future of the SF project.

### TEAM ACTIVITIES:

#### SUNDAY, 25 FEBRUARY

- Registered and attended parts of the Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum

#### MONDAY, 26 FEBRUARY

- Attended the Digital Transformation exhibition, which was open and available every day.

**Afternoon** - Side event, - “Intergovernmental consultations on Nature Based Solutions - moving forward with the recommendations”.

- **Organisers were the governments of Costa Rica and Nigeria.**

Nature-based solutions are a vital tool for tackling the triple planetary crisis: Climate Change, Nature & Biodiversity Loss and Pollution & Waste. They provide multiple benefits which enable them to address all three dimensions of the crisis simultaneously and cost-effectively. Increased interest and support for nature-based solutions was catalysed by UNEA resolution 5/5, which included the first multilaterally agreed definition. This momentum was further increased by the Intergovernmental Consultations on Nature-based Solutions, which the resolution requested and which took place from May to October 2023. Informed by that



process, the Co-Chairs of the consultations developed eight recommendations to support the implementation of nature-based solutions. The recommendations build on the breadth of support for NbS that the consultations demonstrated, while tackling the remaining challenges that they revealed.

This side event, hosted by Costa Rica and Nigeria, will begin with a High-Level Segment where the importance of nature-based solutions in the specific context of desertification and the ocean will be discussed. The second half of the event focuses on the Co-Chairs' recommendations. The speakers will discuss how the recommendations can contribute to potential solutions for moving forward towards effective, inclusive, and sustainable actions to support the implementation of nature-based solutions, and how their country or organization is addressing them. The event will consider how support for nature-based solutions can continue to gain momentum beyond the intergovernmental consultations.

### **Moderator**

[Dr Najma Mohamed](#)

Head of Nature-Based Solutions, UNEP-WCMC

### **Speakers**

[Aristide Taleng](#)

Deputy Head of Mission, Cameroon

[Rakib Miah](#)

Senior Policy Adviser, DEFRA, UK Government

[Kyung Ah Koo](#)

Senior Research fellow, Korea Environment Institute

[Cheyenne Rendon](#)

Society of Native Nations

[Stewart Maginnis](#)

Deputy Director General - Programme, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

[Elizabeth Maruma Mrema](#)

Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and UNEP Deputy Executive Director, UN Environment Programme

[H.E. Ms. Giovanna Valverde Stark](#)

Ambassador of Costa Rica in Kenya, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations Office in Kenya

[Susan Gardner](#)

Director, Ecosystems Division, UNEP

[Astrid Schomaker](#)

Director for Green Diplomacy and Multilateralism, Directorate General for Environment, European Commission

[H.E Dr. Iziq Kunle Salako](#)

Honourable Minister of State for Environment and Ecology, Nigeria

[Sikeade Egbuwalo](#)

Co-Chair of the Intergovernmental Consultations on NbS, Co-Chair of the intergovernmental Consultations on Nature-based Solutions, Nigeria

#### JGS COMMENTS:

The room for this side event was packed, and the energy in the room high. The presentations were hopeful for the most part. The Costa Rican Ambassador, Ms. Valverde Stark and Ms. [Sikeade Egbuwalo](#), of Nigeria, both also Co-Chairs of the NbS process, spoke convincingly and with commitment about the NbS process. The Minister of environment and ecology from Nigeria, Mr. Kunle Salako stated that Nigeria was completely behind and supported the NBS issue. For further analysis and impressions of this event, see my analysis of NbS resolution above.

#### TUESDAY 27 FEBRUARY

- **Morning**

“Transboundary Ecosystem restoration, key to addressing the triple planetary crises” - a side event dominated by too many official statements and too many panellists.

**Organisers: The government of Costa Rica, The government of Slovenia, The Ramsar Convention, UNECE, the Water Convention and IUCN.**

This side event focussed on the importance of transboundary ecosystem restoration in addressing the Triple Planetary Crises: Climate change, Biodiversity loss and Pollution.

Among expected outcomes, the organiser had listed:

- Provide participants with a better understanding of missions, work and practices of both the Water Convention and the Ramsar Convention, their compatibility and cooperation.
- Learn how transboundary ecosystem restoration supports sustainable development, livelihoods, tackling biodiversity loss and pollution, building climate resilience, and enabling carbon sinks.
- Learn about the guidelines, tools, and expertise that the Conventions offer and will thus empower participants to take action in their national contexts.
- Facilitate the establishment of new networks, partnerships, and valuable connections to enhance transboundary ecosystem restoration and join forces to tackle the planetary crises we are currently facing.

## Moderator

- [Mr. Aleš Bizjak](#)
  - International water coordination expert, Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia

## Speakers

- [Tatiana Molcean](#)
  - Executive Secretary, UNECE
- [H.E. Ms. Giovanna Valverde Stark](#)
  - Ambassador of Costa Rica in Kenya, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations Office in Kenya
- [Musonda Mumba](#)
  - Secretary General, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- [H.E. Mr. Uroš Vajgl](#)
  - State Secretary, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Energy of the Republic of Slovenia
- [Bruno Pozzi](#)
  - Deputy Director Ecosystems Division, UNEP
- [Mr. Luther Bois Anukur](#)
  - Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- [Mr. Tomaž Rodič](#)
  - Slovenian Space.Si

## JGS COMMENTS:

The side event was well attended but did not bring much new except to reiterate the issue is fraught with difficulties.

- **Evening:** Green Room; “Fair trade and green MSMEs: catalysing multilateral action for environmental stability.”

## Organised by the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) and chaired by Leida Rijnhout.

Theme: Fostering global cooperation and action to reduce inequalities and tackle biodiversity loss, pollution and biodiversity loss through fair and sustainable local value chains, particularly Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs).

Objective: To provide a platform for stakeholders to discuss the pivotal roles of fair trade and green MSMEs in advancing the UNEA objectives while reducing poverty and inequalities.



We advocate for the inclusion and prioritization of Green and Fair MSMEs in the global policy discourse at the UNEA. The event encourages dialogue and commitments to support sustainable multilateral actions and global cooperation to promote sustainable local value chains.

**Thematic Focus:** By integrating fair trade principles into their operations, MSMEs can drive effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions. They act as agents of positive change in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, all while promoting social equity and community development.

MSMEs play a substantive role in local and national economies. They are majority employers all around the world, but especially in Low-Income Countries (LICs). To advance local, inclusive, and fair value chains, there is a pressing need for universally accepted global fair trade principles and standardized definitions of 'green' among other essential measures. Multilateral cooperation and MEAs can play a significant role in supporting fair MSMEs globally and locally, as they play a fundamental local role in enhanced community engagement and local inclusivity. Moreover, they are fundamental to advance green and equitable economies worldwide, as they:

- Reduce environmental harm, promote nature-based solutions and restore environmental integrity and livelihoods;
- Enable local economic and social resilience and adaptation capability;
- Promote sustainable practices, including fair trade practices, green procurement, and local and indigenous knowledge;
- Promote supply chain transparency and accountability; and
- Promote advocacy and collaboration, including among different themes, sectors and environmental agreements.

However, green and fair MSMEs face significant barriers to operate, and these barriers are quite similar in different contexts and countries. To name a few:

- No legally defined status for green enterprises in national laws.
- Unfair power relations that limit their access to markets.
- Very limited access to finance and investment.
- Very limited access to information and knowledge of best practices.
- Limited capabilities for reporting.
- Informal sectors.

In the event, we will hear first a keynote speaker, who will set the context for green and fair MSMEs and multilateral action. The keynote speaker will emphasize the importance of fair trade in promoting environmental sustainability and the significance of MSMEs in multilateral environmental cooperation (10 min).

The event will be followed by two panels:

**Panel Discussion 1: Fair Trade and Environmental Conservation (25min).** Panellists will focus on examining the role of fair trade in promoting environmental sustainability. Challenges and opportunities in scaling up fair trade initiatives. Policy recommendations and support for



green and fair MSMEs. Case studies of fair trade practices that support biodiversity conservation

Panel Discussion 2: Multilateral Actions and Collaboration (25 min). Panellists will discuss on how green and fair MSMEs can promote multilateral environmental agreements. Strategies for enhancing MSMEs' participation in global and fair environmental initiatives. Sharing experiences of MSMEs collaborating with international organizations. Sharing examples of successful green and fair SME initiatives.

#### JGS COMMENTS:

The event was well attended, despite being an evening event. Inputs were relevant and interesting. The MSMEs is a group that could be engaged with SF project.

### WEDNESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY

**Morning:** (08:00 to 9:30) Breakfast meeting at the Tribe hotel, in the vicinity of UNEP's Gigiri compound (08:00 - 09:30)

**Subject:** "Centring Environmental Governance: Opportunities for the Summit of the Future and Beyond."

**Organisers:** The Bahai International Community and the Coalition for the UN we Need.

The meeting was moderated by Daniel Perell of the Bahai International Community.

The meeting gathered approximately 40 people at the early morning start. 08:00. All of the participants had received a personal invitation from the organisers. Seated at five different tables, the discussion was lively. An emcee moderated the guided discussion. An invited person offered initial reflections (5 minutes) on the questions identified below. These questions were discussed at the table for roughly 20 minutes and the process was repeated at each new set of questions.

The Summit of the Future is being called a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance cooperation on critical challenges and address gaps in global governance." Today's triple planetary crisis represents shortcomings in both of these areas—cooperation and governance. While the zero draft of the "Pact for the Future" acknowledges that "environmental crises pose the most pressing and serious threats to the sustainability of our planet and the well-being of its present and future inhabitants," how the "fundamental shift" necessary is to come about remains an open question. How, then, can we ensure that the Summit delivers for planet and people?

The range of possible actions and commitments to address the planetary crisis is enormous. As COP28 highlighted, there is real momentum to accelerate our transition from fossil fuels in a just, equitable and orderly manner, though far more investment and a reordering of our priorities will be needed to shift incentives towards green energy and industry. Proposals to reform the international trade and legal architecture; redefine measures of progress and enhance the role of the UN in environmental governance are worthy of Member State





consideration. Ultimately, the international community will need to tap into greater stores of collective will and a long-term perspective in order to bring about enduring transformation and bridge the gap between policy and action.

Challenges have emerged in international environmental governance including maintaining coordination across multilateral environmental agreements, the mandate of UNEP to facilitate adequate multilateral environmental governance, and emerging gaps in the development and environmental nexus. To take forward a discussion on proposals to address such gaps, and to offer space for a diversity of views in the lead up to the Summit of the Future, the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office and numerous partners will host a conversation on the margins of UNEA6 to explore actionable proposals together with those critical values needed to ensure success.

The goal of the gathering will be to deepen our understanding of the key challenges facing environmental governance today, consider how certain environmental governance proposals might be taken forward, and identify next steps between now and the Summit of the Future.

Attendees will be encouraged to discuss the following three sets of questions:

**Opening question:**

1. What values and incentives underlie current environmental governance structures? Where are the most important shifts that need to take place?

**Main course questions:**

2. What future do we hope to see for humanity's relationship with the natural world? What role does environmental governance play in that future?

3. What specific proposals for improving environmental governance do you think are ripe for action today? For example, proposals to enhance UNEP were put forward by the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism ([here](#)).

4. Could the Summit of the Future feature an environmental outcome of some kind? What could that look like? What needs to be done today to move forward?

**Closing questions:**

5. What is your vision of an international environmental governance structure that can allow the centring of values which would conserve the environment for future generations? How can we work together to bring it about?

6. What should environmental governance look like in 10 years? What needs to happen today to achieve that result?

## JGS COMMENTS:

This meeting was among a few that focussed specifically on the SotF. The other event that concentrated on the SotF was the side event also organised by the Bahai International Community, and where I was among the speakers. I can only speak for my table, and despite the fact that the participants at my table also represented various UN offices, little substance was known about the content of the SotF. Despite Dan Perell's valiant efforts to focus on the SotF and the Pact for the Future, my view was that the discussion took a different path than perhaps was hoped. I attribute this to the lack of knowledge in the SotF.

Wednesday was also the first of the MEA days, and I tried to get as much as possible out of these days. Not always easy, as events often overlapped. Some also covered issues that were rather familiar to me, and thus did not really bring much new issues to the table - at least not for me.

## JGS COMMENTS:

The MEA issue was a key element in this UNEA 6. The ED has expressed serious interest in further coordination of the MEAs proposing to have the most relevant MEAs find a home at UNEP with mixed response

- Midday

Green Room: "UNEP needs civil society to manage Nature Based Solutions - 50 years of collaboration is proof that the next 50 years will need more of the same."

### **Organiser: Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future**

This was an in-person launch of the People's Environment Narrative (P.E.N.), which was very well attended. We focussed on the key themes of UNEA 6 but drew the perspectives to history and to future.

The session was moderated by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, SF

Speakers (who were all authors) of P.E.N.

I gave a small intro of the P.E.N. and showed a few slides, outlining the themes covered and gave a bit of statistics. I also stated that the P.E.N. is no longer a report, but "a compendium of articles with encyclopaedic ambition". I also pointed out that in the P.E.N. there is a comprehensive report from the Stockholm Conference in 2022.

The following agenda was used, and the outlined questions only meant to guide and inspire the authors to say more and were as follows:

- Olga Skaredina - You worked closely with Maria Ivanova, authoring one of the Legacy Papers, and from your perspective, as a younger person and student, why is such a

report important, and how can it serve a purpose, bearing in mind that it is neither an academic report, nor an official UN or government report, and what did you think when you were asked to contribute?

- Leida Rijnhout - you were a chief project officer for Stockholm+50 as well as an author. You have followed and worked with UNEP, the environment and governance for decades as well - can you comment on the usability of such a compendium for civil society?
- Marcos A Orellana - with a solid background in international law, and knowledge of UNEP - what were your reactions to being invited, and also perhaps a comment or two on the usability of the compendium?
- Ingrid Rostad - coordinator of the project's relationship with the Major Groups, responsible for channelling their ideas into this report through the webinars and an author - fun work, or just added burden during all these months it took to finalise the P.E.N.?
- Dan Perell - you are also an author, and you have been involved in issues that this compendium covers do you think this magnum opus will be a good reference work for civil society and UNEP to have?
- Neth Dano - having been actively involved in work on emerging issues and representing the global south in many contexts - what are your reflections on the usability of the P.E.N.?

The presenters all expanded on their theme and emphasised the importance of the P.E.N. as a historical repository of civil society and UNEP, the first complete document to allow civil society to speak about these issues.

- **Evening**

Side event: "Tackling the Triple Planetary Crisis: Building the Linkages from Science to Action."

**Organisers: UNEP**

Science-policy interfaces work to translate scientific findings into policy-relevant information with a focus on solutions and are also providing platforms for dialogue, communication, and collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Outcomes of existing science-policy interfaces from different fields point to a similar set of key messages, showing the interlinkages across the pillars of the triple planetary crisis and calling for holistic solutions across fields.

**Expected Outcomes**

The objective of this side event is to explore how to ensure and strengthen the policy relevance of science-policy panels in a fast-changing world with complex challenges to be dealt with, building upon success stories and lessons learned. In particular, the side event



will explore synergies and opportunities across science-policy interfaces for solutions to tackling the triple planetary crises in a holistic manner.

### Speakers

[Moustapha Kamal](#)

Global Coordinator, Green Jobs Programme, International Labour Organization

[Lesley Onyon](#)

Chemicals, Safety and Health, WHO & IOMC Secretariat

[Janez Potocnik](#)

Co-chair, International Resource Panel (IRP)

[Rolph Payet](#)

Executive Secretary, Basel Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (BRS)

[Elizabeth Maruma Mrema](#)

Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and UNEP Deputy Executive Director, UN Environment Programme

[Gudi Alkemade](#)

Chair, Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) on a science-policy panel (SPP)

[Jim Skea](#)

Chair, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

[David O. Obura](#)

Chair, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

[Anna Mampye](#)

Co-chair, Intergovernmental and Multistakeholder Advisory Group, Global Environment Outlook 7, UNEP

[Andrea Hinwood](#)

Chief Scientist, UNEP

### JGS COMMENTS:

This event focused more of the work of each of the presenters than on building linkages from science to action as the title suggested.

### THURSDAY, 29 FEBRUARY

- Morning

“Side event: “Bringing the environment to the Summit of the Future.”

**Organisers: the Baha'i International Community**

In his Our Common Agenda report, the Secretary-General proposed a Summit of the Future to “forge a new global consensus on what our future should look like, and what we can do today to secure it”. Member States have agreed to host this Summit on the 22nd and 23rd of



September of 2024. The United Nations, Civil Society, and other stakeholders worldwide are preparing for the Summit, which is set to explore a wide range of issues looking into the future of multilateralism. The Zero Draft of the Pact for the Future does mention the environment, but perhaps not to the level of ambition that would have the impacts necessary.

The Secretary-General has called for the triple planetary crisis to be raised as a vital issue of common concern time and again. His High-Level Advisory Board on effective multilateralism identified, in its second “shift”, “Regaining Balance with Nature and Provide Clean Energy for All”, the benefit of upgrading the United Nations environmental governance system. For its part, civil society has been clear: there is no future without the environment.

Given this reality, how can those engaging at UNEA6, and other allies around the world, ensure strong outcomes of the Summit of the Future that take the environment into consideration? What strategies can help align the Pact for the Future with humanity’s clear recognition of the need to centre the environment as a priority and overcome the triple planetary crisis?

This session will feature experts who will explore, from a variety of perspectives, how the environment can be prioritized in conversations related to the future. Importantly, we will be eliciting concrete recommendations to contribute to Member States as they negotiate the Pact for the Future.

The session was moderated by **Daniel Perell**, one of the co-chairs (alongside Florence Syevuo) of the Coalition for the UN We Need.)

**Jan-Gustav Strandenaes** is expert in environmental governance.

**Florence Syevuo** organizes civil society and communities at the local and national level to implement the SDGs.

**Adam Day** served in the secretariat for the High-Level Advisory Board and helped in the drafting of its report.

**Abigael Kima** is a social media influencer, storyteller, and environmental activist. If approved, we will also approach the Missions of Germany and Namibia (the co-facilitators of the Summit of the Future process) to ensure their perspectives are present.

#### **JGS COMMENTS:**

There were not many events covering SotF at this UNEA. Most of the Major Group’s representatives I spoke with were aware of the SOTF process, few had insights and even less knew the proposed content of the Pact. On one hand this can be seen as an expression of the focus of the attending stakeholders at UNEA 6 - or any UNEA for that matter - the vast majority has a specific focus on environmental issues, many also with a very concrete mandate - NbS, plastics, water, environmental consequences of war etc.

The panellist at this side event had a reasonable grasp of the issues at stake with regard to SotF, but as often is the case, people with a generalist knowledge are not good at focussing on key issues, challenges or obvious gaps.

The discussion at the side event also touched upon the upcoming civil society SotF conference in May in Nairobi, and hopefully this event will raise the level of interest and knowledge among many and will try to connect the stakeholders attending UNEA and those attending UN NY based processes, which is also one of the aims of the SF project. I outlined the project SF is doing supported by EU and UNEP, which is in line with strengthening integration among SDGs and ensuring that environmental dimension is strongly present and through work on CoPs to contribute to the SDG implementation, including through SotF process. Dan has asked me to be on the drafting committee to develop alternative texts for the Pact, and I have happily accepted this assignment, which will ensure more emphasis on environment.

- **Afternoon and evening**

Attended the Multistakeholder Dialogues.

**FRIDAY, MARCH 1**

**Morning**

“The role of artificial Intelligence (AI) in tackling the Triple Planetary Crises.”

**Organisers: Expert Action Group Leading Environmental Sustainability (EAGLES 2030)**

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, refers to the ability of any machine or computer to mimic human capabilities such as learning from examples and experience, recognizing objects, understanding and responding to language, making decisions, and solving problems. AI also plays an important role in achieving not only environmental but all other Sustainable Development Goals- from ending hunger and poverty to achieving sustainable energy and gender equality to protecting and preserving biodiversity.

AI has the potential to tackle the triple planetary crises by accelerating global efforts to protect the environment and conserve resources by detecting energy emission reductions, CO2 removal, helping develop greener transportation networks, monitoring nature loss and deforestation, predicting extreme weather conditions and catalysing climate action. The objective is to demonstrate the potential of AI to address global environmental problems and the thematic focus will be on the triple planetary crises: Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Proof-of-concept AI applications will be demonstrated for each of the 3 global problems. Information on Member States’ use of AI will be shared i.e. strategies, policies and AI support structures (ministries, advisory bodies, etc.).

**JGS Comments**

The Eagles 2030 network is a relatively new organisation, and among the founding members are long active UNEP staff, some now retired. Gerard Cunningham who has spent all his life working on the environment and UNEP, is a founding member and resides in Nairobi.

A young staff presented issues that in some way paralleled what other groups are working on - how to use AI intelligently and creatively to promote issues related to environmental protection and promote their own organisation.

I am still concerned about lack of awareness of the challenges that AI poses to governance in general and good governance in particular.

- **Midday**

Side event: “Pathways for the consistent and effective application of Nature-based Solutions - the role of the IUCN Global Standard for NbS and Launch of the State of ENACT NbS Goals Report: Year One Roadmap”

**Organisers: The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**

The adoption of the resolution “Nature-based Solutions for Supporting Sustainable Development” at UNEA-5 was a significant milestone in advancing the uptake and mainstreaming of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) across development sectors. The IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions offers clear criteria that guide the integration and mainstreaming of high-integrity NbS at policy, finance, and actions on the ground. Over the past years, the IUCN NbS Standard has been used as a tool by various Member States to enable and increase the scale and impact of NbS and assess the effectiveness of interventions.

The event will bring together high-level speakers representing China, Colombia, and Senegal, along with IUCN, aiming to:

- Demonstrate how NbS is currently being applied at the national level in policies on the ground implementation including the application of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions.
- Improve the understanding of the role that the IUCN Global Standard can play in the implementation of effective NbS in line with the UNEA multilateral definition.
- Highlight additional support tools available to member states in the implementation of NbS, especially the Self-Assessment Tool.

The event will conclude with a short segment on the ENACT Partnership - Enhancing Nature-based Solutions for Accelerated Climate Transformation - highlighting the key outcomes of the annual ENACT report, together with the co-chairs Egypt and Germany.

**Moderator**

[Stewart Maginnis](#)

Deputy Director General - Programme, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

**Speakers**

[Angela Andrade](#)

Chair of the Commission on Ecosystem Management, IUCN

[H.E. Steffi Lemke](#)

Federal Minister, Minister for the Environment, Germany



### Ming Luo

Executive Director, Nature-based Solutions Asian Hub

### Carolina Diaz Giraldo

Director, Environment and Sustainable Development, National Planning Department, Colombia

### Mame Faty Niang Seydi

Head of the Coastal Management Division, Department of Environment and Classified Establishments, Senegal

### Grethel Aguilar Rojas

Director General, IUCN

### H.E. Yasmine Fouad

Minister of Environment, Egypt

### **JGS Comments**

IUCN organised several side events - as per usual - at this UNEA. They all carry the insignia of an official event, reflecting the special status that IUCN has and enjoys. The list of speakers above also reflects this position. Colombia spoke strongly about NbS.

I also found IUCN's references to NBS rather arrogant. In all fairness, IUCN has long worked with NbS related issues and also has a 'gold standard' definition. However, UNEA 5, in their resolution 5.5 agreed to a global definition also accepted by the majority of countries. I thought that IUCN at least would discuss this resolution in relation to their own work. I had also expected at least one of the speakers to reflect a bit better on the conflict now having paralysed the work on NbS. None did at the extent I had hoped, and that may also illustrate the precarious situation for NbS in policy issues related to global environment. (Please also see my analysis in Section I)

- **Late Afternoon**

“Nature Based Solutions: Lessons and way forward.”

**Organisers: “Centre For Community Economics and Development Consultants Society”**

<https://www.cecoedecon.org.in/>

Nature based solutions remain critical for meaningful response to climate change and biodiversity loss. It is also critical for the livelihoods and wellbeing of communities dependent on natural resources including indigenous peoples, local communities, farmers and fisher folk, and majority of rural populations. Nature based solutions, though not new, got a strong push by UNEA 6 Resolution. However, the consultations succeeding UNEA 6 have seen significant divergence in the understanding and approach of the countries, as well as on principles, standards, criteria and safeguards. Till now, the nature-based solutions are completely self-labelled. Current definition has not only failed to adequately capture the complexity and breadth of the nature-based solutions but has loopholes which may be abused to further commodify the nature and leave behind people and communities'



dependant on nature. The history of REDD Plus, climate smart agriculture etc. does not enthuse much confidence of the communities in land and forest-based interventions. Despite attracting significant investment, they have not provided empirical evidence of emission reduction, enhancing resilience and biodiversity. They have also manifested shift from traditional nature positive actions to profit oriented corporate driven actions leading to further degradation of land, forest and community resources. They remain top down, far removed from the local context and far from full community integration.

The conversation on the nature-based solutions is spread over a diverse spectrum of intergovernmental negotiations landscape in the UNEP, UNFCCC, UNCBD and the UNCCD etc. The focus on the NBS (and the blue carbon) raises enthusiasm but at the same time it raises apprehensions of putting nature to the benevolence of market and brushing aside the concerns of custodians of nature.

The objective of the side event is to discuss gaps and challenges in the NBS from a community perspective and present peoples' solutions and sets of principles, standards and safeguards.

#### **JGS COMMENTS:**

The organisation is based in India, and the presentation was based on their long history of work on environment and civil society on the Indian Subcontinent.

- **Evening**

Attended the Closing Session - for my comments, see my overall analysis.

#### **Communities of Practice at UNEA 6**

I sought actively to promote our project on Communities of Practice (CoPs) and its inherent ideas in most of my bilateral meetings, of which there were many as they are the focus of our project. The three CoPs that are identified for the project are: (1) Integrated actions to advance SDGs, (2) Nature-based solutions and (3) Framing the just transition.

I did follow very closely the discussion and negotiations dealing with the NbS as detailed above, which is the subject matter of one of the CoPs.

Most people - official delegates, members of Major Groups and UN staff - expressed positive interest for CoPs. The outcomes of my bilaterals can best be summarised in a number of questions and comments that I received in relation to the project, which I have elaborated below in the nearly 20 questions (some of the bullets contain more than just one question) as follows and are extremely useful for development of CoPs:

- If we are to collaborate with you - in one of the three CoP themes - how do we do it, and what is in it for us?
- If we become members of one of your CoPs, do we have to commit properly, do you meet regularly, are the meetings moderated?

- How do you choose and select future partners of the CoPs? Have you or will, you develop criteria to that effect?
- What are you offering to my network, that will make our collaboration worth-while? If it is knowledge, are you experts in this area, or do you provide experts?
- Since this is also a project in collaboration with UNEP, will we have access to UNEP conferences with relevance to the CoP theme?
- The three themes are connected to work which is carried out by UNEP, will we be engaged in lobby efforts within UNEP?
- Is your CoP meant as an adviser to us, so I can be better at doing what I am doing? Field work, lobby, fund raising.
- Do you provide money to my organisation which is working practically in the field (for instance to restore ecosystems) in addition to your expertise?
- Have you developed a methodology for the CoPs, and what is the purpose of the website?
- How do you envisage peer-learning within the framework of the CoP theme?
- What does my network have to provide? What are the obligations involved?
- Does the involvement have a time line? And as it is closely connected to the SDGs, will it last only until 2030?
- The UN coordination for the 2030 Agenda and UNEP's coordination body are placed on two different continents - are you providing information and expertise on how both these coordination units work, and how is this relevant to our collaboration within the CoPs?
- Do we have to report on our collaboration with you? And if so, how will these reports be used? And how will this report be of consequence to the implementation of the SDGs?
- Are you building a knowledge bank on how to implement the themes of the CoPs? And in particular how will this implementation have consequences for the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

One of my intentions with my extensive UNEA 6 analysis is also to provide all of us with an understanding of how member states respond and react to various themes within what we may label 'safeguarding environmental work today'. Understanding this, will continue to help us in framing the content of the project as well as providing relevant input to future fundraising.

### **Numerical conclusion**

Including the CPR, I identified well over 100 side events, and this was not counting rsvp based events, sundry press conferences, special dinners and receptions and of course all the official meetings, groups discussions and plenaries.

The logistical capacity of UNON - the overall area of the UN bodies at Gigiri - was stretched to its limits.



I covered 12 side events during my five days at UNEA6, followed two sessions of the Multistakeholder Dialogues, covered the closing session, and listened in on several of the debates concerning the NbS. I also managed to cover a few of the MEA sessions and visited a number of fascinating exhibitions.

**Sources:**

- The proposed resolutions, as presented to the CPR final by December 2023
- The final resolutions, as adopted by UNEA 6
- UNEP's official press releases from UNEA 6
- UNEP's own reports from UNEA 6
- Documents from the Bureaux leading up to UNEA 6
- ENB daily coverage of UNEA 6 including the CPR.
- ENB summary of UNEA 6
- My own notes from meetings, side events and talks

**END**