

# FUTURE WE WANT

## MODEL UNITED NATIONS



United Nations Association of Morocco  
Association Marocaine pour les Nations Unies



Future We Want  
Model United Nations

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# UN ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY

# 20 22

Future We Want MUN  
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# INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

**Topic Area A:** Investing in innovative environmental solutions for accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

The UN established the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in 2012 by the Conference of Sustainable Development to serve as the UN's principle body on formulating environmental policies and codifying international environmental law. Since its formation, the high-level Assembly has met three times. At each summit, delegates have intertwined the relevance of the SDGs with environmental challenges and worked to produce resolutions that help achieve these goals.

UNEA serves as the legislative function of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and brings together relevant environmental stakeholders in the private and non-governmental sector with all 191 UN member states, including the UN's two observer nations.



# Topic Area A: Investing in innovative environmental solutions for accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

- I. Introduction and Definition
- II. Timeline of UN's Commitments towards the Environmental and SDGs and UNEA's past meetings
- III. Discussion of the topic
- IV. Bloc Positions
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## I. Introduction and Definition

Of the 17 SDGs the UN has identified as necessary to achieve by 2030, the commitment to protecting our planet's habitat and resources is seen as perhaps one of the most important tasks. Nearly six specific SDGs relate directly to the environment, and the threats of a changing climate greatly impact the success of the remaining eleven. These climate-specific SDGs include goals six, seven, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen, which advocate for clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; protection of life below water; and protection of life on land, respectively. Relevant to our committee, SDG nine challenges the world to improve industry and innovations to promote employment and environmentalism<sup>[1]</sup>.

In a UNEP document regarding this topic specifically, the United Nations offers four substantial definitions for what innovative environmental investment entails<sup>[2]</sup>.



UNEP has also identified key areas that can be addressed with such investment: pollution, energy insecurity, loss of biodiversity, waste, unsustainable consumption, and production, among many others.

The need for innovative environmental solutions is critical to ensure the implementation of the SDGs and their endurance for the future. The very definition of sustainable itself lies in fulfilling current needs without jeopardizing resources for future generations. Thus, the need for such solutions is essentially tied to building technical capabilities of nation-states, in tandem with improvements in human capital and human development index, including its education and health components. The intrinsic value of innovative solutions can only be made irrelevant when human resources can operationalize, develop, and transfer knowledge of such solutions to future generations. Therefore, as a whole, investment in innovative environmental solutions is crucial to the implementation of the SDGs and its insurance for the future.

After that, it must be noted as well that solutions should be not only sustainable but also *innovative*. Defined as “new forms of social practice and organization, as well as new or improved technological products and processes,” innovation is not only directly tied with Goal nine. Still, it is also an enabler for most other SDGs. For example, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has developed five innovative core solutions: mission-oriented, pro-poor and inclusive, grass-roots, social, and digitally-enabled open and collaborative<sup>[3]</sup>.

Thus, the conceptualization of innovative solutions has to transform from the traditional-conventional understanding of linear research, development, and commercialization to modern all-inclusive social and organizational practices. These types of investment should be



creative and outside of the status quo while focusing equally on technological solutions and non-tech solutions, which allow all participants to opportunity to acquire useful skills and knowledge. UNEP notes that such investment needs to take a “holistic” approach where social, environmental, economic factors are considered, and solutions are built to benefit all those involved<sup>[4]</sup>.

A paradigm to which the topic can be framed and used by nation-states is through an economic perspective in approaching the issue. However, the need to invest is greater than ever, especially noting the myriad opportunities that such an investment in innovative solutions can bring. Inherently tied to economic growth and development, investment in innovative solutions can open new markets and use untapped resources within the country. The notion of aiding developing countries through technology transfer, for example, is contentious when the question of funding, donors, and sponsorships is taken into account. Nevertheless, the UNEA is an intergovernmental body. It is indeed within its purview to ensure that the committee's goal is met concerning member-states sovereignty, voluntary capability, and participatory actions. Hence, solutions should go beyond only technology and expand towards other sectors such as socioeconomic factors. For example, pushing for further integration of women in the market can drastically increase GDP, fully exhausting the labor force and advancing human capital in the country. There needs to be an understanding that the implementation of innovative solutions requires active and enthusiastic participation from civil society. Other key considerations of probable solutions should also focus on policy harmonization, innovative partnerships, innovative financing schemes, and the adoption of new modern economic concepts such as circular economies and sharing economies.



## II. Timeline of UN's Commitments Towards the Environmental and SDGs and UNEA's Past Meetings

The environment has always been of immense importance to the United Nations, and environmental issues have always been at the forefront of international discussions and conferences. The Millennium Development Goals focused heavily on environmental sustainability, with Goal 7 dedicated to the environment. In addition, the political momentum focused heavily on attaining this goal as a top priority beyond the held Summits. Thus the environment, biodiversity, the biosphere, and sub-categories have always had high regard within the UN bodies and the international community.

With the launching of the Sustainable Development Goals, even more pressure has been applied to environmental sustainability, and with all the goals being intertwined in one way or another - alongside the existence of goals that solely focus on environmental aspects - ensuring that environmental problems are eradicated has remained a top priority. As a result, many summits and conferences have taken place since, and each of these summits/conferences has enabled the UN to take important steps towards environmental sustainability.

At the third UNEA Conference held in Nairobi on 4-6 December 2017, the committee adopted a resolution proposed by the African group of states, emphasizing the need to improve the national capability to develop, transfer, and share innovative environmental solutions. Highlighting the notion of collaborative action, the language stresses cooperation between state



and non-state actors, including the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and the research and development community. Although the adopted resolution is superb, the committee should look favorably upon further elaboration on technical operationalization and implementation of sustainable environmental solutions. The fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly took place from 11-15 March 2019 and tackled topics agreed upon in its previous session, particularly on the voluntary report of implementation progress. UNEA 5 will have taken place by the time of the conference and is scheduled for Feb 28-March 2, 2022, in Nairobi, Kenya. The overall theme of UNEA-5 is “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”. The theme calls for strengthened action to protect and restore nature and the nature-based solutions to achieve the SDGs in three complementary dimensions (social, economic, and environmental).

### III. Discussion of the Topic at Hand

In the words of Eric Beinhocker, “Rather than thinking of strategy as a single plan built on predictions of the future, we should think of strategy as a portfolio of experiments that competes and evolves.” Innovation can be defined as the iterative design and is a direct leading cause for economic growth and development in any region or country, spurring technological advances and creating pathways for sustainability - particularly through partnerships. According to the “Spark, Scale, Sustain” report published by the United Nations Development Programme, innovation for development means<sup>[5]</sup>:



- “testing new business models, including impact bonds, to unlock financing needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- developing the next generation of public services with citizens and governments based on user-centric approaches;
- building real-time information systems to improve transparent and responsive decision-making; or
- leveraging behavioral insights to diagnose development problems and design evidence-based experiments better accordingly.”

Each of the points mentioned above provides a basis for a better understanding of the importance of innovation for development - particularly sustainable development.

The undeniable environmental degradation most major areas of the world are experiencing calls for the urgent implementation of sustainable solutions. Despite the numerous efforts of the international community, characterized through endless forums, conferences, and agreements - and facilitated through numerous partnerships, environmental losses are still a harsh reality and, in many regions, are a major cause of the socio-economic decline. With traditional solutions lacking the efficiency needed to sustain the environment due to being either slow-acting or lacking the characteristic of sustainability, innovative solutions are required to sustain the environment and attain the SDGs.

Protecting the natural environment proves to be one of the more challenging aspects of environmental sustainability, where environmental decline is directly proportional to the increase



in the demand for growth, and a balance is required in this regard. Identifying the environmental challenges that the world faces today is arguably the most critical necessity, for innovative solutions need to be tailored to the specific problems for maximum efficiency. These can be redefined as focus areas, which - when tackled individually - can guide governments and organizations to solve environmental issues.

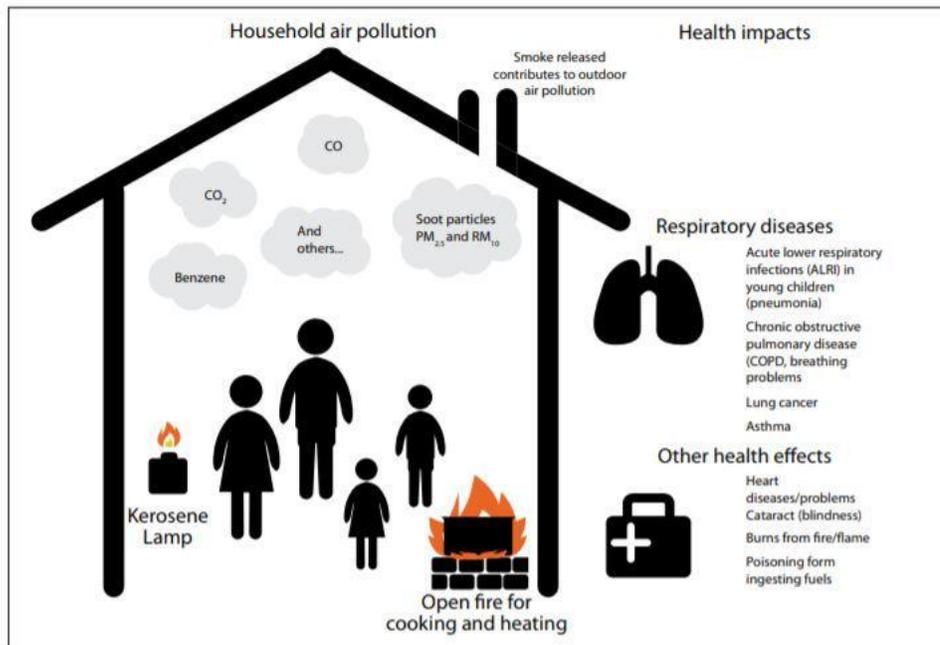
It is important to realize that governments need to create, promote and enable an environment that fosters, encourages, and gives way to the generation of innovative solutions and their implementation. Such an environment can then be enhanced by resolving the issues in each particular focus area as per the country's needs. While most focus areas are universal and common between most of the United Nations member states - such as resolving all environmental issues affecting agriculture with an end goal of eradicating world hunger and enhancing food security - some focus areas may not be of importance in a particular region, due to the lack of issues surrounding it. Nevertheless, many focus areas exist, and some of these are:

### **a) Pollution**

Pollution - including indoor air pollution - is a major factor that contributes to the environmental decline the planet faces today. Due to the linear economic model of "take-make-dispose", coupled with mismanagement of natural resources - alongside many other reasons, the previously controlled phenomenon is currently a significant one that requires an immediate response. A previously neglected aspect, indoor air pollution, accounts for 4.3 million deaths, 18% of ischaemic heart disease, and 33% of lower respiratory infections globally as per the United Nations Environment Programme and Climate and Clean Air Coalition 2016.



People in low-income groups - particularly women and children - are more susceptible to this type of pollution due to overexposure to pollutants with inadequate ventilation. A handy figure to illustrate this is as follows:



Source: World Health Organization 2011a<sup>1</sup>

Alongside indoor air pollution, other major forms of pollution include (but are not limited to) air pollution, land and soil pollution, freshwater pollution, marine and coastal pollution, and other cross-cutting sources of pollution (chemicals and waste)<sup>[6]</sup>.

Innovative initiatives that facilitate risk-reduction strategies have proven to be a handy and effective solution. Many examples of successful insurance industry initiatives on pollution and climate change exist that prove so.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (2017) Towards a Pollution-Free Planet Background Report. United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi, Kenya.

## b) Energy and Food Insecurity

To define the energy crisis nexus, it is important to define the energy use paradox - where in most cases, it can alleviate and aggravate a challenge at the same time. With the current decade (2014-2014) being the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All), as declared unanimously by the General Assembly in its 67th session, three objectives were set: energy access, energy efficiency, and renewable energy. The SE4All Framework for action recognizes that “Achieving each of the three objectives would realize multiple, substantial benefits to countries, companies, and society. Energy is the world’s largest industry, and the transition to sustainable energy systems provides perhaps one of the largest global economic opportunities of the 21st century – particularly important at a time of financial hardship in many nations. Developed countries face the combined challenge and opportunity of transforming existing infrastructure; developing countries have the opportunity to adopt cleaner, more efficient technology from the start; leapfrogging technologies and infrastructure that developed countries had to establish.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Connecting energy and food security to environmental crises can be simply done by understanding Environmental Livelihood Security, conceptualized in 2014 by Biggs et al. (2014; p. 1)<sup>[8]</sup>.

A large part of the environmental crisis and decline today can be placed on the heavy human demand on the environment and the resulting environmental impact on humans. Therefore, developing an operational framework is often the first step in overcoming any food or energy crisis and is critical in the case of an end goal of a self-sustainability, and setting up such a framework could make use of the environmental-livelihood interactions in a certain region to identify the obstacles and the problems to make way for innovative solutions.



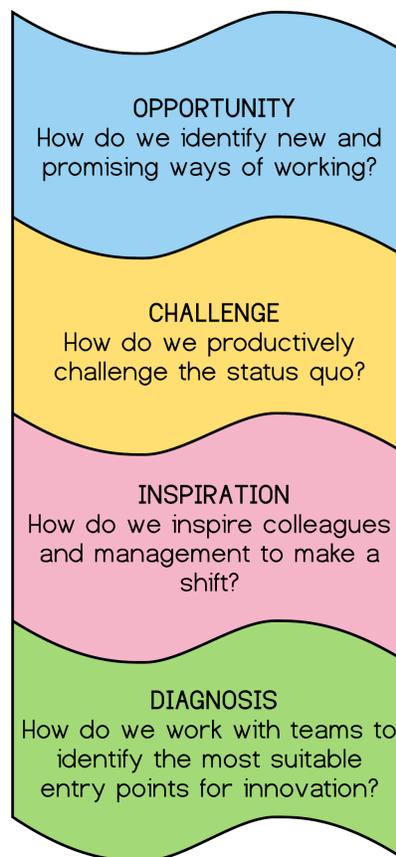
### c) Loss of Biodiversity

Biodiversity lies at the heart of sustainable development; deforestation and desertification - both due to human actions and climate change - are both harsh realities that take their toll on the natural habitat of species. Strengthening natural resource management is an important issue that needs to be embedded in all governments' action plans to slow down - if not halt completely - the degradation of the forests worldwide. While 15% of the land is currently protected<sup>[9]</sup>, biodiversity worldwide is still extremely vulnerable. This poses its own challenge to people's livelihood in low-income regions or those living in poverty. Such phenomena need to be targeted from two main areas, first, through tackling the effect of climate change and minimizing the direct factors such as CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and second, through increasing land productivity under controlled regulations that protect the habitat while also maintaining equilibrium between supply and demand. An example that should be studied in this regard is the demand for wood, which is a leading cause for the deforestation of many forests, and thus a huge obstacle in maintaining a healthy ecosystem - damaging the biosphere and threatening many species.

Alongside the focus areas mentioned above, many other areas exist, such as unsustainable consumption and production, waste and waste management, antimicrobial resistance, environmental wear due to sandstorms, global warming challenges, and environmental displacement and degradation. However, all the focus areas discussed, and many many more, urgently signal the need for innovative solutions and the necessary platforms for their implementation.



Creating an environment for innovation is equally important as having innovative solutions, for one cannot exist without the other. According to the UNDP Annual Report in 2016, 4 core functions were identified and lie at the heart of every innovation environment: opportunity, challenge, inspiration, and diagnosis. Further exploration of these four core functions, as well as their adaptation in every country, is critical for the generation of innovative solutions.



## IV. Bloc Positions

There is no doubt that all of the United Nations member states have committed to achieving the SDGs. Thus many world leaders and governments have started taking effective measures to combat the environmental decline. However, despite a unanimous interest, regional rankings in attaining the SDGs vary greatly between one region and another - and more so, between countries of the same region. Identifying the factors that attribute to such distinct phenomena is crucial for true sustainability. It is important to refer to the SDGs index and the indicators that identify the underperforming goals. One aspect to consider concerning the topic is environmental spillovers on an international level. While countries may be divided by region, the lack of consistency in the level of ranking amongst countries of the same region may provide an obstacle in finding solutions that are regionally based. Innovation plays an important role in this regard, especially when finding a solution that can adapt to different countries, cases, and regions.

## V. Recommended Sources and Further Research

- Draft Decision 1: Investing in Innovative Environmental Solutions for Accelerating Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 in Africa (At the 2017 African Union's African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), with the support of the UNEP, African leaders drafted a decision affirming the importance of innovative investment in protecting the environment and how such investments can help the African continent achieve both the UN's SDGs as well as the African Union (AU) Agenda 2032 goals)



- Addis Ababa Action Agenda (beneficial to explore funding pathways)
- The Dornod Aimag Environment office utilizes drone data to enhance environmental protection in Mongolia.
- The leveraging of crowdfunding to protect the environment, improve livelihoods, and strengthen local cultural identities in Ecuador
- Baidu Recycle app - UNDP partnership with Baidu and the Ministry of Environmental Protection to tackle electronic waste
- UNDP Maldives collaboration with leading drone company DJ, and robotics solutions provider WeRobotics for the utilization of drones to empower communities in response to natural disasters

## VI. Questions to Consider

1. Where will the funding come from for potential solutions?
2. What innovative solutions has your country implemented, and how can they be utilized as a global solution?
3. What kind of educational efforts surrounding innovation will the UN undertake?
4. What are the focus areas that your country has to work on?
5. How can the international community establish a platform for developing and implementing innovative solutions?
6. How can partnerships be utilized to encourage innovative solutions?



## VII. Conclusion

It is important to recognize that innovative solutions appear to be the most hopeful pathway to attain sustainability in environmental regards. With the environment facing decline and traditional solutions lacking efficiency, the need for innovative solutions characterized by high efficiency, fast-acting effects, and universal application/adaptability is constantly on the rise. Such solutions need to be catered to tackle different focus areas to eradicate all issues.

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