

Distr.

GENERAL  
Governing Council  
of the United Nations UNEP/GC.20/40  
Environment  
Programme

Twentieth  
session  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

22 December 1998

Nairobi, 1-5 February 1999  
Item 9 of the provisional agenda\*

PROGRAMME, THE ENVIRONMENT FUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND  
OTHER BUDGETARY MATTERS

Promoting interlinkages among global  
environmental issues and human needs

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

In adopting the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the

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United Nations Environment Programme, the Governing Council at its nineteenth session stated that one of the core elements of the focused mandate of UNEP should be "to analyse the state of the global environment and assess global and regional environmental trends, provide policy advice, early warning information on environmental threats, and to catalyse and promote international cooperation and action, based on the best scientific and technical capabilities available". Furthermore, the Nairobi Declaration calls on UNEP "to promote greater awareness and facilitate effective cooperation among all sectors of society and actors involved in the implementation of the international environmental agenda, and to serve as an effective link between the scientific community and policy makers at the national and international levels".

In line with the Nairobi Declaration, UNEP in partnership with the World Bank, and with additional financial support from the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration, collaborated in the preparation of the interlinkages assessment report Protecting Our Planet, Securing Our Future: Linkages Among Global Environmental Issues and Human Needs. The central message of the report is that scientific and policy interlinkages among major global environmental issues must be understood and that they need to be addressed in a more holistic manner if sustainable development is to become a reality. Moreover, the report is a major step forward in response to the growing concern that global environmental issues are being dealt with in a fragmented, disconnected manner.

#### Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

Bearing in mind Governing Council decisions 19/1 of 7 February 1997, on the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, and SS.V/2 of 22 May 1998, on revitalization, reform and strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme,

Having considered the report of the Executive Director on promoting interlinkages among global environmental issues and human needs (UNEP/GC.20/40),

Mindful of the importance of the scientific and policy interlinkages among global environmental issues, and their relevance to the human needs of food, shelter, health and clean water,

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Noting with appreciation the constructive collaboration between the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank in this initiative, as well as the financial support provided by the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration,

1. Welcomes the report Protecting Our Planet, Securing Our Future: Linkages Among Global Environmental Issues and Human Needs;

2. Expresses its appreciation to the many experts who contributed freely their time and expertise to the preparation of the report;

3. Urges Governments to take into consideration the conclusions and recommendations of the report in the preparation of their national environment and sustainable development strategies and plans;

4. Requests the Executive Director to provide the conclusions and recommendations of the report to the governing bodies of global environment conventions and relevant international agreements;

5. Further requests the Executive Director to continue work on the scientific and policy interlinkages among global environmental issues and human needs, paying particular attention to the scientific and policy linkages among global and regional environment conventions and related international agreements;

6. Urges the World Bank and other concerned international, regional and national organizations to collaborate with the United Nations Environment Programme in this endeavour.

## I. BACKGROUND

1. The concept for this paper originated at a workshop organized by UNEP in early 1996 on approaches to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity. The workshop focused principally on the interlinkages between biodiversity and climate change. The meeting recognized that the scientific community, policy makers in Governments and the secretariats of global environment conventions treated the issues of climate change, loss of biological diversity, land degradation and desertification, stratospheric ozone depletion, freshwater degradation, deforestation and unsustainable forestry, marine environment and resource degradation, and persistent organic pollutants in isolation, despite being linked through a set of physical, chemical and biological processes. At the conclusion of the workshop, UNEP formed a group of experts to prepare a report identifying the key scientific and policy linkages among these issues, as well as the linkages between these global environmental issues and the question of meeting the basic human needs of adequate food, clean water, energy and a healthy environment. This group of experts met on several occasions to tackle the complex task of analysing the scientific and policy linkages among global environmental issues and how these in turn are linked to meeting key human needs.

## II. THE INTERLINKAGES ASSESSMENT REPORT

2. The interlinkages assessment report, Protecting Our Planet, Securing Our Future: Linkages Among Global Environmental Issues and Human Needs, was produced with the support of many scientists, policy makers and technical specialists. It is directed at policy makers who represent their Governments at the negotiating sessions of environmental conventions, as well as managers and planners at the national level in ministries such as environment, agriculture, forestry, water resources, natural resource management, economic planning, energy, industry, and health.

3. As the end of the millennium approaches, the report clearly shows that environmental degradation is accelerating and the human condition deteriorating in many parts of the world. Both are inextricably linked: these global environmental problems are caused by the same driving forces of population size, level of consumption, and choice of technologies. The report clearly signals that the current rate of global environmental degradation is unprecedented and that reversing environmental damage, depending on the problem, can take decades to centuries. In the case of loss of biological diversity, the damage is irreversible.

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4. Three important recommendations emanate from the report:

(a) To effectively respond to global environmental problems, and in turn meet human needs more effectively, global environmental issues must be addressed in a holistic, integrated manner, building on the same policy instruments, such as global and regional environmental conventions, and technologies that are used to contend with these issues currently in a sectoral manner;

(b) New institutional partnerships involving Governments, the private sector, academia, non-governmental organizations, and civil society are needed at the global, regional and national levels to achieve a sustainable world;

(c) Taking into account the fact that most changes to the global environment cannot be reversed quickly and despite scientific uncertainties, decision makers need to adopt wise, cost-effective, and adaptive management approaches that can be implemented now.

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