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Policy issues: state of the environment

**Policy issues: coordination and cooperation
within the United Nations system on environmental matters**

**Joint progress report of the executive directors of the
United Nations Environment Programme and the
United Nations Human Settlements Programme**

Note by the Executive Director

Summary

The report provides an overview of the progress made over the period 2009–2010 in strengthening the cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. It also provides an overview of key activities in which such cooperation has taken place.

* UNEP/GC.26/1.

Introduction

1. In 2009 and 2010, cooperation expanded between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). In particular, the Partnership Framework for the period 2008–2013 was institutionalized through the adoption of biannual implementation plans. The current implementation plan for 2010–2011 is focusing on the issue of cities and climate change, with particular attention to, first, cities and climate change assessments; second, ecosystem-based adaptation in coastal cities; third, buildings, housing and construction; and fourth, sustainable urban transport.

2. UNEP and UN-Habitat continue to meet monthly to coordinate their cooperation through the Joint Operation and Coordination Group. The Group has the mandate to coordinate the Partnership Framework and is the primary vehicle for overseeing the implementation of joint activities. In addition, other forms of cooperation are being pursued at the local, regional, national and global levels.

3. The present report gives an overview of the progress made over the period 2009–2010 in strengthening the cooperation between the two programmes. It also provides an overview of key activities in which such cooperation has taken place.

I. Cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme

4. UN-Habitat and UNEP, with their complementary mandates in the fields of sustainable urban development and the global environment, have a history of continued cooperation spanning over 20 years. The overall goal of the cooperation between the two programmes is to mainstream environmental considerations into local, national and global urban policymaking, to incorporate urban perspectives into environmental policymaking at the global, national and local levels and to highlight the linkages between local and global environmental issues. Accordingly, considerable importance is attached to the need to integrate urban environmental considerations into the work of both programmes.

5. Under the Partnership Framework for the period 2008–2013, the two programmes have been stepping up their cooperation to provide better and more extensive services to local and national governments in the field of the urban environment. The aim is to enable cities better to assess and prioritize local environmental concerns and to have a voice in the national and global environmental debate, particularly in such areas as climate change. Helping countries and cities to implement global standards, agreements and conventions will enable them to link global concerns to local issues.

6. Over the reporting period the two programmes carried out the first 2008–2009 implementation plan of joint activities and embarked on the implementation of a second biannual workplan for 2010–2011. While the first implementation plan focused on providing cities and national Governments with tools and capacity-building in the area of environmental planning and management and in dealing with urban environmental issues across various sectors (air pollution, transport, energy, water and sanitation),¹ the current workplan is being implemented under the overall theme of cities and climate change. Joint activities focus on the inventorizing of urban greenhouse-gas emissions, the assessment of urban vulnerability to climate change impacts and the development of innovative adaptation mechanisms, for example, ecosystem services and mitigation efforts at the city level (particularly in the building and transport sectors).

7. The development of the UNEP medium-term strategy for the period 2010–2013 and the UNEP 2010–2011 programme of work was driven by a results-based implementation approach with six priority areas.² Likewise, the UN-Habitat medium-term strategic institutional plan for the period 2008–2013 defines six focus areas,³ which are further refined in a results framework. The joint

1 As described in the report on cooperation with agencies and organizations within the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations outside the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations submitted to the UN-Habitat Governing Council at its twenty-second session, HSP/GC/22/2/Add.5.

2 The six priority areas are the following: climate change, disasters and conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, harmful substances and hazardous waste, resource efficiency – sustainable consumption and production.

activities of the two programmes are fully integrated into their respective strategies and programmes of work.

8. UNEP and UN-Habitat meet monthly to coordinate their cooperation through the Joint Operation and Coordination Group. The Group has a mandate to coordinate the development of the Partnership Framework and is the primary vehicle for overseeing the implementation of joint activities. It comprises staff members of the Sustainable United Nations Unit of UNEP and the Urban Environmental Planning Branch of UN-Habitat and other employees from UNEP and UN-Habitat involved in work on joint activities. The deputy executive directors provide strategic direction and guidance to the Group.

9. In April 2009, the UNEP Urban Environment Unit was restructured as the Transport Unit under the Energy Branch of the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics, retaining its base at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi. Work on the urban environment moved to the Division's offices in Paris, under the responsibility of the Sustainable United Nations Unit of the Sustainable Consumption and Production Branch, with a view to ensuring that it was properly aligned with the work of the team working on sustainable buildings and, ultimately, to strengthening the urban team.

II. Joint activities for 2009–2010

A. Activities

10. The joint implementation plan for 2008–2009 focused on providing cities and national Governments with tools and capacity-building in four focus areas: climate-resilient cities in Africa; the Global Alliance for EcoMobility; improving the solid waste management strategy in Nairobi; and promoting urban biodiversity and ecosystems. In the third quarter of 2009, the Joint Operations and Coordination Group began to exchange ideas on the development of the implementation plan for the biennium 2010–2011. Three main principles guided that development process: first, the need to consult a wide range of branches, units and regional offices across UNEP and UN-Habitat; second, to ensure that joint activities would provide tangible results and impact and be fully aligned with the respective programmes of work; and third, to organize activities under the overarching theme of climate change and resource efficiency.

11. With the continued drive towards urbanization, climate change is perceived not only as a threat, but also as an opportunity for promoting green technologies and more compact approaches to urban growth. The future of hundreds of millions of people will be determined by the pace of mitigation and adaptation undertaken by cities over the coming decades. In addition to efforts at the global and national levels, local authorities are already leading the way in finding local solutions to these global challenges. Consequently, the implementation plan for 2010–2011 is focusing on cities and climate change, with particular attention paid to the following areas: cities and climate change assessments; ecosystem-based adaptation in coastal cities; buildings, housing and construction; and sustainable urban transport.

1. Cities and climate change assessments

12. Under the UN-Habitat cities and climate change initiative, mounted in 18 cities across Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, and the UNEP environmental and climate change outlook report at the national, regional and city levels, the two organizations are closely coordinating work on methodologies for climate change impact and vulnerability assessment in cities. Areas of collaboration include participation in peer-review mechanisms and the development of joint reports and assessments. Accordingly, UNEP and UN-Habitat launched on-the-ground coordination activities by carrying out joint scoping missions, including those in Maputo and Dar es Salaam in November 2009. This facilitated both the closer alignment of the work of the two organizations and the inclusion of local priorities.

2. Ecosystem-based adaptation in coastal cities

13. The Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Branch of the UNEP Division of Environmental Policy Implementation is working in partnership with the UN-Habitat Cities and Climate Change Initiative to develop demonstration projects for ecosystem-based adaptation in selected coastal cities in Pacific small island developing States. The project takes an innovative approach of testing and adapting

3 Focus area 1: effective advocacy, monitoring and partnerships; focus area 2: promotion of participatory planning, management and governance; focus area 3: promotion of pro-poor land and housing; focus area 4: environmentally sound basic urban infrastructure and services; focus area 5: strengthened human settlements finance systems; focus area 6: excellence in management.

ecosystem-based adaptation methodologies to the city level. It builds on existing vulnerability assessments for Lami in Fiji, Apia in Samoa and Port Vila in Vanuatu, supported by the Cities and Climate Change Initiative. Preliminary findings show that ecosystem-based adaptation is critical in all three cities. UNEP and UN-Habitat are working with local governments in Pacific island cities to incorporate effective ecosystem-based adaptation strategies into local adaptation planning.

3. Harnessing the mitigation potential of buildings, housing and construction

14. UN-Habitat, in cooperation with UNEP, the Global Environment Facility and the Governments of the East African Community (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania), is developing a programme on promoting energy efficiency in buildings in East Africa with the aim of mainstreaming energy-efficient measures in housing policy and building codes, standards and practices in the region. In particular, the programme will assist national and local governments, the private sector and the public to adopt energy-efficient practices, energy conservation measures and renewable energy technologies in buildings to tackle the problem of energy shortages and to contribute to climate change mitigation by cutting greenhouse gases.

15. From 4 to 6 May 2010, UN-Habitat hosted a conference in Nairobi on green building rating in Africa. The conference participants generally embraced the World Green Building Council model as a way for environmentally friendly stakeholders in a country's building sector to work together to promote greener building practices, and called for the formation of a regional network of emerging green building councils in Africa. UNEP also presented the key findings of its Sustainable Buildings and Climate Initiative.

16. The UN-Habitat Shelter Initiative for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation has developed a scoping study on sustainable building practices for affordable housing solutions, designed to achieve a better understanding of the implications of such practices for climate change mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. The study provides an overview of existing knowledge, lead research, best practices, key partners and academic institutions in the field of affordable and sustainable housing and sustainable land-use for housing and concludes with recommendations for action-oriented research. The Shelter Initiative has also developed a strategy paper to identify key areas of work, to define a road map and to explore specific areas of cooperation with the UNEP Sustainable Buildings and Climate Initiative and other strategic partners.

17. Furthermore, recognizing that a building's operational phase accounts for between 80 and 90 per cent of its lifetime emissions, a common carbon metric protocol for measuring energy use and reporting greenhouse-gas emissions from building operations is being developed by the UNEP Sustainable Building and Climate Initiative. It will be further tested in cities jointly selected by UNEP and UN-Habitat.

18. Lastly, in 2010, UNEP launched a project on sustainable buildings policies in developing countries, in cooperation with UN-Habitat, to assist national and local governments in establishing a policy foundation for mainstreaming sustainable construction and building approaches. The policy tools will be field-tested in two African cities, jointly selected with UN-Habitat.

4. Low-carbon cities: transport and urban planning dimension

19. In the area of urban transport, UN-Habitat has been working closely with UNEP to finalize a proposed project on promoting sustainable transport solutions for East African cities. This initiative aims to stem the growth in motorized individual travel, thus reducing traffic congestion and greenhouse-gas emissions in the capital cities of Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. The focus is on preparing improvements for public transport, in particular by introducing bus rapid transit systems and integrated networks for non-motorized transport, and also through traffic demand management and regional knowledge exchange. UN-Habitat is the implementing agency for this project, while UNEP plays an advisory role by coordinating feasibility analyses for the application of clean vehicle and fuel technology initiatives in the three countries and by disseminating its results throughout the region.

20. Beyond this project, UNEP and UN-Habitat are also cooperating with local partners such as the African Bicycle Network on joint activities to raise awareness of the importance of infrastructure improvements for pedestrians and cyclists in African cities. In line with the UNEP "Share the Road" initiative, these activities highlight a shared key message of both agencies: sustainable mobility needs expanded investments in infrastructure for integrated public transport and walking and cycling road infrastructure.

21. In addition to the above focus areas, which constitute the core of the 2010–2011 implementation plan, there are a number of existing networks, initiatives and outreach activities in which the two organizations are actively joining forces. One key example is the Green Economy

initiative, launched in 2008 by UNEP, which aims to motivate Governments and businesses significantly to increase investment in the environment as a new engine for economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction in the twenty-first century. The concept was subsequently adopted in 2009 as one of the eight priorities of the High-Level Committee on Programmes and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, with UNEP as the lead agency. Green Economy initiative activities include advisory services to countries interested in greening their economies, producing outputs such as the Green Economy Report and the Green Jobs Report and encouraging partners to ensure the effective promotion and implementation of green economy strategies. The Green Economy Report devoted an entire chapter to the important role of cities in the emergence of a green economy. UN-Habitat has contributed to the preparation of several chapters of the report and is exploring the potential for local green economy initiatives, jointly with UNEP.

22. The fifth session of the World Urban Forum took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 22 to 26 March 2010. UNEP supported UN-Habitat in the organization of the high-level dialogue session on the theme: “Sustainable urbanization: cities in a changing climate”. Other joint activities included a networking event on what might be termed “future-proofing” the world’s cities, at which UNEP and UN-Habitat, in concert with the World Bank and Cities Alliance, launched a common standard for measuring greenhouse-gas emissions and presented a UNEP/UN-Habitat joint publication on wastewater. In addition, two joint training events were conducted, the first on assessing cities’ vulnerability and adaptation to climate change, and the second on planning for cities in the transition towards a green economy.

23. UNEP is developing a methodology, under a joint work programme between UNEP and Cities Alliance, to ensure that the policies and strategies developed through city development strategies integrate environmental considerations from the outset. The methodology will provide a set of instruments and approaches to integrate and monitor environmental resources in the development and implementation of city strategies and policies, including measures to tackle the impacts of a changing climate. UN-Habitat is providing advice on this initiative, drawing on its expertise in environmental planning and management and the set of tools and instruments already developed through its sustainable cities and local Agenda 21 programmes.

24. UN-Habitat and UNEP continued to publish a joint urban environment e-newsletter, which is distributed twice a year to a network of cities and partner institutions, regional offices and other interested parties. The editions published during the reporting period covered the themes “Environmental planning and management”, “Cities in transition towards a green economy” and “Buildings, climate change and cities”.

25. UNEP and UN-Habitat presented their joint efforts at a number of events in 2009 and 2010, including the twentieth session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council and the twenty-fourth session of the UNEP Governing Council, the World Congress of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the ICLEI Resilient Cities Congress, through presentations, the organization of joint side events and joint exhibitions and other measures.

B. Key partnerships

26. UN-Habitat, UNEP, the World Bank and Cities Alliance have joined forces in taking on the issue of cities and climate change. The joint work programme pursued by the three organizations aims to contribute to a more coordinated and focused response to issues facing cities, in particular in developing countries. A process for developing a global standard on greenhouse-gas emissions originating from cities was launched in March 2010 during the World Urban Forum. Information on the baseline emissions of over 45 cities is already available. Other planned outputs of this joint work programme include a joint position paper on cities and climate change, the harmonization of approaches to urban risk assessments and the development of an online knowledge centre on cities and climate change.

27. The Territorial Approach to Climate Change is a partnership of five United Nations bodies (the United Nations Development Programme, UNEP, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, UN-Habitat and the United Nations Capital Development Fund) with subnational territories and their associations. The overall objective is “increased resilience to climate change impacts and reduced carbon footprint in subnational territories in developing countries and countries with economies in transition”. In 2009 and 2010, a needs assessment relating to climate change was carried out among over 100 subnational authorities. On this basis, a training package was designed for awareness-raising workshops for subnational authorities on climate change issues. To date, the training package has been used for training some 140 representatives of subnational authorities at workshops in Albania, Mexico, Thailand and Uganda. UN-Habitat supported the development of the

training modules for a pilot training programme coordinated by UNEP in cooperation with the East African Local Governments Association, whose participants included Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, and also assisted with its implementation.

28. UNEP, UN-Habitat and ICLEI have a long-standing partnership focusing on the role of cities in global environmental issues. Their cooperation is focused on the areas of cities and climate change for both UNEP and UN-Habitat and local action for biodiversity for UN-Habitat. Furthermore, UNEP supported the establishment of the ICLEI Centre for Local Climate Action and Reporting in Bonn, Germany, with the aim of supporting efforts by local authorities to promote low-carbon communities in cities through the sharing of information on climate commitments, greenhouse-gas inventories and mitigation and adaptation actions.

29. A number of joint publications have already been produced, including a guidebook on the ICLEI Local Action for Biodiversity initiative, the LAB Guidebook, and Sustainable Urban Energy Planning, a handbook for cities and towns in developing countries, launched jointly by ICLEI, UNEP and UN-Habitat at the ICLEI World Congress in Edmonton, Canada, in June 2009. UNEP and UN-Habitat have provided support for ICLEI events and initiatives, including its sessions on a local government climate road map, held in parallel with the sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and also the summit meeting held in South Africa in July 2009 to prepare for the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties, in Copenhagen. The second World Congress on Cities and Adaptation to Climate Change, known as the “Resilient Cities Congress”, held in Bonn in May 2010, was also supported. All these events contributed to raising the profile of local governments in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

30. UN-Habitat and UNEP are also cooperating in several United Nations inter-agency bodies, such as UN-Water, UN-Energy and the Environment Management Group. In 2009 and 2010, cooperation between UN-Habitat and UNEP within the framework of the UN-Water task force on wastewater management created new synergies in tackling the ever-increasing challenges posed by water pollution. The two organizations jointly produced a rapid assessment report on wastewater management entitled *Sick Water? The Central Role of Wastewater Management in Sustainable Development*, which was launched on 22 March 2010 as part of the World Water Day celebrations in Nairobi.

31. Over the period 2009–2010, UN-Habitat and UNEP jointly chaired the Inter-Agency Decade on Education for Sustainable Development and they are working together in the Education for Sustainable Development in Africa programme, which focuses on the development of a master’s degree on sustainable development for Africa, and is piloted by Kenyatta University and Nairobi University with support from the United Nations University.

32. UN-Habitat and UNEP also co-chaired the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues over the period 2009–2010. The Group was established to support and promote the mandate of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues within the United Nations system and throughout the broader intergovernmental system. Through this co-chair arrangement, the two programmes were able to strengthen their interlinkages, joint activities and respective in-house efforts in support of indigenous peoples and to highlight the importance that they attached to these issues.

33. UNEP and UN-Habitat have committed themselves to implementing the United Nations climate-neutral strategy and continue to coordinate their efforts in this area. In September 2010 UNEP launched a UNEP climate-neutral strategy, which, among other things, sets clear emissions reduction targets. Across the entire United Nations system, two Excel-based calculation systems are used for the quantification of greenhouse-gas emissions from air travel and office operations developed by UNEP (available at www.greeningtheblue.org). Greening the United Nations compound at Gigiri in Nairobi is linked to the climate-neutrality process. UNEP and UN-Habitat are in the process of moving into a new office building in Gigiri, which is a solar-powered energy-neutral office facility. Both programmes have been working closely together to make this a showcase for sustainable buildings in the United Nations and the world in general. The new office facility was completed in December 2010, with the first staff members to occupy their new offices in January 2011.

34. Within the context of the inter-agency framework team for preventive action, UN-Habitat and UNEP have been working together to improve the capacity of the United Nations and the European Union to tackle land and natural resource conflicts. To date, four guidance notes, a range of training materials and an expert roster have been developed. The second phase of activities includes providing technical advice in four pilot countries (Guinea, Liberia, Peru and Timor-Leste) and developing rapid response capacity to support United Nations and European Union representatives confronted by land or natural resource conflicts.

C. Regional highlights

35. The second report in the UN-Habitat series on the state of African cities, *The State of African Cities 2010: Governance, Inequity and Urban Land Markets*, was launched in November 2010. As its contribution, UNEP focused on the provision of relevant information on environment and climate change and supported a substantive review of sections on the environmental geography of climate change in African cities. Since 2009, UN-Habitat and UNEP have been working on issues related to land, natural resources and national land policy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries. In West Africa, UNEP and UN-Habitat are aiming to cooperate in creating a transboundary corridor between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia for the Tai-Sapo protected area complex. By taking up the issue of land titles, harmonizing legislation and acting to preserve the forest cover and fauna populations across the corridor, it should be possible to protect and consolidate some 13,500 square kilometres of the remaining forest cover in West Africa.

36. In Asia, the UN-Habitat Bangkok office is working closely with the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in promoting strategic partnerships on climate change within the framework of the United Nations Development Group regional team for Asia and the Pacific and on the preparation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework at the United Nations country team level.

37. In Myanmar, UN-Habitat is working in partnership with UNEP to support the country's environmental priorities. A Programme Officer for Environment is serving as the focal point for implementation of priorities identified in the joint programme, such as synergies between the thematic areas of urban development and environmental sustainability, and focusing on programmes for climate change adaptation and mitigation and environmental planning, in particular for cities and peri-urban settlements. In parallel, technical input will be provided to support national policies and strategies for Myanmar, such as the country's national sustainable development strategy and national biodiversity strategy and action plan, and an initial needs assessment and feasibility analysis conducted of the national action plan for climate change.

38. In Nepal, the two agencies have developed a comprehensive action plan in partnership with local organizations, designed to improve the water-flow of the Bagmati river in Kathmandu, and this initiative has been endorsed by the Government of Nepal.

39. UNEP contributed to the first-ever UN-Habitat report on the state of Asian cities, *The State of Asian Cities 2010/11*, by providing a chapter on urban environment and climate change and by reviewing the entire report.

40. In Latin America, under the umbrella of the UN-Habitat/UNEP joint urban environmental strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean, in addition to responding to demands from urban environmental authorities of the region, four urban environmental profiles have been prepared in Brazil for the cities of Marabá, Ponta Pora, Beberibe and Piranhas, with contributions from local governments and technical partners, the Ministry of Cities, the Ministry of Environment and the non-governmental organization Parcería 21. These reports were completed in 2009.

III. Future cooperation

41. In the coming years, the focus on cooperation will be on the implementation of the Partnership Framework for the period 2008–2013 and, in particular, the joint implementation plan for 2010–2011. New efforts will be made to define indicators to show the impacts and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration, to highlight its added value. Arrangements to improve the internal communication flow beyond the two headquarters will also be put in place. These recommendations were made at a joint senior management meeting, held in October 2010, and jointly chaired by the two deputy executive directors.

42. As reflected in the present report, much emphasis has been laid on the role of cities in climate change and resource efficiency. In addition to other initiatives in this regard, UN-Habitat is providing direct support to cities to deal with the effects of climate change through a cities in climate change initiative. Partner meetings will be organized, good practices published and climate change training and knowledge products developed for local decision makers and planners. UN-Habitat will also strengthen its work with city regions on strategic urban planning and sustainable urban mobility approaches. Particular emphasis will be laid on the role of urban patterns in moving towards a green economy, within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. These initiatives will be carried out in close cooperation with UNEP.

43. UNEP will continue to highlight the important role of cities at the global, national and local levels in tackling climate change, resource efficiency and ecosystem management and in demonstrating the wider economic and social benefits of green cities. It will provide expertise in a number of sectors, such as sustainable urban energy planning, sustainable buildings, urban climate change mitigation, urban transportation, integrated solid waste management and integrated water resource management. This will be effected with support from UN-Habitat and key city networks, such as ICLEI, United Cities and Local Governments and the C40 cities climate leadership group.

44. UN-Habitat and UNEP are expected further to intensify their cooperation within the framework of the Global Environment Facility, particularly regarding objective 4 of the Facility's climate change mitigation objectives: to promote energy efficient, low-carbon transport and urban systems.
