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**Policy issues: state of the environment; coordination and
cooperation with 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 Director¹

Summary

The present note provides an overview of the progress made over the period 2011–2012 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.

¹ Issued without formal editing.

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an overview of the progress made in the biennium 2011–2012 to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). It also provides an overview of key activities in which such cooperation has taken place. Cooperation between the two programmes was strengthened during the biennium by a joint implementation plan focusing on the issues of cities and climate change and resource efficiency at the city level.
2. Through their partnership, UNEP and UN-Habitat have increased the synergy between and the complementarity of their activities and developed a shared position on a number of critical issues, such as cities and climate change, in particular through the joint work programme with the World Bank and the Cities Alliance, which has provided a strong and effective channel for collaborative efforts. While UNEP and UN-Habitat both have distinct areas of expertise, they can competently advocate for each other's work on sustainable cities. Key partners have referred to this relationship as a clear demonstration of the "One United Nations" principle and consider it to be important for fundraising efforts for new activities.
3. UNEP and UN-Habitat continue to review progress through monthly teleconferences in order better 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, national, regional and global levels.

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

4. With their complementary mandates in the fields of urban development and the global environment, UN-Habitat and UNEP have a history of continued cooperation spanning more than 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 local, national and global levels and to highlight the linkages between local and global environmental issues. Accordingly, increased importance is attached to the need to integrate urban environmental considerations into the work of both programmes.
5. Under the Partnership Framework for 2008–2013, the two programmes have strengthened their cooperation to provide better and more extensive services to local and national governments in the field of the urban environment. The objective is to enable cities better to assess and prioritize local environmental concerns and to have a voice in national and global environmental debate, in particular in such areas as climate change. Helping countries and cities to implement global standards, agreements and conventions enables them better to link global concerns to local issues.
6. During the reporting period, the two programmes implemented the joint implementation plan, maintaining the overall theme of cities and climate change with an additional topic of resource-efficient cities.
7. Activities under the Partnership Framework are linked closely with the UNEP and UN-Habitat programmes of work. UNEP currently works in partnership with public and private stakeholders on six priority areas, or subprogrammes.² Joint activities are particularly pertinent for the resource efficiency and climate change subprogrammes. Likewise, the workplan is anchored to the UN-Habitat medium-term strategic institutional plan for the period 2008–2013, which is defined by six focus areas.³

² The six subprogrammes are climate change; disasters and conflicts; ecosystem management; environmental governance; harmful substances and hazardous waste; resource efficiency, including sustainable consumption and production.

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.

8. The Joint Operation and Coordination Group comprises staff members of the Sustainable Consumption and Production Branch/Built Environment Unit of UNEP and the Urban Planning and Design Branch of UN-Habitat and other staff from UNEP and UN-Habitat who are working on joint activities. The deputy executive directors of both programmes provide strategic direction and guidance to the Group.

9. Consultation on joint activities goes far beyond merely the branches that are responsible for inter-agency cooperation. The Partnership Framework has allowed for a much more structured mechanism for cooperation, with a number of key results, including: (a) the harmonization of methodologies and improved response to UNEP and UN-Habitat clients and partners (e.g., Global Environment Outlook (GEO) Cities Programme, Cities Alliance-funded projects); (b) expanded cooperation with extended partners (e.g., joint work programme with the World Bank on cities and climate change); (c) a united position and coordinated outreach (e.g., joint side events at sessions of the governing councils of UNEP and UN-Habitat, world urban forums and ministerial environment forums, joint publications and joint progress reports).

III. Joint activities

A. Joint implementation plan for 2011–2012

1. Cities and climate change assessments

10. During the sessions of the subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Bonn, Germany, in May 2012, UN-Habitat and UNEP participated in the launch of the Global Protocol for Community-scale Greenhouse Gas Emissions. That protocol, a key city-level assessment tool, grew out of the earlier collaboration between UNEP, UN-Habitat and the World Bank through a Cities Alliance-funded joint work programme on cities and climate change. In anticipation of the expiration of the joint work programme, the three partners have developed a project brief that proposes a second phase of consolidation of joint activities. UNEP, UN-Habitat and the World Bank jointly presented the proposal to the Cities Alliance partners at their Consultative Group meeting held in Hanoi on 30 October 2012.

11. The Global Protocol for Community-scale Greenhouse Gas Emissions represents a significant step forward for cities in terms of their ability to assess their contribution to climate change by harmonizing the measurement of emissions and reporting processes for cities of all sizes and geographies. This transparent, consistent and common approach provides cities with a much-needed tool to increase access to climate action planning and financing and offers a platform for the sharing of lessons learned between cities around the world and advocating for policies that better address climate change in urban areas. Moreover, it provides critical input for low-emission urban development strategies. More than 30 expert organizations and cities worldwide have provided input to the Protocol. As a next step, partners, including UN-Habitat and UNEP, will pilot test the Protocol in a number of cities. The ultimate objective is to establish a single minimum global standard for community-scale greenhouse gas emissions measurement.

2. Ecosystem-based adaptation in coastal cities

12. The Freshwater and Marine Ecosystems Branch, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation of UNEP, has partnered 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. Such collaboration forms part of a broader UNEP initiative on ecosystem-based adaptation. UNEP and UN-Habitat are taking the lead in ecosystem-based adaptation through an initial demonstration project in Lami, Fiji. Under the project, a number of activities are being implemented in the framework of a careful mix of adaptation approaches recommended by experts from UNEP and UN-Habitat.

13. The Lami town council, UN-Habitat and the World Wildlife Fund are now working to rehabilitate mangroves and plant vetiver grass along river banks to minimize erosion. Monitoring the implementation of those measures, which are seen as quick-win options, will help to strengthen cost-benefit analyses in Pacific small island developing States as existing assumptions regarding the costs and benefits of such measures are based on experiences in other regions.

14. Lessons learned in Lami are currently being applied in other cities in Fiji. Experience garnered in the context of the Lami project and, to a lesser extent, in two other cities, will be shared at a Pacific regional workshop. As the UN-Habitat Cities and Climate Change Initiative expands in the Pacific region, UN-Habitat and UNEP will work 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**

15. UNEP and UN-Habitat have collaborated in a number of conferences and meetings focused on sustainable buildings and construction. UNEP organized a two-day kick-off meeting in Nairobi on 1 and 2 September 2011 to officially launch the project on sustainable buildings policies in developing countries, which is under way in Burkina Faso and Kenya. UN-Habitat contributed actively in the meeting in recognition of its role as a key partner in the initiative. UN-Habitat also participated in the World Sustainable Building Conference, held in Helsinki in October 2011, which was co-organized by the UNEP Sustainable Buildings and Climate Initiative (SBCI), the International Council for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction and the International Initiative for a Sustainable Built Environment. Similarly, UNEP contributed actively to the UN-Habitat initiative to promote coordination and knowledge-sharing in the field of sustainable urban development, i-HOUSE, and the International Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Housing, held in Nairobi in December 2011.

16. In 2011–2012, UNEP and UN-Habitat identified new areas of potential cooperation, including joint contribution to and co-branding of reports on energy efficiency in buildings and sustainable social housing and national reports on sustainable building policies and best practices. UN-Habitat has also agreed to serve on the Advisory Board of the UNEP Sustainable Social Housing Initiative in Bangladesh and India.

17. Specific areas identified for future cooperation include: (a) contributing to reports, including national reports in project countries, a series of reports on sustainable building policies and practices entitled “State of play” and country baseline emission and reduction potential reports; (b) establishing a common platform to engage the UNEP network to advance UN-Habitat efforts on the ground; (c) joint fundraising and project promotion projects; (d) identifying strategic openings to impact construction sector supply chains; (e) scaling up building code initiatives in cooperation with other organizations; (f) promoting further activities through UNEP regional centres (such as the Building and Construction Authority in Singapore); identifying potential regional centres through UN-Habitat work; (g) inviting UN-Habitat to participate in the UNEP-SBCI task force on greening the building sector supply chain, launched in 2012; (h) seeking to align the UNEP Sustainable Social Housing Initiative indicators and reporting formats with the UN-Habitat policy guide for sustainable housing in developing countries (for consistent mainstreaming of policies in pro-poor housing and slum upgrading programmes); (i) co-branding the Sustainable Social Housing Initiative and the UN-Habitat sustainable housing reports and tools to increase profile and exposure; and (j) adopting UNEP tools, such as the common carbon metric and the quick scan policy tool, to provide measurements and indicators.

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

18. UN-Habitat and UNEP have been cooperating on the implementation of a project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) on promoting sustainable transport solutions for East Africa. The aim of the project is to provide technical and institutional support for the design and implementation of a high-quality and efficient public transport system that integrates non-motorized transport in Addis Ababa, Nairobi and Kampala. It seeks to leverage the respective comparative advantages of the two programmes in a complementary manner to provide a complete “menu of services” for cities. Each programme is taking the lead on interventions that fall within its area of comparative advantage. For example, UN-Habitat is taking the lead on urban planning to help cities avoid unsustainable modes and patterns of transport before they face infrastructural lock-in, while UNEP is taking the lead in the clean technology component, helping cities to improve the performance and efficiency of existing modes of transport. The clean technology component is providing technical assistance to the three capital cities to select the best available clean bus technology for the planned bus rapid transit systems.

19. In the context of the project on promoting sustainable transport solutions for East Africa, UN-Habitat and UNEP are jointly supporting the Government of Uganda in the improvement of non-motorized transport facilities in Kampala. Both programmes are supporting the pilot project to introduce the use of public space for pedestrians and cyclists in Kampala city centre. As part of the “Share the road project”, UNEP is supporting the appraisal of existing conditions for the implementation of the pilot project, while UN-Habitat is contributing to the stakeholders’ consultation, communications and public participation as part of the development of a city-wide concept of sustainable urban mobility.

20. The implementation of the “Streetscape project” is under way in Kigali with the objective of allocating public space for the use of pedestrians and cyclists in the city centre. UN-Habitat is supporting the implementation component, which includes quality control, technical assistance in

urban planning, urban mobility and impact assessment, while UNEP was involved in the detailed design component as part of the “Share the road” project.

B. Key partnerships

21. UNEP and UN-Habitat are working together to ensure synergy between their activities and the alignment of the positions of both institutions in relation to cities and climate change and resource efficiency. UN-Habitat, for example, served on the cities working group of the UNEP-hosted International Resource Panel and contributed to the related report entitled “City-level decoupling: urban resource flows and the governance of infrastructure transitions”, which will be launched in 2013.

22. The collaboration between UN-Habitat and UNEP extends its influence to shared partners, in particular in the context of the joint work programme on cities and climate change begun in 2010. Climate change is increasingly affecting cities in a variety of ways. It is crucial, therefore, that cities take responsibility for reducing the vulnerability and risk exposure of their residents, especially the urban poor, while taking action to reduce their carbon footprints. UNEP, UN-Habitat, the World Bank and the Cities Alliance aim to contribute to a more coordinated and focused response to challenges facing cities, in particular in developing countries. The entities involved in the joint work programme all consider it to be a success, in particular because it inspires cooperation among them and shapes the climate change agenda for cities of all sizes in all the regions. The joint work programme focuses on five areas: knowledge management, operational support, monitoring, awareness-raising and coordination, building on the added value and comparative advantages of the entities involved. It was awarded the World Bank Vice-President Team Award in 2011 in recognition of its efforts as a unique showcase of the positive effects of successful consensus-building in a global partnership.

23. The development of a Knowledge Centre on Cities and Climate Change (K4C), which was launched at the sixth session of the World Urban Forum, held in Naples, Italy, in September 2012, is one of the key accomplishments of the joint work programme. UNEP and UN-Habitat worked together with the World Bank and the Cities Alliance to develop an online platform that is unique in that it is managed jointly by the four entities and provides the most up-to-date information, research and best practices available on cities and climate change. UNEP and UN-Habitat are now considering the use of K4C as a primary tool in the information dissemination strategy of the UN-Habitat Cities and Climate Change Initiative. Other key achievements of the joint work programme include:

- (a) Building on the prior development of the first standardized protocol to measure greenhouse gas emissions in cities: in May 2012, during the sessions of the subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UN-Habitat and UNEP participated in the launch of the Global Protocol for Community-scale Greenhouse Gas Emissions;
- (b) Piloting the mainstreaming of climate change issues into city development strategies;
- (c) Facilitating the development of a “Guide to climate change adaptation in cities”;
- (d) Promoting the development of a tool for urban risk assessment.

24. In anticipation of the expiration of the joint work programme in December 2011, UNEP, UN-Habitat and the World Bank have developed a project brief that proposes a second phase of consolidation of joint activities. On the basis of an independent external evaluation, the three partners elaborated the cornerstones of a second phase for the application, operationalization and dissemination of products developed during the first phase. They jointly presented the proposal to the Cities Alliance partners at their Consultative Group meeting held in Hanoi on 30 October 2012.

25. In the lead-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, the two organizations worked together closely on advocacy to promote the sustainable urban development agenda and in the organization of events on that topic. The preparations for Rio+20 represented an excellent example of inter-agency cooperation in the context of the “One United Nations” initiative, with each entity acknowledging the added value and complementarity of the other. The complementary mandates of UN-Habitat and UNEP have also been recognized and welcomed by representatives of major groups, with UN-Habitat clearly acknowledged as the lead agency on urban planning and human settlements and UNEP contributing to the sustainable development agenda through a resource efficiency perspective.

26. UNEP and UN-Habitat collaborated on cities and climate change and on resource efficient cities at Rio+20 and at the sixth session of the World Urban Forum. They continue to participate in each other’s meetings and events and have presented shared positions on a number of issues, including resource efficient cities, cities and climate change and urbanization. UN-Habitat contributed actively to events organized by UNEP at Rio+20 on the following themes: “Inspire, invest, innovate: the

business case for the green economy”; “Contributions of local authorities and businesses to achieving green economy and improving governance for sustainable development in China”; and “Building a common framework for resource efficient cities and buildings”. During the sixth session, UNEP took part in a meeting of the partners of the UN-Habitat Cities and Climate Change Initiative. The partners discussed the establishment of an advisory committee that will comprise members from a number of United Nations entities, interest groups and international non-governmental organizations. At the session, UNEP organized two key side events on the concept of decoupling in cities and the Global Initiative for Resource Efficient Cities.

27. UNEP launched the Global Initiative at Rio+20 with the support of and in close cooperation with UN-Habitat. The Global Initiative was developed on the basis of UNEP experience on sustainable consumption and production, resource efficiency and the green economy. Cities will be largely responsible for deciding on and implementing a transition to more sustainable technologies, policies and consumption and production behaviours. In this context, greater understanding is required on resource flows and resource assessments (inputs and outputs) in cities with the overall aim of clarifying the resource footprint of a given city. It will provide decision makers in cities with a unique tool to support and track progress on the efficient use of the resources available to them. The Global Initiative provides support to national and local governments in the form of research, policy support and networking among cities.

28. The Global Initiative seeks to connect the many entities around the world working on resource efficiency using the convening power of UNEP to mobilize partners and constituencies from among governments at the national and local levels, civil society, business and industry and other major groups. UN-Habitat was an active participant in the first meeting of the Global Initiative’s steering committee, held during the sixth session of the World Urban Forum. The steering committee comprises members from national and local research institutions, international organizations and the private sector.

29. UN-Habitat and UNEP co-chair a UN-Water task force on wastewater management, which was established in 2010 to facilitate coordination among United Nations entities and partners on wastewater management and water quality. In the light of the outcomes of Rio+20, a process has been initiated by the task force to develop a draft sustainable development goal target and associated indicators on effective wastewater management and pollution control.

C. Regional highlights

30. In Africa, UN-Habitat and UNEP participated in a regional training course on climate change assessments in July 2012. A total of 35 participants from eight southern African countries attended the course, sharing their experiences in relation to addressing climate change at the subnational level and discussing integrated territorial climate change plans.

31. UN-Habitat and UNEP are also collaborating on the formulation of a Lake Tanganyika water supply, sanitation and environmental management programme, specifically in the context of preparing a project to strengthen the environmental aspects of the programme, for submission to GEF.

32. In Myanmar, UN-Habitat is working in partnership with UNEP to support the country’s environmental priorities. UNEP and UN-Habitat have signed an agreement with the Government of Myanmar to prepare a joint report on the state of the environment to be finalized by the end of 2012 or early 2013. The two programmes also have a joint national environment officer (fully funded by UN-Habitat) based in Yangon who serves as the focal point for joint work on the preparation of a tool to allow the United Nations country team to mainstream urban environment concerns in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. UNEP and UN-Habitat are working on a joint climate change programme with funding from the European Union totalling some 4 million euros. Feedback from the European Union revealed that the strong working relationship between UNEP and UN-Habitat was instrumental in securing the grant.

33. In the Pacific region, UNEP and UN-Habitat are testing and adapting ecosystem-based adaptation methodologies at the city level. Building on existing city-wide climate change vulnerability assessments for Lami, Apia and Port Vila, with support from the Cities and Climate Change Initiative, the partnership is exploring how a deeper understanding of ecosystem services can shape adaptation planning. The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme participated in a related cost-benefit analysis.

IV. Future cooperation

34. In the next two years, the focus of UNEP and UN-Habitat cooperation will be on the finalization of the Partnership Framework 2008–2013 and the development of a new Partnership Framework starting in 2014. UNEP and UN-Habitat are planning to undertake an independent evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of their collaboration over the past five years.
35. A high-level meeting to be chaired by the two executive directors is scheduled for the first quarter of 2013 with the objectives of: (a) reviewing and assessing cooperation; (b) exploring how the two partners could better contribute to each other's work; (c) agreeing on next steps for enhanced cooperation through certain defined strategic areas.
36. UN-Habitat continues to provide direct support to cities in dealing with the effects of climate change through its Cities and Climate Change Initiative. At the sixth session of the World Urban Forum, UN-Habitat convened a meeting of the partners, including UNEP, to review its progress over the previous four years at both the normative and operational levels and to consider how to create a more formal advisory structure to support the initiative.
37. UN-Habitat intends to strengthen its urban and metropolitan planning work with city regions on developing sustainable urban spatial development patterns in support of a green economy. Particular emphasis will be placed on mainstreaming ecosystem services into spatial planning and improving landscape connectivity. These activities will continue to be carried out in cooperation with UNEP.
38. UNEP and UN-Habitat are exploring the possibility of collaborating on the promotion of ecosystems-based adaptation in larger pilot cities in Asia with the objectives of: (a) strengthening adaptive capacity and reducing the vulnerability of urban populations in medium-sized cities to climate change impacts; (b) strengthening urban ecosystem resilience through the promotion and application of ecosystem-based adaptation; and (c) integrating ecosystem-based adaptation into national climate change risk management strategies and development planning. The project would draw on the respective strengths of the two programmes in protecting ecosystems and building the capacities of city governments and build on their long history of collaboration in promoting improved management of the urban environment, including through the Sustainable Cities Programme, a joint UN-Habitat and UNEP initiative that continued until 2007.
39. UNEP will continue to highlight the important role of cities at the local, national and global levels in tackling climate change, resource efficiency and ecosystem management and in demonstrating the wider social and economic benefits of green cities. UNEP invited UN-Habitat and a number of other partners to the first meeting of the steering committee of the Global Initiative for Resource Efficient Cities, held during the sixth session of the World Urban Forum. The meeting focused on the operationalization of the Global Initiative and the development of an operational plan and a business plan. UNEP will continue to provide technical expertise in a number of relevant sectors, such as sustainable urban energy planning, sustainable building technology, sustainable urban mobility and integrated solid waste management, with support from UN-Habitat.
40. "Sustainable buildings and construction" was identified as a priority theme in the ten-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns, adopted by Heads of State and Government in the outcome document of Rio +20, entitled "The future we want".⁴ This recognized the significant economic impact of the construction sector on sustainable consumption and production. UNEP will work closely with UN-Habitat on future activities in this area through its Sustainable Buildings and Climate Initiative, which has developed a strong network of partnerships to promote sustainability and resource efficiency in the construction sector.

⁴ General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex, para. 226.