



First session

Agenda item
26 March 2022

**Synopsis for Environmental Consequences
of Progress on Sustainable Development
Goals in Developing Countries**

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Progress on Sustainable Development Goals in
Developing Countries**

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the United Nations Environmental Programme the topic synopsis entitled “Environmental Consequences of Progress on Sustainable Development Goals in Developing Countries” (UNEP/SYN/IIE/01.3).



Environmental Consequences of Progress on Sustainable Development Goals in Developing Countries

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Section I—Introduction

The United Nations Environmental Programme is the UN’s primary body for matters regarding ecology, conservation, and environmental sustenance. It works to promote the widespread sustainable development of the environment.

Section II—Topic Background

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of seventeen goals set by the UN to be completed by 2030. According to the UN, they are “a call for action by all countries – poor, rich and middle-income – to promote prosperity while protecting the planet.” However, certain goals, such as those pertaining to economic and job growth, ending poverty, and attaining zero hunger lead to severe environmental consequences in several developing countries. Environmental consequences include the decline of natural resources, damage of natural ecosystems, pollution, soil erosion, and the long-term presence of toxic pollutants in the air.

Emerging countries in particular struggle to develop sustainably, as many obstacles prevent long-term progress towards these goals. One of these obstacles includes limited government involvement in consistent development. Oftentimes governments will abandon development projects due to a change in administration and political beliefs. The overwhelming lack of bipartisanship on these issues prevents developing countries from consistently focusing on the SDGs. An obstacle to the aforementioned issue includes industrialization. Many developing nations do not have the economic stability to industrialize sustainably, since many of their profitable industries heavily rely on natural resources and fossil fuels. For example, in order to reach Goal 8, many countries promote controversial industrial practices because they are profitable and produce more job growth.

Industrialized countries also have obstacles to developing sustainably. Many developed countries rely on the services and labor provided by developing nations. Developed countries also support unendurable development practices and industries in other countries through imported goods. The UN states that “through unsustainable consumption and value chains, exports of toxic pesticides and weapons, and unfair tax competition and profit shifting” developed countries “undermine other countries’ ability to achieve the SDGs”. This is defined as an international spillover, or when countries’ can positively or negatively affect the development of other countries. Trade-related spillovers especially can result in negative environmental consequences through excessive use of fossil fuels.

Section III—Possible Solutions

The damage to natural ecosystems caused by economic development varies from case to case. In some instances, soil erosion has occurred and must be taken seriously. To help in this case, the introduction of diverse plant life, as well as new soil, into the preexisting ecosystem, produces great benefit. Forsaken ecosystems, such as abandoned forests, can also be restored with the proper nutrients and maintenance. Aquatic ecosystems as well can benefit from proper waste regulation.

However, there are ways to ensure that dire environmental consequences do not occur in regard to the SDGs. Stricter regulations regarding economic practices such as oil drilling or hydraulic fracking can be implemented in order to prevent environmental consequences. Inspections by the UN to ensure that countries are adhering to agreed-upon standards of development would make it easier to stop damage before the aforementioned situation occurs to an extent in which it cannot be fixed.

Section IV—Bloc Positions

African: The African Bloc is primarily made up of developing nations and has made minimal progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The region heavily relies on agriculture for employment opportunities as well as food security. However, certain agricultural practices are harmful to the environment and can lead to soil degradation and water depletion.

Asia and the Pacific: The Asia-Pacific Bloc is made up of mostly developing nations. This region has attained significant progress in industry, innovation, and infrastructure (Goal 9) as well as decent progress on work and economic growth (Goal 8). However, economic growth in the region is heavily dependent on using natural resources, which have led to regression on environment-related goals.

Eastern European: The Eastern European bloc consists of developed nations, however like Western Europe, the Eastern Europe Bloc also faces environmental challenges while trying to achieve the SDGs. Eastern Europe lags behind the Western European bloc on many of the environmental SDGs such as climate action (Goal 13) and responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) due to industrial practices and resource use that are environmentally detrimental.

Latin American and Caribbean: The Latin American and Caribbean bloc have had immense economic and industrial growth in recent years. However, this development has come at the cost of the environment. For example, the forestry industry in Brazil allows for the creation of many jobs and provides the country with economic growth while also negatively impacting the environment through excess deforestation.

Western European and Others: The Western European Bloc is composed of developed nations. However, despite being more developed than other countries, Western Europe faces many challenges to achieving the SDGs due to overconsumption, untenable agricultural practices, as well as large amounts of carbon emissions. Western Europe is also largely responsible for generating international spillovers through overconsumption of imports which leads to deforestation and environmental degradation outside of Europe.

Section V—Questions That Should Be Taken Into Consideration

What constitutes an ecosystem?

At what point is environmental damage irreparable?

How do most developing nations approach the UN Sustainable Development Goals? What specific consequences do these actions have?

What are the most common environmental side effects of the pursuit of the UN SDGs?

Section VI—Helpful Sites and Resources

Research Database—Sustainable Development Report—Track SDG achievement by country
bit.ly/IIMUN2022-UNEP (Shortened URL from sdgindex.org)

Report—Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—Policies Aimed At Reducing Deforestation
bit.ly/IIMUN2022-UNEP1 (Shortened URL from ipcc.ch)

Article—Down to Earth—Asia-Pacific may achieve just 10% targets of sustainable development goals:
UN report
bit.ly/IIMUN2022-UNEP2 (Shortened URL from downtoearth.org)

Report—Sustainable Development Report—Europe Sustainable Report 2021
bit.ly/IIMUN2022-UNEP3 (Shortened URL from sdgindex.org))

Article—Economics Help—Environmental Impact of Economic Growth
bit.ly/IIMUN2022-UNEP4 (Shortened URL from economicshelp.org)

Research Database—UN Development Programme—UN Sustainable Development Goals
bit.ly/IIMUN2022-UNEP5 (Shortened URL from undp.org)

Article—United Nations Environmental Programme—A beginner’s guide to ecosystem restoration
bit.ly/IIMUN2022-UNEP6 (Shortened URL from unep.org)

Potential Search Terms—UNEP Sustainable Development Goals, environmental impact, ecosystem restoration, Climate change and SDGs