

Inter-Agency assessment of sustainable development 20 years on from the Earth Summit: progress, gaps & strategic guidelines for Latin America & the Caribbean
Side event at 3rd Intersessional Meeting,
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UNEP contribution:

Key actions for the region from the perspective of UNEP

Delivered by Arab Hoballah, Chief SCP/UNEP on behalf of Ms. Amina Mohamed, Deputy Executive Director of UNEP;

Dear Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy SG of the UN,
Dear Ms. Alicia Barcena, ES of ECLAC,
Dear Ms. Lakshmi Puri, DED of UN-Women,
Dear Mr. Niky Fabiancic, Deputy Regional Director, LAC/UNDP,
Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good afternoon

On behalf of Ms Amina Mohamed, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), I would like to apologize on her behalf as she had to make last minute changes to her schedule.

Allow me first to express our appreciation to the Ms- Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean for the invitation to UNEP to participate in the launching of this document, result of the joint efforts of more than 20 agencies.

The launching of this document gives us an opportunity to reflect on the challenges that we still face, considering the progress made in the last 20 years. The Rio+20 gives us the opportunity to adopt a paradigm shift to accelerate and scale-up many of the extraordinary transitions already underway in the region and elsewhere.

As indicated in the assessment, Latin America and the Caribbean has achieved remarkable successes: to mention a few:

- Since 1992 environmental legislation and institutions have been strengthened and sustainable development has been introduced in public policies and national programmes
- The total surface of protected areas has doubled and now stands at over 20% of the region's territory
- Major advances have been registered in relation to toxic chemicals and waste management

But like all regions of the globe, we know that the successes are being overshadowed by the speed of environmental changes that are challenging the very life support systems that sustain progress and prosperity, especially among the poor and the vulnerable.

The comparative indicators reveal that two decades of reiterated commitments by the international community have not been sufficient to eradicate poverty, hunger, inequality and environmental degradation.

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region rich in diversity of environments, ecosystems, species and cultures; today this richness finds itself under threat due to the predominant models of economic development in the region.

The growing tendency toward urbanization in the region is a generalized phenomenon with major environmental, social, economic, and political consequences. The region has the largest percentage of urban population (79%) of all developing regions in the planet.

Climate change, the loss of biodiversity, environmental degradation, the emergencies caused by natural disasters, water scarcity, and accelerated urbanization make urgent the need for strong and decisive changes in environmental management, in particular in the integration of these changes in each country's development programmes.

Despite the region's advances in environmental matters, important challenges still persist to achieve sustainable development. The present model of development has generated economic growth, but also environmental degradation and societal breakdown, to the degree that currently Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with the greatest inequality in the world.

In the region, it is necessary to design and implement policies and create enabling conditions that strengthen the investment toward sustainable development and a sustainable society, in a way that is crosscutting and integrated with sectoral and development policies.

Also needed are greater financial and technological investments applied to environmental matters, and improved access to standardized, up-to-date, comparable, and quality data that support informed decision-making. It is crucial to highlight the dependent relationship that human populations have with ecosystems and the goods and services that these provide.

We must put forward an agenda for this region which integrates effectively the economic, social and environmental pillars, and recognizes the interaction among them.

The assessment, as already mentioned, puts forward a set of policy guidelines for achieving sustainability. The report suggests, among others, the need to measure sustainability of development, the internalization of the environmental and social costs and benefits of public and private economic decisions, as well as the formulation of the formulation of better policies based on a more informed, participatory process.

In this regard, the guidelines are focused towards ensuring that the pathways and policies move towards an economy that delivers economic progress and generates decent employment, but without pushing humanity through planetary boundaries.

As proposed in other fora and recommended by the regional consultation meeting last September, measuring well-being would require a shift to metrics that incorporate non-economic markets-based aspects of well-being, including sustainability issues.

The blind pursuit of the business as usual GDP growth comes at a tremendous cost to society. Specifically, such trend would result in:

- Growth that fails to reflect in its ledgers of profit, the loss and resource depletion, as well as environmental degradation,
- Growth that fails to distinguish socially desirable goods and services from those that are undesirable, and
- Growth that is unable to capture many of the crucial variables for human welfare which take place outside of the market sphere (as social networks or ecosystem services)

GDP does not take into account that:

- Over the last 25 years, while the world economy has more than doubled, 60% of the world's ecosystem services covered by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment are found degraded or used unsustainably.
- Each year, 13 million ha of the world's forests disappear, equivalent to the land area of Greece.
- According to UNEP's Year Book 2012, 24 per cent of the global land area has already suffered declines in health and productivity over the past quarter century as a result of unsustainable land-use.
- Some kinds of conventional and intensive agriculture are triggering soil erosion rates some 100 times greater than the rates at which nature can form soil in the first place.
- By 2030, without changes in the way land is managed, over 20 per cent of terrestrial habitats such as forests, peatlands and grasslands in developing countries alone could be converted to cropland-aggravating losses of vital ecosystem services and biodiversity.
- Global warming, for example, could trigger increasing numbers of displaced people and make whole countries uninhabitable including the low lying island of the Maldives and Kiribati.

UNEP in its submission to the outcome document has called for a 'Committing to the development of an internationally-agreed accounting framework and metrics to complement GDP for better measurement for progress towards sustainable development' and pointed to building blocks that already exist and could be synthesized and integrated into national accounting frameworks. A number of initiatives are leading the way to new measurements, in which UNEP as well as many of you here today are involved.

Such initiatives are also being informed by the findings and the ways of measuring wealth outlined in The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) - a broad partnership that emerged from the G8 in Potsdam and was hosted by UNEP.

There are clear signs that many countries are already heading onto more creative paths at least in some sectors and areas of their economies that will contribute towards sustainable development. Let me give you some examples:

Ecuador has centred its development strategy on a "National Plan of Good Living," that puts human well-being and sustainability at the centre of economic planning, and has enshrined rights to a healthy environment in its Constitution, making it an inspiring model of sustainable development in Latin America and beyond.

Mexico's energy policy is aimed at increasing its renewable power generation capacity to 7.5% of its energy mix by 2017 and reducing its carbon emissions by 20% by the year 2020.

Costa Rica has taken a commitment to become carbon neutral by 2021 based on its national strategy on climate change.

Barbados, with its plans to install solar water heaters in 50 per cent of households by 2025-is on a trajectory to reach this goal even earlier.

There is long and rich list of examples.

Rio+20 represents the single opportunity to take bold measures to ensure efficiency and productivity, to decouple economic growth from resource use and from environmental impacts, and to truly ensure the achievement of a transformative sustainable and progressive development in the 21st century.

As it has been the case in the preparation of this important report under the coordination of ECLAC, it is crucial that UN Agencies cooperate more closely as One Un to assist global and local communities improving their knowledge for better informed decision-making process and actions for achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty.

Thank you for your attention