

The Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP
8 December 2016
Gigiri, UN Office at Nairobi
Conference Room 4

Update on Progress of Work on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

Introduction

A combination of new leadership, and a more explicit focus on Ocean, opens up the space for a reflection on the role of UN Environment with regard to the marine and coastal environment. The strategic work ahead needs to draw upon a collaborative approach, guided by Agenda 2030 and grounded in UN Environment Assembly Resolutions (1/6, 2/6, and 2/11), the Medium Term Strategy 2014-2017, and 2018-2021. This briefing provides an update on the current progress of work, and provides a basis for discussion with Member States the roadmap on marine and coastal environment, for the years ahead.

Strategic Roadmap

There is a need for enhanced leadership in the ocean space and strengthened capability to implement ocean-related targets and indicators in Agenda 2030. UN Environment combines expertise in-house, a world-wide network in Governments, NGOs, science community and great potential to reach out to the private sector. The mandate and power to convene member states and contracting Parties to the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans gives UN Environment a unique role in facilitating progress and implementation of agreed policy frameworks.

At the same time, it is crucial not to duplicate efforts or develop parallel initiatives or processes. A gap analysis identifying where the biggest impact could be achieved, and where UN Environment can play a central role as a game changer, is fundamental to transformative leadership for oceans. UN Environment aims to support Member States and promote champions in their work to spread best practice and create incentives for change. At the same time, more knowledge is needed in some parts of the world, in particular in Small Island Developing States and low income countries.

UN Environment is actively participating in the preparatory process for the UN Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*, through the Informal Preparatory Working Groups established by the Advisory Panel to the co-chairs of the Conference. Two key themes have been brought forward to the United Nations Conference on Oceans, (1) regional ocean governance; and (2) the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from land-based Activities.

UN Environment is currently revising the 2011 marine and coastal ecosystem strategy.

Progress of Work

Global Leadership on oceans is still fragmented. UN Environment plays a critical role in shaping the ocean agenda and the implementation of the ocean-related targets in Agenda 2030. Strong collaboration with other relevant UN bodies and relevant stakeholders aims to create a platform for change. The revision of the 2011 Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Strategy will be based on engagement and ownership by Member States.

Communication

UN Environment aims to communicate stories and create a passion for commitment and change by educating and enhancing knowledge about the linkages between healthy oceans and life on land. (Still the lack of knowledge about the ocean and its resources is enormous, therefore one key component for change is to address ocean literacy). A central part of increasing the knowledge base is to communicate the value of the marine resources, both in economic, social and cultural terms. For many developing countries that depend on ocean resources for livelihoods, knowledge about ocean health and economics is crucial. Further knowledge about the value of marine resources will showcase the economic benefits of restoring ocean health.

UN Environment wishes to move into a more action and campaigning mode, focusing on specific urgent issues, such as marine plastic and coral reefs. Policymakers need to understand and integrate values of marine ecosystems and their services as well as the effect of possible trade-offs, in order to be able to make informed decisions. Understanding “the Economics of the Ocean” as well as the cultural and social values will be even more important as many countries and stakeholders aim to tap into the oceans’ resources. UN Environment has long standing experience with nature-based economics such as the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity.

Ocean Governance

The Regional Seas Programme, established in 1974, is a core building block for conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. The Programme currently involves eighteen Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans across the world. They aim to address the accelerating degradation of the oceans and seas through the cooperation of neighboring countries sharing common water bodies. UN Environment directly administers seven Regional Seas programmes. The UN Environment strives to strengthen the Programme and to advance the use of the existing regional ocean governance framework in supporting Member States with the implementation of the ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals.

Regional Bodies could be used even more systematically as implementing mechanisms for ocean-related partnerships in areas like marine spatial planning and development of a blue economy, including measuring and reporting progress towards ocean-related sustainable development goals.

Progress of Work

The Regional Seas programmes have adopted common Regional Seas Strategic Directions (2017-2020) in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. The Strategic Directions focus on four thematic issues: pollution, climate change, extractives and governance.

The Regional Seas programmes have agreed to develop their respective regional implementation outlooks to propose how they can support their participating countries with the implementation and monitoring of the ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals.

The Sustainable Ocean Initiative meeting held from 26 to 29 September 2016 in the Republic of Korea brought together these two types of organisations for the first time to have a formal global dialogue. The participants recommended the regular organisation of this type of global dialogue.

Enhanced Ocean Partnerships

The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) was adopted by 108 governments and other relevant stakeholders in 1995, in USA. This framework assists countries in fulfilling their duty in accordance with international law to conserve and protect the marine environment from sewage, physical alterations and the destruction of habitats, nutrients, sediment mobilization, persistent organic pollutants, oils, litter, heavy metals and radioactive substances. The 4th Inter-governmental Review Meeting of the Programme will tentatively be held in Indonesia 2017. The purpose is to review the implementation of the Global Programme, and discuss and agree on the way forward for the next 5 years.

Progress of Work

A stronger partnership to address land-based pollution is needed. UN Environment seeks to build broad coalitions and partnerships for coordinated efforts to target land-based pollution. The 4th Intergovernmental Review Meeting on the Global Programme of Action, provides an opportunity to review the current progress of work.

A Global Campaign on Marine Litter will be rolled out in 2017 with a focus on non-recoverable plastics and single-use plastics. Member States are invited countries to see how this could be implemented at national or regional level.

An advisory Group has been established to guide the development of the Marine Plastic litter and micro plastic assessment. A major marine litter conference is planned for 11-18 March, 2018. The involvement of all countries is encouraged.

Revised New massive open online courses are under development in English (April 2017), Spanish (September 2017). UN Environment is currently exploring ways of having the leadership track (first two weeks) in all UN languages.

Coral Reefs

UN Environment and Indonesia jointly organized a consultation meeting on implementation of resolution 2/12 (Manado, Indonesia, 28-29 June 2016). Responding to recommendations from the meeting, UN Environment will convene an 'advisory committee' for regular, direct liaison with Member States on implementation of the resolution. Member States will be invited to nominate focal points for the committee.

Progress of Work

UN Environment, jointly with the Secretariat of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), leads a working group to further develop the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) as a coastal ocean observing system. This will support identification and adoption of coral reef indicators that strengthen reporting in the context of the SDGs and other international targets. UN Environment and Regional Seas also continue to support regional processes that: improve access to coral reef data; generate actionable coral reef management and policy recommendations; and strengthen regular coral reef reporting.

UN Environment has initiated preparation of an outreach campaign on coral reefs, to be rolled out in 2017.

The Global Coral Reef Partnership of UN Environment and Regional Seas develops tools and supports regional and national measures that build climate change resilience. A coral reef theme on UNEP-Live provides access to downscaled climate model projections for future coral bleaching conditions, enabling identification of relative climate refugia that are critical management priorities.

Contact person:
Lisa Emelia Svensson,
Coordinator, Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Branch
Lisa.svensson@unep.org

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