



Key Messages from U.S. Major Groups and Stakeholders Regional Consultation on Delivering on the Environmental Dimension of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

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United Nations Foundation
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This document is intended to reflect areas of general consensus that emerged from the consultation, but should not be read as an official position or endorsement by the individuals and organizations in attendance.

The United Nations Environment Programme's Regional Office for North America (UNEP RONA) convened a half-day round-table consultation in Washington, D.C. on March 17th, 2016, with U.S.-based Major Groups and Stakeholder representatives, civil society, and government officials. The objective of the meeting was to provide U.S.-based stakeholders with an opportunity to provide input into the upcoming United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 2) to be held in Nairobi, Kenya from 23 – 27 May, 2016. The consultation focused on two issues that will be central to the UNEA agenda: *Delivering the Environmental Dimension of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda* and *Healthy Environment – Healthy People*.

The meeting was facilitated by Scott Fulton, President of the Environmental Law Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Patricia Beneke, Regional Director for UNEP's Regional Office for North America, delivered the opening presentation, which provided an introduction to UNEP's global work and its regional priorities. Ms. Beneke also described how the 2030 Agenda integrates the economic, social, and environmental pillars that underpin sustainable development and noted that the SDGs are universally applicable.

The keynote speaker at the consultation was Jane Nishida, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Ms. Nishida's remarks focused on U.S. experience with the intersection between public health and the environment. She noted in particular the U.S.'s success with substantially reducing air pollution emissions while expanding economic productivity. Ms. Nishida also mentioned the success of the UNEP-led Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles (PCFV) in phasing out lead from gasoline, and discussed the importance of building on this success to promote the elimination of lead from other sources, including paint.

Participants engaged in a lively roundtable discussion focused on the topics described above. Some of the key messages that emerged from the dialogue were the following:

- The universality of SDGs means that they are relevant to North America and should be addressed locally as well as globally.
- Technology and innovation have an important role to play in the implementation of the SDGs.
- The implementation of the environmental rule of law is fundamental to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.
- It is vital to find ways to measure, track and monitor progress on the SDGs at the country level.
- Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) is a key issue in the US context (e.g. food waste).
- Domestic crisis scenarios, such as the lead water poisoning crisis in Flint, Michigan, provide a teachable moment for the broader international community.
- The U.S. has been a leader when it comes to ensuring access to critical environmental information such as air and water pollution data and toxics release information. It can provide support to other countries seeking to learn from and replicate this experience.
- The U.S. approach to domestic environmental regulation focusses heavily on addressing connections between human health and environmental quality.
- The SDGs should be viewed as ecosystems of interrelated parts, rather than silo issues (e.g. animal well-being being is also connected to human well-being).
- Understanding the needs of local communities is crucial in meeting the SDGs.
- The SDGs should focus on how vulnerable communities are most at risk from environmental failures.
- Education and communication about the SDGs is essential for their success.
- Youth engagement is vitally important as youth is the future.
- Increased and adequate involvement of the major groups and stakeholders at UNEA and all other global international processes is essential
- Stakeholder involvement in implementing the SDGs is crucial. For example the private sector plays a key role in addressing the food waste challenge through its value chain. Getting government entities and private sector markets to integrate value chain producers is essential to ensure viability.

Participants identified the following challenges in implementing the sustainable development goals in the US context:

- The lack of a clear contact point for the SDGs within the government, which makes it challenging for stakeholders to contribute and be included.
- Financing shortages at the local level were seen as an impediment to improving environmental quality and implementing the SDGs.

While all the goals are relevant to environmental sustainability, participants highlighted that some of the goals were more relevant to the U.S. context than others. The discussion focused on goals related to water, forests, cities, sustainable consumption and production, climate change, oceans, biological diversity, and social justice. In this connection, the following points were emphasized:

Goal 6: Water – Addressing access to potable water, sanitation and urban water sustainability requires improving water infrastructure and finding innovative finance mechanisms. The Water-Energy-Food Nexus provides a crosscutting approach for addressing this.

Goal 11: Cities – Since cities have a strong connection with water, climate, energy and health, using an integrated ecosystems approach in creating resilient communities is important.

Goal 12: Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) – Is a key area for the US, and ongoing efforts to reduce food waste are a promising example of domestic SDG implementation efforts. Addressing sustainable production systems across value chains is essential.

Goal 13: Climate Change – Is relevant to all sectors. Increasing renewable energy and adopting sustainable production methods can help minimize emissions for key sectors e.g. agriculture.

Goal 14: Oceans – Managing wastewater and nutrient run-off is key to achieving this goal.

Goal 15: Terrestrial Ecosystems – Environment conservation is essential to protecting species from extinction. Target 15.7 on illegal wildlife trafficking was seen as particularly relevant to the U.S. context.

Goal 16: Social Justice – Implementation of the environmental rule of law is essential for accountability and transparency, and will strengthen the environmental pillar of the development paradigm and safeguard the right to live in a healthy environment.

Participants also discussed the role of UNEP in encouraging implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The following ideas were highlighted related to UNEP's potential niche and role:

- As an enabler and through its role as a convener, UNEP can bring thought leadership and gather diverse stakeholders to tackle complex issues such as supply value chains and alternative indicators of progress (e.g. inclusive wealth index). UNEP can be a capacity builder and an engine of knowledge transfer.
- UNEP has technical strengths to offer. For example, one participant noted that it would be useful for UNEP to develop an analytical framework for urban ecosystem design.

- UNEP can also be a vehicle for disseminating assets that the broader stakeholder community would like to share globally (e.g., business communications tools, Ocean Health Index).
- UNEP should focus on key issues that impact the most vulnerable populations, such as toxics and chemicals, and build partnerships with countries and stakeholders that are interested in making progress on these issues.
- UNEA is a key platform for furthering understanding of the links between human rights and the environment.
- Through UNEA and also its involvement with the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, UNEP can work to ensure that the environmental dimension of the sustainable development agenda is strengthened.

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