



UNEP Science Strategy 2011-2013

Input to UNEP's Medium Term Strategy



SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	i
SUMMARY	ii
PART 1	1
INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 <i>Impetus for a science strategy</i>	3
1.2 <i>Working at the science-policy interface</i>	3
1.3 <i>Purpose and goals of the Science Strategy</i>	4
1.4 <i>Capacity building as an important cross-cutting element of the Science Strategy</i>	5
PART 2	7
PRIORITY ACTIONS OF THE STRATEGY	8
<i>Goal 1: Emerging Issues</i>	8
<i>Priority Actions for Goal 1</i>	8
Action 1.1 <i>Implement a Global Environmental Alert Service (GEAS)</i>	8
Action 1.2 <i>Establish a UNEP-sponsored Foresight Process</i>	9
<i>Goal 2 Sustainability Scenarios</i>	11
<i>Priority Actions for Goal 2</i>	12
Action 2.1 <i>Build solution-oriented, sustainability scenarios as part of UNEP projects</i>	12
Action 2.2 <i>Build solution-oriented, sustainability scenarios in member states</i>	13
Action 2.3 <i>Institutionalize scenario analysis at UNEP</i>	13
<i>Goal 3: Sustainability Science</i>	14
<i>Priority Actions for Goal 3</i>	14
Action 3.1 <i>Carry out "reverse" integrated assessments</i>	14
Action 3.2 <i>Reach out to new stakeholder group – science & research ministries in member states</i>	15
Action 3.3 <i>Play "honest broker" among scientific community in supporting the climate and biodiversity negotiations</i>	16
<i>Goal 4. Scientific Competence</i>	17
<i>Priority Actions for Goal 4</i>	17
Action 4.1 <i>Increase impact of UNEP scientific assessments</i>	17
Action 4.2 <i>Increase the impact of UNEP publications</i>	18
Action 4.3 <i>Establish new strategic scientific partnerships</i>	19
Action 4.4 <i>Strengthen scientific competence of UNEP staff by providing goals and incentives</i>	20
Action 4.5 <i>Improve the coherence of inputs to UNEP science committees</i>	21
PART 3	23
TOWARDS IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY	24
ANNEXES	27
Annex I: <i>Current (2010-11) science-related activities at UNEP</i>	28
Annex II: <i>Landscape of ongoing assessments with UNEP's participation (updated 04 August 2010)</i>	31

FOREWORD

Science is at the foundation of UNEP's work and so its Science Strategy aims to lay out a clear pathway for strengthening this cornerstone in the service of member states. The new Science Strategy advances four clear goals towards this direction.

First, UNEP will enlist the best science to identify the most critical of the global environmental issues facing society over the coming years. It will keep the world abreast of "environmental events" as they happen, and bring together leading scientists and experts in relevant fields assist in anticipating developments that may be on or just over the horizon.

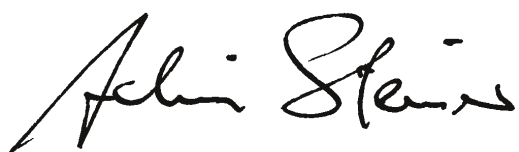
Second, UNEP's Science Strategy will evolve its work on scenarios to boost support for sustainable development and accelerate a transition to a low carbon, resource efficient Green Economy that also addresses poverty eradication.

Third, UNEP will not only deepen its engagement with the scientific community but will be more proactive in putting the challenges of sustainability higher on the international research agenda, including by strengthening and further developing its partnerships within the UN family and scientific umbrella organizations. The Strategy will actively harness UNEP's convening strengths to bring together researchers to analyze and recommend actions able to address persistent and emerging issues at the frontiers of science and policy.

Finally, UNEP will strengthen its own capacity to work at the science-policy interface by improving its procedures for assessments, improving the credibility and impact of its publications by enhancing their coherence and scientific rigour, and setting up more strategic partnerships with the scientific community.

Achieving these goals requires a long-term commitment by UNEP's divisions and the support of its member states and partners.

It will also require that the Strategy is fully integrated into the Medium-Term Strategy and planning and programming of UNEP's work. Reinforcing, revitalizing, renewing and re-visioning UNEP's critical work on the science-policy interface represents a new, challenging but also exciting phase for UNEP.



Achim Steiner,
UN Under Secretary-General, UNEP Executive Director
February, 2011

SUMMARY

The Science Strategy addresses the need to strengthen the scientific base of UNEP and to reinforce its work on the science-policy interface. The Strategy has four overarching goals covering the areas of “emerging issues”, “sustainability scenarios”, “sustainability science”, and “scientific competence”. The first three of these areas are outward-looking, and the fourth addresses the internal situation of UNEP. The four goals are:

1. **Anticipating the future:** UNEP takes the lead in the UN system in identifying emerging environmental issues.
To make progress towards this goal, two actions will be taken: First, UNEP will implement a *Global Environmental Alert Service* for keeping the world informed in a timely fashion about critical environmental developments. Second, it will sponsor a regular *Foresight Process* for ranking the most important emerging issues and conveying this information to a wide audience.
2. **Designing the future:** UNEP becomes a major global player in developing “solution-oriented”, sustainability scenarios.
This goal will be accomplished by building solution-oriented, sustainability scenarios as part of various projects in the POW. UNEP will also assist member states to build scenarios as part of the GEO-5 follow-up, and set up a cross-divisional Scenario Team to support the development of scenarios both internally and externally.
3. **Catalyzing needed science:** UNEP takes a lead in formulating and advocating a worldwide sustainability science agenda that meets the critical needs of sustainable development.
The actions for achieving this goal are: (1) carrying out “reverse” integrated assessments” in order to identify key questions from the policy arena that should be dealt with by the scientific community; (2) making contact with Science & Research ministries in order to expand the area of the science-policy arena in which UNEP operates; and (3) playing an “honest broker” role in supporting climate and biodiversity negotiations.
4. **Bolstering UNEP's scientific weight:** UNEP equips itself scientifically to accomplish more at the science-policy interface and to strengthen itself as the “leading global environmental authority”
To accomplish this goal UNEP will (1) increase the impact of its scientific assessments and publications by improving their coherence and scientific rigor, (2) establish new scientific partnerships, (3) strengthen the scientific competence of its staff by providing goals and incentives for them to engage with the scientific community, and (4) improving the coherence by which science is used in the various scientific advisory committees in the UNEP family.

Capacity building to serve UNEP's government clients will play a large role in the Strategy especially in Goals 1 to 3: This will include training experts in developing countries on how to carry out foresight studies and how to develop sustainability scenarios. It will also include conducting “reverse integrated assessments” with partners in developing countries to identify the key environmental policy issues in these countries that require scientific research.

The Science Strategy will be implemented chiefly **by embedding it in the Programme of Work** of various divisions rather than executing it as a stand-alone, top-down activity.

Summing up, achieving the four goals of the Science Strategy will greatly enhance the role of science in helping UNEP carry out its mission.



PART 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

As the principal body for the environment in the UN system, UNEP has a mandate to keep the global environment under review.¹ UNEP provides the world with an important environmental early warning service, and monitors, assesses and reports on the state of the global environment. Science plays an important role in this mandate by supporting UNEP's global, regional and national responsibilities, both normative and operational. Indeed the number of science-related activities at UNEP is large. (Annex I). Since the international community expects UNEP to produce credible, policy relevant reports on the state of the environment, the scientific underpinning of its work is crucial to its mission.

Herein we present a Science Strategy that aims to reinforce the scientific underpinning of UNEP's work. We begin by presenting the impetus for this strategy provided by UNEP's governing institutions and Medium Term strategy, and then review how UNEP's work at the science-policy interface influences the Strategy. Following this, we present the goals and priority actions of the Strategy, and the general scope for implementation.

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