

Integrating the environment into the 2030 Agenda

Ensuring we effectively deliver on the environment pillar

Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stresses the need for an integrated approach in pursuing environmental, social and economic objectives that provide for a world in which no one is left behind and all live in dignity in harmony in nature and embracing five broad universal principles: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership (see Figure 1).

In May 2016, the second session of the UN Environment Assembly, saw member states requesting UN Environment to “enhance coordinated, coherent and integrated delivery in the United Nations system on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” by among others, actively promoting the integration of the environmental dimension into UN Development Assistance Frameworks and fostering partnerships and other means of cooperation.

In December 2016, the Doha Declaration on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which was adopted at the 29th UNESCWA Ministerial Session, emphasized the need for UNESCWA and UN organizations to support member States in their efforts towards achieving the SDGs, including the environmentally-related SDGs. This included a request for UNESCWA to develop approaches that adapt and incorporate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and targets at both the regional and national levels as well as for identifying sets of interlinked goals drawn from national priorities.

UN Environment and UNESCWA have been working since before Rio+20 on ensuring that the environmental pillar is well reflected in sustainable development activities. More recently, in 2016, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment also requested the two organization to draft an implementation plan on the environment dimensions, which was presented in the 2017 session (18-19 October 2017).

Environment in the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda address a broad range of issues, including drivers, means of implementation and outcomes across the environmental, economic, social and governance dimensions of sustainable development. Across its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, more than half of the SDGs have an environmental focus or address the sustainability of natural resources, and over half of the targets incorporate an environmental dimension¹, both recognising and emphasising the importance of environment in underpinning development activities and human well-being, and providing a foundation for ensuring the integration of environment across development policy. Figure 2 below illustrates the number of environmental targets and percentage of environmental targets in each goal.

We already see a number of goals that are considered as ‘environmental goals’ such as:

- ✓ Goal 6 (ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all)
- ✓ Goal 7 (ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all)
- ✓ Goal 11 (make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable)
- ✓ Goal 12 (ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns)
- ✓ Goal 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts)



Figure 1: The five P's
Source: Adapted from 2014 Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General

¹ Analysis undertaken at the global level by UN Environment and other environmental organisations broadly defined the environmental dimension of the SDGs to include 86 environment-related targets and 110 indicators.

- ✓ Goal 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development)
- ✓ Goal 15 (protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss).

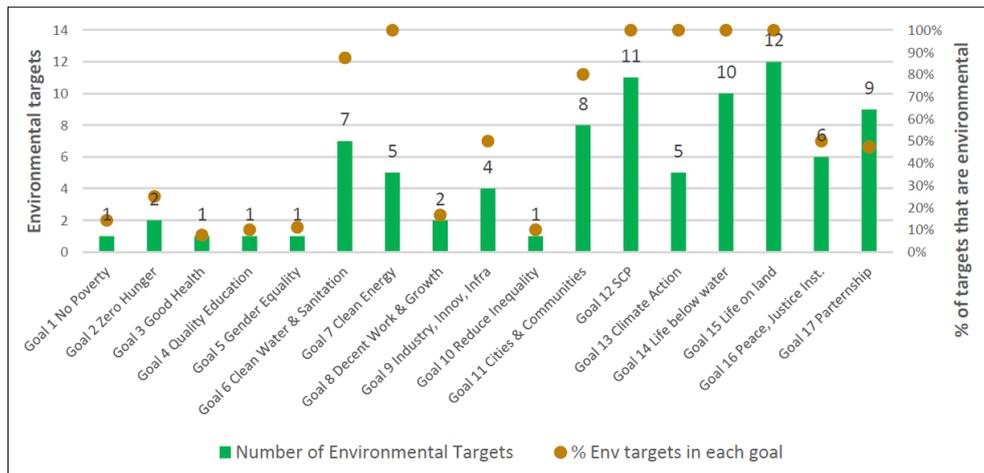


Figure 2: Environmental targets in the SDGs

Source: Implementing the Environmental Dimension of the SDGs in the Arab Region: Assessment Report (draft), C. Allen, 2017

But it cannot be overlooked that for the remaining goals, a healthy environment is integral to their achievement as recognised through the environmentally-related targets, focusing on the close linkage between human wellbeing and the environment. Part of “leaving no-one behind” is recognising the right of every citizen to a clean, healthy and productive environment, as well as access to natural resources and services to fulfil basic needs and to live in dignity.

Implementing the environmental dimension – the use of the nexus approach

The nexus approach, a subset of the integrated approach, is a mechanism being increasingly lauded to tackle the immense challenge of the 2030 Agenda: understanding and appreciating complexity of implementation and potential need to seek trade-offs and synergies, but also providing an opportunity for innovation and improvisation. It advocates focusing efforts on a limited number of nexus areas, or strategic issue overlaps to deliver on multiple benefits over time; allowing us to address multiple social, economic and environmental objectives in a balanced manner across sectors. They also lend themselves unambiguously to enhancing human well-being, and inclusive and sustained economic growth in a healthy environment.

The environmental dimension fits well with a nexus approach as nexus integration’s guiding principles are to promote sustainable and efficient resource use – doing more with less – to ensure access to resources for the most vulnerable, especially the poor, and to maintain healthy and productive ecosystems (Hoff 2011)². By using the most important intersections, i.e. those with the greatest likelihood to deliver the most positive benefits, the nexus approach prioritizes efficiency and turns the interwoven nature of the 17 SDGs into an asset rather than a source of complexity for policymakers.

From an environmental perspective, and considering the priorities of the region, there are five nexus areas that can be considered:

1. Human Well-being • Healthy Environment
2. Water and Sanitation • Clean Energy • Food Security

² Hoff, H. (2011) Understanding the Nexus. Background Paper for the Bonn 2011 Conference: The Water, Energy and Food Security Nexus

3. Sustainable Consumption and Production • Sustainable Cities
4. Healthy Oceans • Trade Opportunities • Pollution
5. Disasters • Conflict • Migration

Their inter-connections are provided in Figure 3 below, further demonstrating how the 2030 Agenda and the priorities we face are intricately inter-woven and the need for taking a more holistic approach.

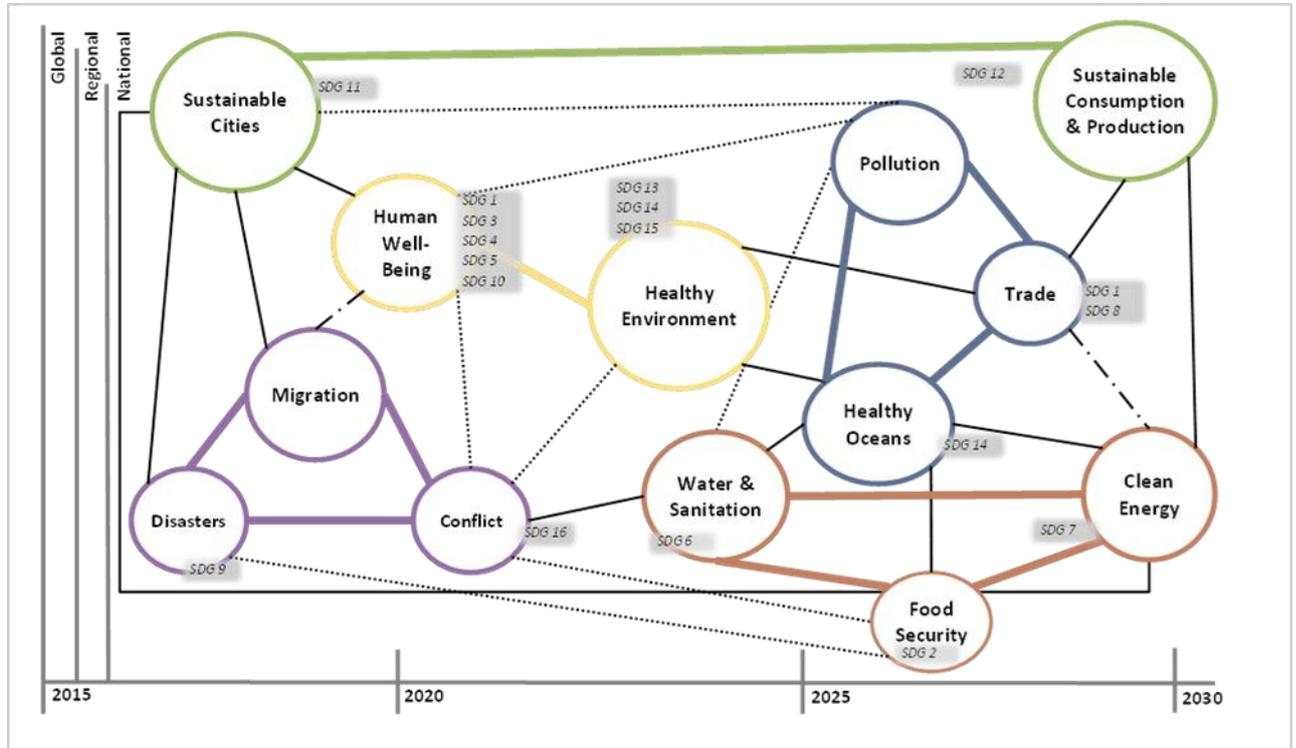


Figure 3: The interconnectivity of the proposed nexus areas

Taken from internal UN Environment discussion on the environmental nexuses

Conclusion

The challenge ahead is to focus on finding synergies and in identifying if there are potential trade-offs to be made and how to offset these, but overall to look for the efficiencies that can be found through finding the policy solutions that serve as many targets as possible in a coherent way, bringing together the economic, the social and the environmental dimensions.