

United Nations Environment Assembly

May 10, 2019

Manifest Pedagogy

UN organizations on climate change and environment are important areas of preparation both from mains and prelims perspective. Outcome and resolutions of annual summits and also reports of international NGOs like IUCN are the key focus areas for environmental topics in UPSC prelims. India's position at various international forums and the domestic steps initiated to tackle climate change and environmental issues should also be taken note of.

In news

The fourth session of UNEA was held in Nairobi

Placing it in the syllabus

Environment: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation.

Static dimensions

- About UNEP
- About UNEA

Current dimensions

- The fourth meeting of UNEA
- The outcome of the meeting

Content

History of UNEP

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established by the UN General Assembly in 1972. The need for developing laws such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) led to the 1972 U.N. Conference on Human Environment (Stockholm Conference) to address the pollution caused during the 1960s and 1970s by the industrial revolution. Several topics including marine life, resource protection, environmental change, nature-related disasters, and biological change were discussed at this conference. This conference resulted in a Declaration on the Human Environment (Stockholm Declaration) and the establishment of an environmental management body, which later was named United Nations Environment Program(UNEP).

About UNEP

The United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. UNEP's work include;

- Assessing global, regional and national environmental conditions and trends.
- Developing international and national environmental instruments and.
- Strengthening institutions for the wise management of the environment.

Mission of UNEP

- To provide leadership and encourage partnership in

caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

Focus areas of UNEP

1. Climate change
2. Disasters and conflicts
3. Ecosystem management
4. Environmental governance
5. Chemicals and waste
6. Resource efficiency, and
7. Environment under review

United Nations Environment Assembly

Background

- The United Nations Environment Assembly was **created in June 2012**, when world leaders called for UN Environment to be strengthened and upgraded during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also referred to as **RIO+20**.
- The Environment Assembly embodies a new era in which the environment is at the center of the international community's focus and is given the same level of prominence as issues such as peace, poverty, health, and security.
- The establishment of the Environment Assembly was the culmination of decades of international efforts, initiated at the **UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972** and aimed at creating a coherent system of international environmental governance.

About UNEA

- The United Nations Environment Assembly is the **world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment**. It addresses the critical environmental challenges

facing the world today. Understanding these challenges and preserving and rehabilitating our environment is at the heart of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

- The **Environment Assembly meets biennially** to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law. Through its resolutions and calls to action, the **Assembly provides leadership and catalyzes intergovernmental action on the environment**. Decision-making requires broad participation, which is why the Assembly provides an opportunity for all peoples to help design solutions for our planet's health.

The fourth meeting of UNEA

- **It was held in Nairobi, Kenya**
- **Theme:** Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production
- **Three areas of focus:**
 1. Tackling the environmental challenges related to poverty and natural resources management, including sustainable food systems, food security and halting biodiversity loss.
 2. Introducing life-cycle approaches to resource efficiency, energy, chemicals, and waste management.
 3. Ensuring sustainable business development at a time of rapid technological change.

The outcome of the Fourth meeting of the UNEA

- The assembly has **adopted 2 resolutions** piloted by India on single-use plastics and sustainable nitrogen management. They are:

- **Resolution on single-use plastic**

Background: The resolution on single-use plastics raises the alarm about plastic waste since only 9% of the nine billion tonnes of plastics ever produced have been recycled and most of them end up in landfills, dumps and the environment.

This resolution notes the significant role played by key sectors such as plastics producers, retailers and the consumer goods industry, as well as importers, packaging companies, transport companies and recyclers in contributing to the reduction of plastic waste from their products and activities and in providing information on the impacts of their products and encourages an innovative approaches such as the use of extended producer responsibility schemes, deposit refund schemes and other initiatives.

The resolution on single-use plastic also welcomed the global efforts to raise awareness of the negative impacts of plastic pollution and appreciates the 2018 World Environment Day under the theme of “beating plastic pollution” with India as its global host in this regard.

- **Resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management:**

It recognizes multiple pollution threats resulting from anthropogenic reactive nitrogen, with adverse effects on terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments, contributing to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, while recognizing nitrogen benefits.

This resolution also notes initiatives such as the Global

Partnership on Nutrient Management (GPNM), the International Nitrogen Management System as a science-based support system for policy development throughout the nitrogen cycle, and the South Asia Cooperative Environment Program (SACEP).

The resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management calls for options to facilitate better coordination of policies at national, regional and global level across the global nitrogen cycle, including consideration of the case for the establishment of an intergovernmental coordination mechanism on nitrogen policies, based primarily on existing networks and platforms, and consider the case for the development of an integrated nitrogen policy.

- It was decided to advance sustainable consumption and production patterns, including, but not only, through circular economy and other sustainable economic models and the implementation of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns.
- It was also decided to promote innovation and knowledge sharing in chemicals and waste management to achieve safer and less toxic material flows in order to protect human health and the environment.
- Participants committed to promote sustainable food systems by encouraging the implementation of sustainable and resilient agricultural practices, improving value generation, and significantly reducing waste and energy use along the food supply chain to help ensure food security and ecosystem functions and services.
- Committed to work towards comparable international environmental data, and support the United Nations Environment Programme in developing a global environmental data strategy by 2025 in cooperation with other relevant United Nations bodies.
- It was resolved to invest in environmental research, education, and awareness-raising in the framework of

sustainable development, with a strong focus on women and youth, and will promote wider use of innovative approaches, such as inclusive citizen science.

- Committed to respect indigenous and local knowledge on environmentally friendly practices and promote the engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities.