

## UN Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment

Special Session Convened at the Sixth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6)

27 February 2024, 08:00-18:30 hrs  
UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi

### CONTEXT

The United Nations Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment (UNSPBF) serves as a comprehensive, multi-sectoral, and inter-agency platform. Its primary purpose is to facilitate collaboration and dialogue among various sectors, including science, policy, and business, in the pursuit of environmental objectives.

Inaugurated during the third United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 3) in December 2017, the Forum was established to address the need for a more integrated and dynamic interaction among these sectors, as requested by Member States.

Regionally, the Forum extends its activities to Asia-Pacific and Africa, aligning with environmental ministerial processes. Additionally, it functions as the Secretariat for both the Data for the Environment Alliance (DEAL) and the Expert Group on Big Data and Frontier Technologies. For more information, visit their website at <http://www.un-spbf.org>.

### APPROACH

The Forum's approach is pragmatic and oriented towards policy and technology driven solutions that assist in the realization of environmental goals. It emphasizes an "Integrated Solutions" approach to achieving environmental goals and to foster cooperation among its partners. The Forum and its community uphold the values of equity, ethics, transparency, diversity, and inclusion, as crucial for attaining a fair and sustainable future.

The Forum's Special Sessions at UNEA 6 concentrate on solution-driven thought-leadership that aligns with the UNEA theme and the Executive Director's Report. These sessions are crafted to provoke innovative and inclusive thinking, enriching the dialogue and action around achieving environmental goals and shaping the next Medium-Term Strategy. They encapsulate diverse perspectives from government, industry, finance, science, and society.

UNSPBF's distinct approach, which bridges various stakeholders and sectors, not only amplifies the work of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) but also promotes a One-UN approach. The Forum's sessions are organized to explore critical aspects from three perspectives:

**Policy Perspective:** Focusing on policy coherence, an all-encompassing government approach, safeguards, accountabilities, and the role of the multilateral system.

**Corporate Perspective:** Examining technology and financing solutions, business practices, resource efficiency, value chains, circularity, and transparency, and advocating for an all-encompassing economic approach.

**Societal Perspective:** Embracing an all-inclusive societal approach, the sessions engage major groups, youth, women, and indigenous communities.

Central to the Forum's operations is its foundation in science, ensuring that its initiatives and discussions are rooted in scientific understanding and evidence.

On 27 February, the day will be divided into three key sessions. The morning session focuses on **Sector Wide Transitions**, while the afternoon session will focus on **Financial and Economic Tools** and **Integrated Early Warning Systems**. The sessions are highly interactive, with star speakers and participants representing multiple sectors.

## PROVISIONAL AGENDA

27 February 2024, 08:30-18:30 hrs.

### High-Level Opening Session: Shaping Our Common Future

During the past century, we witnessed the sobering reality of a planet in peril, where the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystems deterioration and pollution adversely and mercilessly impacted – and continue to impact -- our livelihoods, health, economies, security and our very survival. UNEP's report "Making Peace with Nature" clearly states that the world is not on track to meet any of the environmental goals, a trajectory that we seek to challenge and overturn.

What are the building blocks to doing better? To putting the world on track to meet environmental goals? And if there is one thing that we need to either change or embrace to reach this goal, what would that be?

The Opening Session of the Science-Policy-Business Forum, entitled 'Shaping our Common Future', will lay the foundations for the day's deliberations. Leaders and visionaries, representing diverse sectors, will attempt to answer these questions through their distinct vantage point.

The format is built around mini TED-like talks of 5 minutes each, that are compact, focused, and impactful.

According to Merriam-Webster, vision is defined as, "the act of power of imagination." When we apply vision to the future, we create not only aspiration but a determination to guide and direct our actions.

## PART ONE

# Sector-wide Transformations

*UNSPBF-style moderated, interactive debates. The sessions comprise deep-dive segments that speak to the wider theme, introducing perspectives and contributions from multiple sectors and stakeholders. This work builds on the UNSPPBF regional and thematic processes and Expert Groups*

### **The Imperative for Resource Efficiency and Sustainable Value Chains**

In 2022, over 55% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions stemmed from biomass cultivation, mineral and fossil resource extraction, and their conversion into materials, fuels, and food. This figure rises to over 60% when emissions from land-use changes are included.

Notably, these emissions have increased since the 2015 Paris Agreement, indicating that climate mitigation efforts have inadequately addressed resource-related impacts.

The International Resource Panel's "Global Resources Outlook" reveals that strategies like sustainable consumption, circular economy, and resource efficiency could slash CO2 emissions by over 80% by 2060. This reduction is achievable while still promoting wellbeing and economic growth.

The session will discuss actionable strategies across housing, mobility, energy, and food systems, emphasizing justice and equity, based on the report's insights.

### **Responsible Mining in a Resource-Hungry World**

*Co-organized in cooperation with the Consumption and Production Unit of UNEP's Industry and Economy Division, the International Resource Panel, and UNSPBF partners*

As the global demand for minerals and metals surges, primarily driven by the low carbon energy transition, infrastructure growth, and digitalization, the mining industry faces significant sustainability challenges.

Between 1970 and 2017, mineral and metal extraction tripled and is projected to double again by 2060 (International Resource Panel, IRP 2019).

This debate will bring together industry leaders, government officials, and experts to discuss the future of responsible mining, focusing on sustainable practices and addressing environmental and social impacts.

The session aims to explore enabling conditions for responsible mining and the sustainable use of mineral resources. It will address the need for effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions, with a particular focus on minimizing negative impacts and fostering sustainable development, especially in resource-rich developing countries.

#### Key Themes:

- Global Demand and Public Policy: Tackling the challenge of meeting the growing demand for minerals in a sustainable manner.

- **Circular Economy and Material Efficiency:** Exploring strategies to enhance the circularity of minerals and reduce future mining.
- **Financial Sector's Influence:** Understanding the role of finance in promoting environmentally and socially responsible mining practices.
- **Governance and Accountability:** Improving the fragmented governance landscape in the mining sector.
- **Role of Multilateralism:** Examining how multilateral cooperation can support sustainable mining practices.

**Environmental and Social Concerns:** There is increasing scrutiny over the environmental and social impacts of mining. Companies like Vale and Freeport McMoRan have faced criticism for their environmental impacts and human rights violations.

**Forests & Finance,** an initiative by a coalition of campaign and research organizations, aims to increase transparency about which financial institutions support mining companies that can cause social and environmental impacts. They provide a dataset detailing the financial flows to these companies.

## **The Urban Environment: The Near-Zero Buildings of the Future**

*Co-organized in cooperation with UNEP Cities Unit and [Cool Coalition](#), [Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction](#) (Global ABC) and [Generation Restoration](#)*

Urban areas are at the forefront of the pollution crisis, contributing significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions. Sustainable buildings offer a solution to reduce urban pollution levels and combat climate change.

This session delves into how near-zero emission and resilient buildings can play a pivotal role in mitigating these challenges. It will bring together top experts from UN Habitat, ICLEI, UNEP, the World Bank, OECD and the private sector to discuss the intersection of sustainable architecture, urban planning, and environmental health.

The session comes a week ahead of the Buildings and Climate Global Forum, convened in Paris by the governments of France and Morocco, in partnership with UNEP and the Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction.

**Key Themes:**

- **Global and Regional Perspectives:** Analysing the importance of sustainable buildings in different regions, considering environmental and health impacts.
- **Economic and Policy Frameworks:** Evaluating economic models and policy initiatives that support the adoption of sustainable building practices.
- **Innovation and Technology in Sustainable Architecture:** Exploring advancements in building materials, energy efficiency, and sustainable design.
- **Community Engagement and Equity in Urban Planning:** Understanding the role of community participation and equity in shaping resilient urban landscapes.

## **Thread Lightly: Unravelling the Fabric of Sustainable Fashion**

*In cooperation with UNEP Economy and Industry Division and UNSPBF Community*

The fashion industry is a significant contributor to ecological degradation, responsible for 2-8% of global carbon emissions. The prevalent linear economic model in this sector, emphasizing a take-make-waste approach, has led to fashion being largely disposable.

UNEP's 2023 report, "Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain: A Global Roadmap," stresses the importance of shifting consumption patterns, improving practices, and investing in infrastructure to achieve a circular textile sector. The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook, co-published by UNEP and UN FCCC, provides guidance on aligning consumer-facing communication with sustainability targets.

The value chain approach in sustainable fashion focuses on each step of the creation of value of a product, from raw materials to final products, and consumer and post-consumer use. This approach ensures that environmental and social impacts are considered and minimized throughout the entire lifecycle of the product. Key aspects include circular product design, circular business model, sourcing sustainable materials, ensuring fair labor practices, minimizing waste during production, and promoting recycling and upcycling of products.

This session will review the integration of sustainability in the textiles industry, gaining insights into a multifaceted challenge that requires the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including SMEs, large corporations, and financial institutions.

The goal is to create a system that supports ecological integrity and social justice, transitioning from a linear model of production and consumption to a more circular and responsible one.

## **Building the Business Case for Soil Health**

*Co-organized in cooperation with UNEP's Ecosystems Division, UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders, UNEP's Private Sector Unit and the One Planet network Sustainable Food Systems Programme*

Healthy soils sit at the centre of the UN conventions on desertification, climate change and biodiversity and are critical in addressing the triple planetary crisis and as a key to the solution to delivering on many of the SDGs. Increasingly extreme weather has led to more droughts as well as more flooding increasing the loss of topsoil through erosion. Rising sea levels can carry contaminants, like salt, into soil, as well as cause erosion. Modern agricultural practices are also degrading the planet's soil at an accelerated rate. We lose 24 billion tonnes of topsoil every year due to unsustainable land and soil management. The net result of this is more pesticides and nutrients like nitrogen being applied to counter act degradation not only causing more acidic soils but also an overload of pesticide residue and nutrients in the environment impacting human and planetary health.

Building an investment business case and accelerated multistakeholder action in support of strengthening healthy soils ecosystems is urgently needed. UNEP's Global Partnership on Nutrients Management effects a need for strategic, global advocacy to trigger government and stakeholder action in improved soil health and lower nitrogen and phosphorous use. This event aims to highlight the importance healthy soils as a key cross cutting agenda linked to a range of outcomes: biodiversity, circularity, land restoration, regenerative agriculture and nature positive agriculture and how adopting an integrated approach can harness synergies across a range of environmental and social agendas.

The event will:

- Illustrate where real progress is already being made and can be scaled.
- Examine the role of public – private investment
- Explore the business case for strengthened soil health action and scope for a joined up high ambition action agenda.
- Demonstrate the importance of integrated soil data and financial incentives and de-risking as enablers to accelerated soil health action.
- Make the case for a soil health UNEA resolution.
- Undertake how best to leverage the upcoming international calendar where World Environment Day, UNCBD and UNCCD will all feature soils strongly to accelerate action.

## PART TWO

# New Economy: Harnessing Economic and Financial Tools to Tackle the 3 Planetary Crisis

### High Level Panel: Tracking Financial Flows to Nature-based Solutions

*Co-organized in cooperation with UNEP Climate Finance Unit, UNEP FI, UNSPBF partners*

Nature based Solutions provide critical investment opportunities as they are cost-effective and provide multiple benefits. The opening segment of this session will explore the scale of nature-negative finance flows from both public and private sector sources globally, comparing them to the finance needed to maximize the potential of Nature based Solutions to help tackle climate, biodiversity and degradation challenges. This segment builds on UNEP's newly launched report 'State of Finance for Nature 2023' which tracks finance flows to nature-based solutions.

### The Argument for High-Integrity Carbon Markets

The integrity and effectiveness of carbon markets are vital for meeting the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement. One of the key challenges is ensuring they benefit developing countries, which often face the dilemma of balancing fossil fuel exploration for economic development with environmental sustainability.

Addressing equality and equity, especially in developing countries, is central to the effectiveness of carbon markets. This includes ensuring that carbon markets are designed to support sustainable development in these regions, rather than exploiting them.

UNEP Copenhagen Climate Centre has explored methodologies to promote transformational change through carbon markets. CTCN concluded that 'Digitalization', 'Private sector and Governments', 'Carbon pricing' and 'Dynamic baselines' are key actions towards transformational change.

Meanwhile, the World Bank has just launched ambitious plans for the growth of high-integrity global carbon markets, with 15 countries set to earn income from the sale of carbon credits generated from preserving their forests. By next year, these countries will have produced over 24 million credits, and as many as 126 million by 2028. These credits could earn up to \$2.5 billion in the right market conditions.

The private sector, particularly corporates, plays a role in driving demand for carbon credits, though this has been met with challenges like accusations of greenwashing and the need for clearer guidelines on credit quality and claims. Financial institutions are pivotal in providing the necessary capital and investment products to support these markets.

The voluntary carbon market is at an inflection point, with growth slowing due to uncertainties about credit quality, eligibility, and public scrutiny, including accusations of greenwashing. This highlights the need for clearer global standards and consistent guidelines to bolster market confidence and integrity.

# The Cost of Climate & Nature Positive Transitions: From Strategy to Action

*Co-organized in cooperation with IACE– Institute for Climate Economics*

Countries have made significant progress in developing climate and sustainability strategies. However, when it comes to moving from strategic planning to effective implementation, key questions need to be addressed: how much will the transition cost? What will be the respective roles of the public and the private sector? which domestic and international sources of funding can be mobilized to fulfill additional public spending needs?

Integrated sustainability financing plans will help countries answer these questions and hence their development is one the most critical steps towards the achievement of climate and SDGs objectives.

By providing an integrated whole-of-economy, whole-of-society approaches, financing plans lay out the financial equation that countries need to solve and constitute a roadmap to bridge the finance gap.

This segment will explore country sustainability experiences from a whole-of-economy perspective, building on individual experiences and a multi-sectoral approach.

## PART THREE

### Forecasting the Future: Towards Integrated Early Warning Systems for the Planet

Early Warning Systems (EWS) and Early Warning for Environment (EWE) are fundamental accelerators for the Achievement of Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development. Early Warning for Environment is a complementary dimension of Early Warning for All Initiative, endorsed by the Secretary General of the United Nations and which is a critical adaptive measure for climate change, saving millions of lives and protecting socio-economic losses, with more impact on developing nations and the most vulnerable. EWE is a co-creation process involving now 12 UN Agencies and 4 Multi-Lateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), aiming at providing Early Warning services to 100 developing countries until 2030.

In this engaging and informative session, we delve into the critical topic of Early Warning Systems (EWS) and Early Warning for Environment (EWE) and their role in addressing the three planetary crises identified by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP): climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

The debate aims to uncover the effectiveness, challenges, and future prospects of EWS in mitigating the impacts of natural and man-made hazards.

The debate will be structured into several key segments, each focusing on a specific aspect of EWS. Expert panelists will offer insights, backed by data and case studies, followed by interactive discussions and audience Q&A session.

Key Themes:

- Introduction to Early Warning Systems and Early Warning for Environment (EWE)
- Discussion on how the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the Paris Climate Agreement incorporate EWS and EWE
- Space Technologies and Future Innovations
- Addressing the challenges in implementing and maintaining effective EWS and EWE, especially in developing countries.
- Debating the opportunities for international cooperation and technological innovation in enhancing EWS and EWE.