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International environmental policy and governance issues

Global Environmental Data Strategy

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. The present note provides information on the development of the Global Environmental Data Strategy (GEDS), prepared in response to United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 4/23,¹ which requested the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to develop a long-term strategy for environmental data “in consultation with Governments, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and international and regional scientific bodies”.
2. The annex to the present note contains the Global Environmental Data Strategy. The Strategy offers a practical framework to improve how environmental data are produced, managed and used worldwide. It aims to strengthen the management, quality, accessibility and interoperability of environmental data, while fully respecting national laws, data sovereignty and the voluntary participation of Member States.
3. The Strategy articulates a shared vision of a trusted, inclusive, accessible and interoperable environmental data ecosystem that enables collective action at the speed and scale required to address the triple planetary crisis and support sustainable economies and societies worldwide.
4. The Strategy does not create new reporting obligations or standards. It is designed as an enabling and voluntary framework to reduce fragmentation, lower costs and maximize the value of

* UNEP/EA.7/1.

¹ UNEP, 2019b, Resolution 4/23 adopted by the United Nations Environment Assembly on 15 March 2019, UNEP/EA.4/Res.23, (<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/28486/K1901170.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>) accessed 6 October 2025.

existing data, allowing digital technologies and artificial intelligence to be more effectively leveraged for environmental action.

II. Progress in implementing resolution 4/23

5. Work on GEDS was supported by generous contributions from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

6. The development of the Strategy built on several years of analytical work and extensive consultations. UNEP reviewed environmental data platforms and compiled an inventory of more than 800 initiatives; worked with partners to map data standards; and prepared a roadmap on environmental statistics and analysis.

7. In 2024–2025, UNEP conducted wide-ranging consultations with Member States and stakeholders. These included six consultations with the UN regions and Major Groups in 2024 and additional consultations in June–September 2025 on the first and second drafts of the Strategy. Collectively, the consultations engaged more than 200 organizations and experts in thematic discussions and gathered extensive online feedback through structured forms.

8. The consultations confirmed the Strategy’s analytical structure, which is organized around five core pillars: data management, quality and provenance, interoperability, access and affordability, and capacity-building. The process also culminated in the identification of seven strategic intervention points that can guide and focus implementation: national data strategies, data quality assurance, essential variables, interoperability standards, federated data platforms, access to priority datasets, and capacity development.

9. For each intervention point, the Strategy identifies specific enabling actions where UNEP can play a catalytic role by convening actors and developing frameworks, tools and guidance to support progress towards the GEDS vision. These proposed UNEP contributions aim to create tools and resources that can be piloted and adapted by Member States and partners within the timeframe of the UNEP Medium-Term Strategy for 2026–2029.

III. Lessons learned

10. The development of the Global Environmental Data Strategy revealed the vastness and diversity of the global environmental data ecosystem — and its high degree of fragmentation. Addressing this complexity requires coordinated action across a wide range of actors, extending well beyond UNEP and its Member States.

11. The process also underscored how quickly the technological landscape has evolved since 2019. To remain relevant, the Strategy’s scope was expanded to include provisions on artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, reflecting both their transformative potential and environmental implications.

12. Consultations confirmed the need for a phased, pragmatic implementation with several options, underpinned by clear prioritization and well-defined roles for each part of the ecosystem (Member States, MEA secretariats, scientific networks, private sector and UNEP). A separate “GEDS Options Paper” sets out these pathways, funding modalities and role delineations aligned with the 2026–2029 period.

13. Mapping exercises highlighted numerous parallel but complementary initiatives and mature best practices. Building on these – rather than duplicating efforts – can accelerate progress on standards, capacity development and federated access.

14. Going forward, iterative engagement and adaptive management will be essential to keep the Strategy aligned with national priorities, evolving technologies and international processes, while ensuring coherent delivery within the UNEP Medium-Term Strategy (2026–2029).

IV. Recommendations and suggested actions

15. Member States may wish to:

- (a) take note of the annexed Global Environmental Data Strategy;

- (b) indicate interest in the proposed areas of action and indicate interest in participating in pilot initiatives under the Strategy;
- (c) support implementation through voluntary financial or in-kind contributions;
- (d) promote national and regional cooperation to enhance the coherence and accessibility of environmental data.

16. The secretariat will continue to promote dialogue with Member States and partners to support implementation of the Strategy within the framework of the UNEP Medium-Term Strategy (2026–2029) and in alignment with other relevant international processes. To inform this dialogue, the secretariat has also prepared a “GEDS Options Paper” outlining possible modalities, funding scenarios and engagement mechanisms for the Strategy’s phased implementation, which is being presented for consideration and discussion by Member States.