

An Ounce of Prevention Beats a Tonne of Cure: Why addressing environmental crises is essential for human health

Leadership Dialogue 1

Thursday, 11 December, from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

A. Introduction

The seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7), to be held from 8 to 12 December 2025, will feature three leadership dialogues aligned with the UNEA-7 theme of “Advancing sustainable solutions for a resilient planet.” The three leadership dialogues are:

- Leadership Dialogue 1: An Ounce of Prevention Beats a Tonne of Cure: Why addressing environmental crises is essential for human health; Thursday, 11 December 2025, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. EAT
- Leadership Dialogue 2: Round and Round: Why circularity and sustainability are critical to the future of global industry; Friday, 12 December 2025, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. EAT
- Leadership Dialogue 3: The Bottom Line: Why tackling environmental degradation is critical to the future of the global financial system; Friday, 12 December 2025, from 11.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. EAT.

This concept note is intended to support Member States, observers, major groups and other stakeholders in preparing for Leadership Dialogue 1 focusing on actions to advance resilience and improve environmental and human health outcomes.

The dialogue acknowledges that a resilient planet, characterized by vibrant ecosystems, clean air and water, and a stable climate, is fundamental to human health and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Habitat destruction, air, water and soil pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, weak environmental governance, and unsustainable economic models harm the health of people and planet.

The leadership dialogue will provide a platform for ministers and stakeholders to explore how environmental action and innovation can strengthen integrated health resilience in the face of environmental stressors. A central focus will be on shifting from reactive responses to proactive, preventative strategies that reduce environmental degradation and its associated health impacts.

B. Scope and Interlinkages

This dialogue will focus on the environmental determinants of health and the role of good governance in securing healthy and resilient populations. It will emphasize the need to prevent environmental degradation by systemically addressing its root causes, rather than merely addressing its consequences.

The session will also explore the transformations needed in economic and financial systems and sectors to support this shift. This includes internalizing environmental and health externalities, realigning subsidies and incentives, and adopting sustainable economic frameworks that prioritize long-term well-being over short-term gains.

The dialogue will also explore how a stronger science base and complex, cross-domain data analysis can uncover linkages between planetary and human health as a basis for action. AI-powered insights can also inform early warning systems and predictive models. Discussions will explore how science policy platforms and international governance instruments can move the needle for evidence-based transformation. These include the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; the newly adopted Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution; and the forthcoming Independent Panel for Evidence for action against Anti-Microbial Resistance. Governance instruments include the biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements; the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework; the Pandemic Treaty; and the Global Framework on Chemicals, as well as the complementary chemical multilateral environmental agreements, including the global agreement on plastic pollution under negotiation. This can help policymakers effectively allocate resources and plan interventions that prevent environmental damage and reduce future health burdens.

C. Guiding Questions

Participants will be invited to address through examples the following questions to foster a focused dialogue:

1. How can strengthened science influence economic and sectoral policies that ensure preventative action for environment and health co-benefits?
2. What social and institutional innovations are needed to create, improve or change policies to uplift the environment and prioritize prevention over cure?
3. What partnerships and innovations are needed to scale up action to yield multiple dividends at the environment-health nexus?

D. Expected Outcomes and Call for Action

The leadership dialogue is designed to promote an understanding of the interlinkages between environmental and human health. It will also identify policy priorities and good practices for integrated, preventative action, while showcasing how to enhance collaboration between the science, environment, health, economic planning and high-impact sectors. As well, it will recognize the role of science and technology in integrated, cross-sectoral analysis, and emphasize the need to mobilize funding and resources to support this application.

Contact Details

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