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**Cooperation with Multilateral Environmental
Agreements**

Background note to support discussions on the supplementary agenda item on “Cooperation with Multilateral Environmental Agreements”.

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. In its decision 5/4, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) endorsed the outcome of the stocktaking meeting for the process for review by the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) governing and subsidiary bodies as agreed at the eighth meeting of the Annual Subcommittee of the CPR, held in Nairobi from 25 to 29 October 2021.
2. As a follow up to that decision, the President of the sixth session of UNEA (UNEA-6), on behalf of the UNEA Bureau, requested the Executive Director of UNEP, in accordance with rule 11 of the rules of procedure of the Environment Assembly, to include a supplementary agenda item entitled “Cooperation with multilateral environmental agreements” in the provisional agenda of the sixth session of the Assembly.
3. Consideration of the agenda item will be supported by, inter alia, a full “Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) Day” which includes two 3-hour moderated high-level dialogues on the following themes:

* UNEP/EA.6/1.

- Strengthening the science-policy interface for effective implementation of environmental commitments; and
- Strengthening cooperation between UNEA, UNEP and MEAs to enhance effective implementation at the national level including through means of implementation.

4. The present note has been prepared to facilitate consideration of the supplementary agenda item on “Cooperation with Multilateral Environmental Agreements” and the exchange of views between Members States and stakeholders in the high-level dialogues named above.

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1 The institutional landscape –UNEA, UNEP and the MEAs

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) was created in 2012 to replace the UNEP Governing Council in response to the wishes of Member States to strengthen the role of UNEP as the leading global environmental authority¹. UNEA is a decision-making body that facilitates scientific dialogue, cooperation, and policy action to address the three planetary crises of climate change, nature loss and pollution in an effective manner. UNEA with its universal membership can promote policy and action by Member States collectively, whilst respecting the autonomy of each of the Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs). At the same time, the respective governing bodies of MEAs, which bring together all the Parties to the MEAs, have over time successfully promoted policy and action whilst respecting the legal autonomy of other MEAs and that of UNEA and UNEP. The convening power of both UNEA and UNEP and the action taken in the framework of MEAs have been used to great benefit of the global community in the past and will continue to play a lead role in cooperation on environmental issues at all levels.

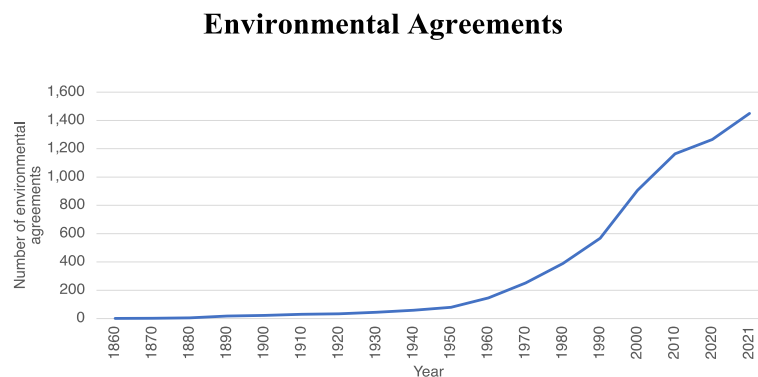


Figure 1: Number of MEAs from the 1860s to today. ²

The global MEAs refer to those MEAs addressing global environmental challenges that have been negotiated at the global level and are open to signature and accession by all States and regional economic integration organizations. A greater number are sub-regional or regional, applying only to Member States on a regional basis. Some regional MEAs, including regional conventions and protocols can support Member States in meeting their obligations under the global MEAs and some have been opened for global membership³.

Depending on the source and classification, the number of MEAs varies. The Figure 1 is derived from International Environmental Agreements database, which indicates that the number of global and regional MEAs has reached over 1000 in the world, dating from 1860 with a rapid proliferation from the 1950s.

¹ Paragraph 88 of ‘The Future We Want’ - Outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20–22 June 2012; subsequently adopted by the General Assembly its resolution 67/213

² See <https://iea.uoregon.edu/base-agreement-list>

³ For example, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, initially negotiated as a regional instrument for the pan-European region and, following an amendment procedure, has been opened up for accession to all UN Member States in 2016

The MEAs are sometimes grouped into thematic clusters including biodiversity related MEAs⁴, those relating to chemicals and waste, the atmosphere (including climate change), and oceans. The Rio Conventions derive from the 1992 Earth Summit.⁵

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20, 2012) recognised the significant contributions made by the MEAs to sustainable development and the work already undertaken to enhance synergies among three of the conventions in the chemicals and waste cluster (the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions). The Conference further encouraged Parties to MEAs to consider further measures, in this and other clusters, as appropriate, to promote policy coherence at all relevant levels, improve efficiency, reduce unnecessary overlap and duplication, and enhance coordination and cooperation among the MEAs, including the three Rio conventions, as well as with the United Nations system in the field.⁶

The encouragement by the Rio + 20 Conference has helped to stimulate discussion and practical work in other thematic clusters, specifically seeking synergies in programmatic functions among the MEAs.

1.1 The MEAs, mandates and governance

MEAs are legally binding international agreements which are formally ratified by their Parties. They are separate agreements to which States, regional economic integration organizations, and, in some instances, international organizations have become a Party.

The MEAs are governed by their respective governing body (usually the Conference of the Parties or equivalent). The number of Parties to individual MEAs varies. Some MEAs have been ratified by all Member States of the United Nations, as well as by other States and regional economic integration organizations, and some are close to achieving universal participation⁷.

Each MEA governing body and its decisions are independent, but decisions may include invitations for actions by non-parties and other entities, such as the governing bodies of other MEAs or UNEA and UNEP or other international organisations, among others. Many of the MEAs have subsidiary bodies, for example, on science and/or implementation, reporting to the respective governing body.

Each MEA is supported by a secretariat, or equivalent, that undertakes tasks as prescribed by the treaty text and the governing body. The UNEP Executive Director provides secretariat functions for fifteen MEAs – the so called “UNEP administered MEAs”⁸ - in accordance with the decisions of the MEA governing bodies and UN rules and

⁴ There is no official definition of a “biodiversity-related MEA”. The Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions includes, in addition to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention, WHC), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands), International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

⁵ The Rio conventions are CBD, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

⁶ Paragraph 89 of ‘The Future We Want’ - Outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20–22 June 2012.

⁷ UN Treaty Collection, [table](#) on Treaties deposited with the Secretary-General close to achieving universal participation (Status as of 1 April 2023).

⁸ Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, Minamata Convention on Mercury, Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa (Bamako Convention), Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention), Convention for Co-operation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region and Protocol (Abidjan Convention), Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region

regulations⁹. The synergies process among the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions led to the joint management of the UNEP-administered secretariats of these three conventions.¹⁰ The governing bodies of the MEAs decide on matters of cooperation and usually authorise their secretariat to cooperate with other entities, including other MEAs, UNEP or other international organisations, to achieve their objectives. Accordingly, UNEP and the MEA secretariats, whether UNEP-administered or not, cooperate on programmatic matters within their respective mandates.

Implementation of the MEAs remains within the purview of the Parties at national, regional and international levels as appropriate. Other actors, for instance UNEP, can support implementation, usually when invited.

1.2 The role and relevance of the UN reform process and the United Nations Country Teams in strengthening national implementation of the MEAs.

UNEP and, as relevant, MEAs are working towards better integration of the climate, nature, and pollution domains across the UN system, including improved recognition of the role of the MEAs in the reformed UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). The UNSDCF is the primary instrument for planning and implementation of the UN development system support to national and regional SDG priorities, informed by the UN-led Common Country Analyses (CCA). The environment has remained weakly represented in these¹¹, limiting its uptake in solutions, although this has improved from 2022 to 2023 as illustrated in Figure 2.

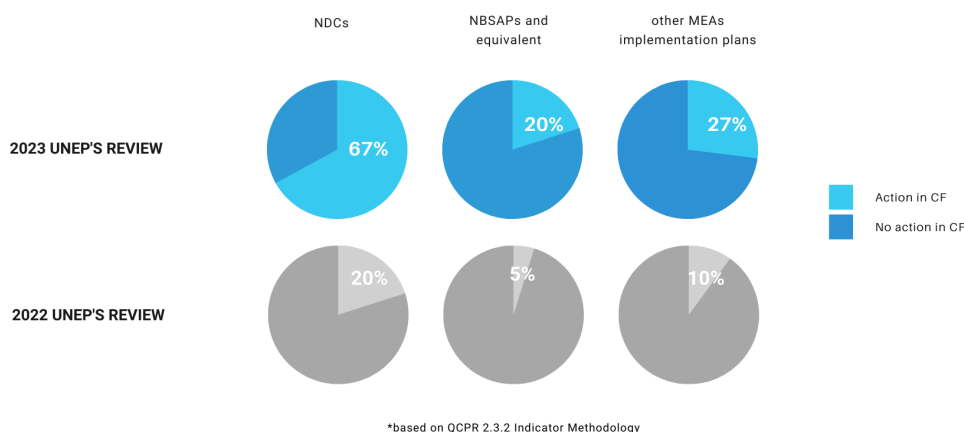


Figure 2: An analysis of environmental representation in Common Country Analyses and Cooperation Frameworks (2022 and 2023 UNEP CCAC-CF review)¹².

UN Country Teams and UN Multi-Country Teams can play a key role in the delivery of the objectives of the MEAs across the multiple development areas that each individual agency deals with at national and transboundary

(Cartagena Convention), Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Western Indian Ocean (Nairobi Convention) and Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention). UNEP also administers two intergovernmental Regional Seas Action Plans (COBSEA and NOWPAP), both with independent governance mechanisms – i.e. Intergovernmental Meetings (IGMs) similar to COPs.

⁹ The administrative services are clustered around the following aspects: Policy, guidelines and procedures; human resources; budget and finance); legal; supply chain, travel, host country relations, facilities management, ERP (UMOJA), enterprise risk management, internal controls (e.g., audits); information and communications technology, amongst other.

¹⁰ Although the Secretariats of the Basel and Stockholm conventions are administered by UNEP, the Secretariat of the Rotterdam Convention is administered jointly by UNEP and the FAO

¹¹ <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/40725/9th%20ASCM%20-%20Agenda%20item%203%20%28Final%20version%29.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

¹² NDC- Nationally Determined Contribution (under the Paris Agreement); NBSAP – National biodiversity strategy and action plan.

levels. Some MEAs¹³ have been working directly on how to better integrate Parties' implementation needs in the UNSDCF. UNEP has also been working together with the MEAs to enhance their visibility in the UNSDCF to support their engagement with national focal points of the MEAs and with the MEA secretariats. Collectively, these efforts are intended to strengthen support to Parties for the implementation of the MEAs including their integration across national development policy and planning.

2 STRENGTHENING THE SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACE (SPI) FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS

A core mandate of UNEP is to keep the world environment situation under review and strengthen the interface between science and policymaking across the sustainable development agenda.¹⁴ Indeed, UNEP has long played a significant role in generating and enhancing the use of scientific evidence in decision-making relating to the environment.¹⁵

MEAs are examples of science-based policy at work. Not only have the MEAs been established in response to scientific evidence, but they also consider, and need continued access to, scientific and other information to support their processes and implementation at all levels. Effective SPIs¹⁶ are therefore critical to MEA operations and national implementation, including cooperation among them.

UNEA and each MEA governing body has its own modalities to obtain, review, and agree on the scientific and technical advice that they need to deliver on their mandates.

Intergovernmental bodies have been established to address the science-policy interface related to climate change and biodiversity: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). UNEP provides the joint Secretariat for the IPCC together with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and provides the Secretariat for the IPBES and the Secretariat of the International Resource Panel. In 2022, UNEA decided to establish an intergovernmental science-policy panel on chemicals, waste and pollution prevention (see section 3). There is a growing number of science-policy platforms and panels providing independent advice together with reports prepared by organizations, including UNEP, that aim to inform policy and its implementation. Some examples are provided in the following sections.

2.1 Calls for cooperation on the science-policy interface from UNEA and the MEAs governing bodies.

From its establishment, UNEA has made comprehensive calls for cooperation on scientific matters with the MEAs including through mandating UNEP to provide support. Examples include requests to the Executive Director to:

- assure the promotion of environmental monitoring and assessment by, and the primacy of a strong SPI within, UNEP by fostering collaboration with Member States, business and experts, MEA secretariats, other UN agencies, funds and programmes, scientific panels and other key partners, such as the UN Statistics Division, the UN regional commissions and the Group on Earth Observations (resolution 4/23); and
- continue to promote greater coherence and coordination of global assessments undertaken within the UN system and in cooperation with relevant international bodies and secretariats of the MEAs (resolution 4/23).

¹³ For instance, the Basel and Rotterdam Conventions. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's (UNECE) work supporting the introduction in UNSDCF of activities supporting implementation of UNECE administered MEAs.

¹⁴ UNEP MTS 2022-25

¹⁵ *Reflecting on the Past and Imagining the Future: A contribution to the dialogue on the Science-Policy Interface*. UNEP (2021). Nairobi

¹⁶ Science-policy interfaces (SPI) are defined as "social processes which encompass relations between scientists and other actors in the policy process, and which allow for exchanges, co-evolution, and joint construction of knowledge with the aim of enriching decision-making". *Reflecting on the Past and Imagining the Future: A contribution to the dialogue on the Science-Policy Interface*. UNEP (2021) Nairobi (after van den Hove, S. A rationale for science-policy interfaces, *Science Direct Futures* 39(2007) 807-826)

In response to these requests, UNEP has been convening Ad hoc Global Assessment Dialogues (AGAD)¹⁷ for several years to encourage synergies and increased coherence across different UN-led scientific assessments. The quarterly dialogue explores various ways of improving the efficiency of assessment processes and increasing coherence.

In seeking support for their decision-making processes, some MEAs invite contributions from a range of scientific and technical bodies, including UN agencies and independent science-policy platforms and panels. UNEP has played a strong role in providing evidence to support decision making processes. This has included preparation of assessments on a wide range of environmental issues, making available online tools and services, and bringing together experts to provide independent advice. UNEP has also been instrumental in the establishment of independent assessment processes.

The UNEP Mid-Term Strategy 2022 – 2025 (MTS) recognizes both the role that science plays in developing and implementing policy and the ways in which policy agendas influence science and knowledge generation to help ensure that support and to identify potential solutions in addressing environmental challenges. The outcomes of the process for review by the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) governing and subsidiary bodies¹⁸ recognises the value of strengthened contributions from MEAs, including by promoting thematic dialogues between Chairs of scientific advisory bodies or other MEA bodies (endorsed through decision 5/4).

2.2 MEA scientific and technical advisory bodies.

MEA decisions adopted by their governing bodies are informed, depending on their content, by scientific and technical information and guidance provided by subsidiary bodies. The composition, operation and mandate of those bodies are tailored to the MEA needs and are guided by its objective(s) in accordance with the terms of reference/decisions adopted by the governing body and its rules of procedure. Membership of these bodies, and the ways in which members are identified, varies from one MEA to another. Some bodies are standing, others are ad hoc. Most MEAs establish ad hoc expert or working groups to provide support on specific topics. These may report to subsidiary bodies or directly to governing bodies; they may be time-bound or longer-term in nature, depending on the mandate or the need.

Some governing bodies of MEAs, such as the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm conventions, have established cooperative modalities between the respective scientific and technical subsidiary bodies and between the governing bodies to promote information exchange and policy coherence. Within MEAs, the scientific and technical information can guide decision-making in a variety of contexts, for instance, when considering expanding or adjusting the scope of the MEA (e.g. listing of new substances, products, sources or species covered by the MEA), when developing technical guidance to support the implementation of the MEA (e.g. technical guidelines), when reviewing implementation challenges, or when evaluating the effectiveness of the MEA. Usually, such technical and scientific information is collected and assessed by scientific and technical subsidiary bodies to the governing body, which include experts nominated by the Parties and representatives of other entities.

2.3 Other sources of science-policy inputs used by MEAs.

The governing bodies of MEAs draw on science and other forms of knowledge from a range of different sources, including those under the control of the MEA or from independent institutions. Examples include:

- i. *Independent intergovernmental bodies* such as the *FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*¹⁹ that, inter alia, informs the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC)²⁰ that played a decisive role in the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and continues to inform its work as well as climate change policy across multiple areas; the *Intergovernmental Science-Policy*

¹⁷ <https://www.unep.org/geo/who-we-work/adhoc-global-assessments-dialogue-agad>

¹⁸ <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/37280/FINAL%20AGREEMENT%20-%20Process%20for%20review%20by%20the%20CPR.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.fao.org/cgrfa>

²⁰ <https://www.ipcc.ch>

*Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)*²¹ that encourages requests from the governing bodies of MEAs and has so far completed assessments relevant to the work of the biodiversity-related MEAs and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); the ongoing establishment of a *science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution*²² that, once established, could support countries in their efforts to take action to promote the sound management of chemicals and waste and address pollution.

- ii. *Bodies underpinning the work of specific MEAs* such as: The *Ozone Assessment Panels* that were established before the First Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, on technology and economic assessment, scientific assessment, and environmental effects assessment; the *UNCCD Science Policy Interface*²³ with its work programme determined by the Convention's Committee on Science and Technology and the three independent organizations identified by the World Heritage Convention as *Advisory Bodies*²⁴. The Regional Seas Conventions get support through the work of Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks.²⁵ The Co-operative programme for monitoring and evaluation of the long-range transmission of air pollutants in Europe (EMEP) with its five centres and four Task Forces provides sound scientific support to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution²⁶.
- iii. *Other assessments* such as when MEAs commission specific assessments or reports to inform their work: for example, the State of the World's Migratory Species being prepared for the Convention on Migratory Species, and the Global Wetlands Outlook²⁷ series produced for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the Global Biodiversity Outlook series prepared by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).²⁸ Reports submitted by competent organizations may support the work of MEA implementation even where they have not been specifically requested or have been developed for submission to other fora, for example, the series of Global Chemicals Outlooks²⁹ and Emissions Gap Reports³⁰, both of which are prepared by UNEP in response to mandates from UNEA drawing on a wide range of experts. The Global Environment Outlook³¹, the flagship outlook report of UNEP, is comprised of a series of reports that review the state and direction of the global environment in an integrated way, the effectiveness of the policy response and the outlook of the future, with the analysis being grounded in the best available science and real-world case studies. There are also thematic and national, regional and transboundary assessments produced in the context of projects funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UN Regional Commissions and the European Commission amongst others.
- iv. *Other sources* such as: contributions from Parties in proposals that they are making for amendments to MEA appendices; specific scientific studies requested by MEA governing bodies, and other independent sources such as universities, non-governmental organizations, and researchers that produce science.

2.4 Summary of some implications and key issues on strengthening the Science-Policy Interface

In further elaborations under the theme, consideration might be given to the following, recognising that each would need to be addressed in the context of respective mandates, rules and procedures:

- The ways in which scientific information is utilized in the UNEA, UNEP and MEA processes to ensure its availability when needed, how this could be enhanced, and the role that MEA secretariats and UNEP could be playing to support this.

²¹ <https://www.ipbes.net>

²² The process was established through UNEA resolution 5/8

²³ <https://www.unccd.int/science>

²⁴ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/advisorybodies/>

²⁵ See for example <https://www.unep.org/cep/who-we-are/regional-activity-centres>

²⁶ <https://unece.org/emep-steering-body>

²⁷ <https://www.ramsar.org/resources/publications/global-wetland-outlook>

²⁸ <https://www.cbd.int/gbo/>

²⁹ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/policy-and-governance/global-chemicals-outlook>

³⁰ <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2023>

³¹ <https://www.unep.org/geo/>

- The key providers of science and other forms of knowledge, and how they are managed and mandated to provide the information required by UNEA, UNEP and MEAs in a timely manner, including the extent of and opportunities for other forms of knowledge such as indigenous knowledge to be incorporated.
- The extent to which science-policy platforms and panels focus on providing practical and implementable solutions that can readily be responded to by MEAs, national governments and other decision makers.
- Opportunities for UNEA, UNEP and MEAs and associated science-policy interfaces to collaborate more effectively to enhance the use of science and knowledge in UNEA and MEA decision making, and identification of the role that the MEA secretariats and UNEP could play in facilitating this.
- Possible opportunities for delivering products of science-policy platforms and panels in the future that lead to a more integrated approach by UNEA, UNEP and MEAs to addressing the interlinked drivers of environmental change.
- The need to keep under review the potential opportunities for improving the science-policy interface that may result from digital transformation and the appropriate use of artificial intelligence.

2.5 Options for action for strengthening Science-Policy Interface

Efforts to strengthen the science-policy interface for effective implementation of environmental commitments will require the identification of a set of pragmatic steps. The following may help in considering this issue further, recognising that these actions would need to be carried out in the context of respective mandates, rules and procedures.

- Strengthen consultations amongst chairs of UNEA and MEA governing bodies and MEA scientific and technical subsidiary bodies as well as other UN scientific advisory bodies*, both within and across thematic clusters at global and regional levels.
- Strengthen consultations with and amongst science-policy platforms and panels and others making key inputs to policy processes*, building, for example, on the experience of the Ad hoc Global Assessment Dialogues³²;
- Enhance the use of multi-year programmes of work* by both MEAs and independent bodies, including under UNEP, that provide science-based inputs that lead to greater recognition of what data, information, and knowledge MEAs are going to need, when, and how this relates to the schedules of those providing that data, information and knowledge including the forward plans of science-policy platforms and panels.
- Review the ways in which UNEA, UNEP and MEAs currently take up and use findings of science-policy platforms/panels and other external sources*, including how UNEA, UNEP and the MEAs take into account these independent processes and what difficulties they experience in doing so.
- Review the ways in which science-policy interface findings are communicated*, including sharing findings and mechanisms to promote cross-fertilization between science-policy interfaces and among multiple stakeholders and processes; for example, bringing findings together as was done in the UNEP-led synthesis report on *Making Peace with Nature* which drew on multiple assessments³³;
- Review the ways in which capacity-building and training are provided*; for example, considering common approaches to writing summaries for policymakers, and understanding how to make science relevant to policy,
- Build stronger relationships*; including developing closer bilateral arrangements between UNEA, MEAs and UNEP and particular science-policy platforms and panels or other sources of knowledge where these are needed, learning lessons from other relationships.

³² <https://www.unep.org/geo/who-we-work/adhoc-global-assessments-dialogue-agad>

³³ <https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>

3 COOPERATION BETWEEN UNEA, UNEP AND MEAS TO ENHANCE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL INCLUDING THROUGH MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

UNEP plays a significant role in supporting implementation of MEAs at the national level through its MTS and Programme of Work and in furtherance to invitations from the governing bodies of MEAs. In addition, it serves as an implementing agency to a number of multilateral funds that support MEAs and provides financial support through the Special Programme on Institutional Strengthening³⁴ at the national level for the sound management of chemicals and waste.

The broader policy frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the recently adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Global Framework on Chemicals - For a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste, provide strong platforms to support national level implementation, facilitating whole of government and whole of society approaches and cooperation across MEAs.

3.1 Calls for cooperation from UNEA and the MEA governing bodies.

UNEA, from its establishment, has made comprehensive calls for cooperation with and among the MEAs, including through mandating support through UNEP. For example, requests to the Executive Director regarding effective programmatic cooperation with MEAs (resolution 1/12); promoting and enhancing synergies at global, regional and national level, including through UNEP regional offices (resolution 2/5 and 2/17); fostering mutually supportive programmes of work (resolution 2/18); and promoting approaches in line with Convention on Biological Diversity decision 14/30 on cooperation (resolution 4/10). Only rarely has UNEA invited the governing body of an MEA to consider some issues falling within its mandate.³⁵ Similarly, direct calls on programmatic matters from the MEA governing bodies to UNEA are very rare.

The governing bodies of MEAs have a long history of inviting UNEP to cooperate on programmatic matters in areas falling within their mandate and according to respective decision texts to ensure coherency and mutual supportiveness. For example, the decisions of the four recent meetings of the COPs of the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata conventions contain over 50 paragraphs referencing UNEP (or the Executive Director), including reference to support for the implementation of programmatic aspects of decisions, for instance capacity building or technical assistance, or welcoming efforts and products of UNEP, or refer to or call for cooperation between the MEAs and UNEP or between UNEP and other initiatives or processes.

For the UNEP-administered MEAs, the Executive Director reports to the meetings of the respective Conferences of Parties and intergovernmental meetings to highlight the activities undertaken by UNEP subsequent to their invitations. The Executive Director also provides information on relevant work mandated by UNEA, including its programme of work and MTS. UNEP also makes interventions at sessions of the governing bodies, subsidiary bodies or other official processes of the MEAs, as appropriate. Conversely, the MEA secretariats may participate in UNEA as observers and provide information documents to UNEA on the activities undertaken pursuant to UNEA resolutions or matters of relevance to UNEA and provide other background documents prepared for the CPR.

Cooperation among MEAs falls within the remit of the respective governing bodies of MEAs. The modalities for cooperation among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions have been set out by a series of decisions of their governing bodies on enhanced cooperation and coordination among the three conventions, referred to the “synergies process”. In addition to establishing joint managerial functions for the UNEP-administered or co-administered Secretariats, those decisions resulted in the organisation of back-to-back meetings of the COPs since 2013 with convention-specific sessions and joint sessions on issues of common interest. Each COP adopts its own decisions with some decisions being substantially identical on joint issues. In the chemicals and wastes cluster, cooperation between the BRS conventions and the Minamata Convention has been enhanced over the years through requests made by the governing bodies to those conventions.

³⁴ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/special-programme>

³⁵ See for example UNEA resolution 3/9 inviting the CoP of the Basel Convention to consider further the issue of increasing levels of illegal transboundary movement of hazardous wastes and other waste, as reported by developing countries and the response of the Basel Convention to UNEA in its decision BC- 15/25.

Mechanisms for cooperation among MEA secretariats initiated by the Conference of the Parties to the CBD include the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions and the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions. Party-led processes for building cooperation and coordination across MEAs include, for example, consultations among representatives of MEA parties and secretariats to cooperate to support the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework³⁶. This has become known as the “Bern Process”, the third meeting organized in Bern in January 2024.

Observations from decisions of recent meetings of the governing bodies of global MEAs include, inter alia:

- i. There are numerous calls for strengthened cooperation by the governing bodies of the MEAs with many focussing on ways and means of improving implementation of cooperation at the national level³⁷; although, as noted above, invitations between MEA governing bodies and UNEA and vice-versa, on programmatic matters are limited.
- ii. Most of the decisions refer to cooperation among the MEAs in either the biodiversity or chemicals and wastes clusters of MEAs; there are less references on cooperation across the two thematic clusters of biodiversity and chemicals and waste MEAs; and
- iii. There are also calls for cooperation with other thematic areas, including with desertification (UNCCD) and climate change (UNFCCC).

3.2 UNEP and its role in supporting cooperation with the MEAs.

The MTS for 2022-25 provides a comprehensive means by which UNEP supports cooperation with and among the MEAs and thereby delivers support at all levels. The MTS recognizes the MEAs as *one of the foundation stones of national policymaking* and the work of UNEP and includes the following references: UNEP will promote coherent and synergized cooperation across all the MEAs and continue to support Member States in the implementation of the MEAs by, inter alia, brokering cross-institutional cooperation and partnerships, creating the required policy instruments and legislation and developing related capacities (MTS para. 104); The MEAs and their multiplier effect will be used to enhance delivery of transformational change (MTS para. 103); and UNEP will support countries in developing the necessary policies, legislation, and strategies to implement their respective obligations under the MEAs (para. 67).

UNEP supports the implementation of MEAs through its Programme of Work, drawing resources from the Environment Fund as well as earmarked funds. Apart from projects focusing on implementation support for individual MEAs, UNEP is supporting several initiatives that address cooperation with and amongst MEAs. These include the *ACP-MEAs Programme*³⁸, which is providing capacity building to 79 countries in Africa, Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP) regions to fulfil their obligations as Parties to the MEAs and the *Environmental Treaties Project* with a focus of national capacity-building across the MEAs through enhancing cooperation between the focal points of different conventions³⁹.

Since 1982, UNEP’s environmental law activities have been organized and coordinated through its flagship Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo Programme)⁴⁰. Renewed every 10 years, this programme has guided the international community in the development of environmental laws that transform science-based policies into action-orientated rules and standards of conduct and support the implementation of MEAs at the national level.

³⁶ pursuant to CBD COP decisions XII/6, XIII/24, 14/30 and 15/13

³⁷ Examples of recent decisions/resolutions etc. include: CBD decisions 13/23, 13/24, 14/5, 14/7, 14/9, 14/10, 14/22, 14/23, 14/25, 14/27, 14/30, 14/34, 14/35; 15/4, 15/5, 15/6, 15/11, 15/13; CMS 13/4, 12/4, 17, 38, 42, 46, 67, 70, 79, 83, 85, 98, 13/8, 16, 17, 19, 20, 52, 64, 66, 68, 70, 82, 83, 86, 88, 92, 108, 109, 111, 119, 127, 133; Ramsar XIV/6, 13/5, 7, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21, 24.; CITES 17.56 (Rev. CoP19), 17/55, 56, 18/23, 44, 46, 47, 48, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, 61, 67, 150, 214, 224, 271, 293; ITPGRFA 13/2022, 5, 11, 13/2019; WHC 41/5A, 42/ 5A, 43/5A, 44/5A, 5D, 7.2. BRS Conventions: BC-16/17, RC-11/6, SC-11/13, BC-16/21, RC-11/8, SC-11/20, BC-16/22, RC-11/9, SC-11/21, BC-16/25, RC-11/12, SC-11/24, BC-16/28, RC-11/15, SC-11/27; Minamata MC-4/12, MC-5/7; MC-5/11, MC-5/17 and MC- 5/18

³⁸ A partnership between the European Union, the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) <https://staging7.unep.org/acpmeas3/>

³⁹ See for instance the compilation of a compendia of guidance on achieving synergies among biodiversity-related conventions at the national level with UNEP source book. <https://dart.informea.org/compendia/?f%5B0%5D=source:3>

⁴⁰ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/environmental-rights-and-governance/what-we-do/promoting-environmental-rule-law-1>

The Information Portal on MEAs (InforMEA)⁴¹, developed and managed in close cooperation with the MEA secretariats, provides a comprehensive one stop shop for relevant information and access to over 40 courses on international environmental law and governance. The platform also hosts the Data Reporting Tool (DaRT) for national reporting to biodiversity-related conventions.

In its role as a GEF implementing agency, UNEP plays a vital role in assisting eligible countries in accessing critical resources. These resources are essential for helping them achieve global environmental benefits and fulfil their commitments under the MEAs, for which the GEF serves as a financial mechanism. UNEP has established itself as a key partner, providing technical support and facilitating various enabling activities. These activities encompass critical work under the three Rio Conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD) and two Chemical Conventions (Stockholm Convention and Minamata Convention). This support and partnership will continue throughout GEF 8, where there is a heightened emphasis on integrated approaches and programming. These approaches aim to foster policy coherence and integration not only across focal areas but also among various ministries and government departments.

UNEP, through OzonAction, is also an implementing agency of the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol. The Multilateral Fund is a successful financial mechanism that assists 148 developing country parties to comply with the Protocol's control measures, thereby contributing to the restoration of the ozone layer and mitigation of climate change. The Fund is collocated with UNEP, which also acts as the Treasurer to the Fund.

3.3 The value of common frameworks as entry points to strengthen cooperation at national level.

One useful trend has been to reflect the relevant objectives of MEAs collectively in broader policy frameworks to ensure mutual supportiveness and to avoid duplication. The leading example is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are “interlinked, integrated and indivisible”. Many of the environmental goals and targets of the SDGs are, accordingly, supportive of the objectives and obligations of the MEAs and, in this way, enhance policy coherence for sustainable development.

There are also other frameworks which provide useful entry points for enhancing cooperation regarding the implementation of the MEAs at the national, transboundary and regional levels. Two recent ones are the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Global Framework on Chemicals.

3.3.1 *The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)*

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), adopted by CBD COP-15 in December 2022, succeeded the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 – 2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets as the common framework for a whole of government and whole of society approach to biodiversity. The framework promotes and creates opportunities for cooperation among relevant MEAs and organizations, recognizing that enhanced collaboration, cooperation, and synergies at all levels would contribute to and promote its implementation in a more effective manner⁴². In its decision 15/13, the CBD COP invited the governing bodies of other biodiversity-related conventions and relevant MEAs, as well as international organizations and other relevant programmes, to formally endorse and coordinate their own strategies with the KMGBF. Several MEAs have already indicated that their updated plans are or will be consistent with the KMGBF and the governing bodies of several MEAs have already formally acknowledged the KMGBF⁴³. The goals and targets of the KMGBF reflect objectives of the other biodiversity - related MEAs and its target 7, among others, creates a clear entry point for the areas of work of the chemicals and waste conventions. Support for the implementation of the KMGBF and the updating of national biodiversity strategies and action plans will be prime opportunities for improved cooperation.

⁴¹ <https://www.informea.org/en>

⁴² CBD Decision 15/4, Annex: KMGBF sections B and C, paras. 6 and 7(q).

⁴³ See for example CITES decision 17.56 (Rev. CoP19), CMS COP [Decision 13.4](#), Ramsar COP [Resolution XIV.4](#); ITPGRFA resolution 13/2022 <https://www.fao.org/3/nk249en/nk249en.pdf>. The Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions (UNEP/CHW.16/30- UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.11/25-UNEP/POPS/COP.11/3 respectively), World Heritage Committee 45 COM 7.2, [Carpathian Convention COP decision 7/6](#), trilateral [Memorandum of Cooperation between CBD, the Carpathian Convention and the Alpine Convention in light of the Global Biodiversity Framework implementation](#) and Minamata Convention MC5/17.

3.3.2 *The Global Framework on Chemicals - For a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste*

The 5th session of International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5) that took place in Bonn, Germany, in September 2023, adopted the Global Framework on Chemicals – For a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste that supersedes the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, marking a significant shift in how the chemicals management is tackled. The framework provides ample opportunities for further strengthening cooperation and multisectoral engagement in the sound management of chemicals and waste, with international organizations being invited to support the implementation of the framework at national and regional levels. The framework invites stakeholders to align their activities with those undertaken for the MEAs to increase the effectiveness of cooperation with efforts to address inter alia climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Furthermore, the International Conference adopted a resolution on international cooperation and coordination, bringing the framework to the attention of the governing bodies of relevant intergovernmental organizations and multilateral agreements and invites them to endorse or otherwise appropriately acknowledge and support this framework, as well as consider the incorporation in their programmes of work of mutually supportive activities. It also requested the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources and in collaboration with relevant organizations, to prepare for the next international conference in 2026 a report on interlinkages between the Global Framework on Chemicals and the KMGBF.

3.4 **Summary of some implications and key issues on cooperation at the national level**

In further elaborations under the theme, consideration might be given to:

- The extent to which international and regional processes respond to and can support coherent and effective MEA implementation at the national level.
- The extent to which integrated approaches in implementing commitments under UNEA and the MEAs across clusters respond to the demands at the national level, considering the specific and differentiated mandates of individual instruments.
- Opportunities and challenges relating to the synergistic implementation of the MEAs and UNEA resolutions, including as a means to improve the coherence and cost-effectiveness of investments.
- The extent to which support for cooperation in implementation addresses the needs of stakeholders across the different sectors and society, including indigenous peoples and local communities, women and youth.
- The extent, utility, uptake, and gaps in tools and approaches to support cooperation at the national level.
- Opportunities for the governing bodies of MEAs and for UNEA to cooperate and converge on common strategies and sharing of experiences.
- Opportunities for strengthened governance mechanisms and institutional cooperation to promote exchange of information, effective coordination between UNEA, UNEP and of MEAs and support monitoring and reporting.

3.5 **Options for action on cooperation for national implementation**

The needs and challenges faced by countries in implementing commitments and policy directions set at the regional and international levels under the MEAs are well documented. There is also ample guidance available on the means to strengthen implementation and cooperation at national level. The synergies process between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, for instance, provide useful lessons in this regard⁴⁴. Some other recent examples include: CBD Decision 13/24,⁴⁵ which provided a detailed list of options to enhance synergies among the biodiversity-related

⁴⁴ See for instance the 2013 and 2017 reports on the review of synergies arrangements available at: <https://www.brsmeas.org/Implementation/Reviewofsynergies/2017Reviewofarrangements/tabid/4801/language/en-US/Default.aspx>.

⁴⁵ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-13/cop-13-dec-24-en.pdf>

conventions at national level; the consultation workshops on the biodiversity-related conventions and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (Bern I and Bern II consultations)⁴⁶; the Nordic Council of Ministers project '*Strengthening Collaboration and Coordination between Biodiversity and Chemicals and Waste Clusters*'⁴⁷ and a recent UNEP capacity building workshop in Africa for national focal points of the MEAs and the Fifth Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law to facilitate implementation of biodiversity and chemicals and waste MEAs⁴⁸. Some examples of the main means of implementation identified are:

- i. *Leverage country commitments through overarching frameworks for implementation*, including common indicators and monitoring; mapping the country obligations under MEAs and the commitments under the KMGBF and Global Framework on Chemicals, and other relevant frameworks and action plans, including at the regional level, to multiply the impact of action taken at the national level for implementation across constituencies.
- ii. *Improve institutional mechanisms at the national level*; closer interaction amongst the designated country contacts for UNEP, other relevant international organisations and the different MEAs is essential; identify and utilise significant areas of common working practice among national institutions; strengthen national policy coordination mechanisms; domesticate MEAs into national laws or administrative measures; and work on common themes across the resolutions and decisions of UNEA and the governing bodies of MEAs.
- iii. *Leverage regional mechanisms and institutions* to support national implementation through exchange of experience and good practices, joint approaches and joint objectives.
- iv. *Strategic Planning and Implementation*: target those that can implement change; prioritise enabling transformative institutional change.
- v. *Resource mobilization*: the new frameworks referred to above are likely to stimulate new momentum and funding, channel funding through integrated programme financing, and integrate UNEA policy directions and MEA objectives and other commitments into national Sustainable Development Frameworks.
- vi. *Knowledge management*: strengthen cooperation on national reporting among the MEAs, bearing in mind respective MEA reporting requirements and existing reporting systems including common monitoring and reporting tools (such as the Data and Reporting Tool, DaRT⁴⁹).
- vii. *Communication*: work together on knowledge management and sharing, communications and messaging relevant to UNEP and multiple MEAs across clusters; and
- viii. *Capacity-building* is an essential cross-cutting need, explore opportunities for working together on coherent and integrated approaches⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ Report of the consultation workshop of biodiversity-related conventions on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Bern, 10 – 12 June 2019. Document CBD/POST2020/WS/2019/6/2 (Bern I); and Report of the second consultation workshop of biodiversity-related conventions on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (Bern II). Document CBD/SBSTTA/24/INF/27

⁴⁷ [Strengthening collaboration and coordination between biodiversity and chemicals and waste clusters \(diva-portal.org\)](https://diva-portal.org/)

⁴⁸ Workshop Report. Capacity building workshop for national focal points of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the Fifth Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law to facilitate implementation of biodiversity and chemicals and waste MEAs, 29-31 August 2023, Bugesera, Rwanda. UNEP, Nairobi. <https://www.unep.org/events/workshop/workshop-implementation-biodiversity-chemicals-and-waste-meas-and-montevideo>

⁴⁹ <https://dart.informea.org/>

⁵⁰ For example the CBD COP decision 15/8 includes a long-term strategic framework for capacity-building and development for the KMGBF, as well as proposals for establishing a mechanism to strengthen technical and scientific cooperation and promote technology transfer; the BRS Conventions have approved a technical assistance plan which encourages UNEP, among others, to support the Parties in accordance with the plan and the guidance adopted by the conferences of the Parties and the Global Framework on Chemicals includes attention to capacity building with some measures identified "Draft elements for a capacity-building strategy for the Beyond 2020 Framework Instrument" (SAICM/ICCM.5/INF/5) and "Capacity-building and the sound management of chemicals and waste: Key messages and recommendations for a capacity-building strategy for the new framework instrument" (SAICM/ICCM.5/INF/3).