

NORTHWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS



PORTLAND



Background Guide for the
UN General Assembly
(GA)

December 1, 2014

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to **Northwest Model United Nations – Portland 2015** (NWMUN-Portland 2015) and the General Assembly Plenary. The committee staff of the General Assembly, consisting of Director Galen Stocking and Assistant Directors Lena Raxter and Arella Yi, is looking forward to working with you over the course of the conference.

The entire Secretariat is very excited to work with you in February and appreciate the hard work and research you are undertaking in preparation for what we are confident will be a great conference!

We are immensely pleased to present to you the background guide, written by the General Assembly committee staff. The topics for the General Assembly Plenary are:

- I. Agriculture Development, Food Security and Nutrition
- II. The Environmental Pillar in the Context of Sustainable Development

Every participating delegation is required to submit a position paper prior to attending the conference. NWMUN will accept position papers until **Friday, January 23rd at 11:59 pm Pacific Time. Please submit all position papers to ga.portland@nwmun.org AND positionpapers.portland@nwmun.org.**

Please refer to the following pages for position paper requirements, as well as an example position paper. Delegates' adherence to these guidelines is crucial, because it not only ensures a well-prepared committee, but is also a key component of the evaluation process.

We wish each of you the best as you prepare for this conference and committee. We urge you to move beyond the background guide as you learn more about both the Member State you will represent and the topics we will be discussing. Please do not hesitate to direct any questions or concerns toward your Director or the Director-General. We look forward to meeting you at the conference!

Sincerely,

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Position Paper Guidelines

Your position paper should consist of a well-developed introduction and a summary of the position of your country on each of the topics to be discussed in your committee. It is important to remember that while you will have lots of information on your country's actions on a local or national level, you must discuss your country's position on an international level, particularly including suggestions for policies and future action that could be taken by the committee. Examples of high quality position papers are available on the NWMUN website under "Delegate Preparation."

Formatting

Position papers should be formatted using the following specifications:

1. Times New Roman
2. Size 10 – 12 font
3. Single spaced
4. 2 pages in length

Please Note: Anything over two pages will not be read.

Submission Process

NWMUN-Portland will accept position papers until **Friday January 23, 2015 at 11:59 pm Pacific Time.**

1. Please **send each position paper in a separate e-mail to the committee** with the subject line: COUNTRY – COMMITTEE
 - a. Example: BELARUS – HRC
 - b. Example: TRINIDAD & TOBAGO – GA
2. Please **CC all position paper submissions** to positionpapers.portland@nwmun.org.

General Assembly Plenary:	ga.portland@nwmun.org
United Nations Human Settlements Programme:	unhabitat.portland@nwmun.org
United Nations Population Fund:	unfpa.portland@nwmun.org
Security Council:	sc.portland@nwmun.org

Please Note: Delegates who have not submitted a position paper by the specified deadline will not be given consideration for awards.

Content Requirements

Position papers should include, and will be graded, on the following items:

1. **Formatting** and presentation;
2. **Spelling and grammar that is reflective of the level of education** being pursued by attendees to the conference.
3. The content should include:
 - a. **Background information on the topic**, why your country thinks it is important, relevant national commitments and action on the issue. Remember to focus on national policies which influence your country's action on this topic within the UN and internationally.
 - b. **International commitments and your country's support of specific resolutions**, initiatives, conventions or treaties. Describe what actions have been taken by your country to address prior international agreements made by your country.
 - c. **Specific and concrete proposals** for next steps on the topic, priority issues, and how your country can move forward on addressing the topic. This is the most important section of the position paper, and should be the longest paragraph.

Research Tips

1. Look for statements made by your country – you will often find the exact position of your country within a speech that they have been made.
2. Look for the voting record of your country, which indicates its support or lack of support for particular resolutions on the topics when they were previously discussed.
3. Look for recommendations made in Secretary-General reports or within resolutions that have been adopted in order to identify the ways in which you can move forward or take action on the topic.

Key Resources

1. **UN Website “On the Record”**: <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/unms/>
This website provides direct access to official documents reflecting the views of United Nations Member States.
2. **UN Website “Global Issues”**: <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/>
This website offers an overview of some of the global issues we will be discussing at NWMUN, and links to other resources where you can get additional information.
3. **UN General Assembly Website**: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/>
This is the official website of the General Assembly. Included in this website is information on the Assembly's role in the broader UN, its powers and functions, its Main Committees and its subsidiary bodies. Delegates can also use it to find past documentation about the Assembly as well as documents created by the Assembly, including agendas, resolutions and other information.

Sample Format & Content of Position Papers

Delegation from
(Bold, Italicized, Times New Roman, Size 10-12)
[Member State]
(Bold, Times New Roman, Size 10-12)

Delegation from
(Bold, Italicized, Times New Roman, Size 10-12)
[Member State]
(Bold, Times New Roman, Size 10-12)

Position Paper for [Committee Name] **(Bold, Italicized, Times New Roman, Size 10-12, Centered)**

Introductory sentence providing an overview of the topics and, if appropriate, your delegation's relationship with the committee. (Times New Roman, Size 10 – 12)

I. Topic One Title **(Bold, Italicized, Times New Roman, Size 10-12, Centered)**

Paragraph #1: Background information on the topic, why your country thinks it is important, relevant national commitments and action on the issue. Remember to focus on national policies which influence your country's action on this topic within the UN and internationally.
(Times New Roman, Size 10 – 12)

Paragraph #2: International commitments and your country's support of specific resolutions, initiatives, conventions or treaties. Describe what actions have been taken by your country to address prior international agreements made by your country (Times New Roman, Size 10 – 12)

Paragraph #3: Specific and concrete proposals for next steps on the topic, priority issues, and how your country can move forward on addressing the topic. This is the most important section of the position paper, and should be the longest paragraph. (Times New Roman, Size 10 – 12)

II. Topic Two Title **(Bold, Italicized, Times New Roman, Size 10-12, Centered)**

Paragraph #1: Background information on the topic, why your country thinks it is important, relevant national commitments and action on the issue. Remember to focus on national policies which influence your country's action on this topic within the UN and internationally.
(Times New Roman, Size 10 – 12)

Paragraph #2: International commitments and your country's support of specific resolutions, initiatives, conventions or treaties. Describe what actions have been taken by your country to address prior international agreements made by your country (Times New Roman, Size 10 – 12)

Paragraph #3: Specific and concrete proposals for next steps on the topic, priority issues, and how your country can move forward on addressing the topic. This is the most important section of the position paper, and should be the longest paragraph. (Times New Roman, Size 10 – 12)

(Repeat the topic header and content for other topics if your committee has more than two.)

Example Position Paper

Delegation from
Canada

Represented by
University of Southern Washington

Position Paper for the Economic and Social Council Plenary

The topics before the Economic and Social Council are: 1) Promoting Economic and Social Gender Equality as a Means to Achieve Sustainable Peace, 2) Implementing International Agreements to Ensure Global Public Health, and 3) Promoting Sustainable Cities. Canada is committed to strengthening the role of ECOSOC on the issues before it, and looks forward to promoting enhanced cooperation amongst Member States in order to reach consensus and take concrete action.

I. Promoting Economic and Social Gender Equality as a Means to Achieve Sustainable Peace

In conflict and post-conflict societies, economic and social rights are often given lower priority than political and civil rights. In these cases, women are not treated equally, and are often the victims of gender discrimination, which manifests itself in violations of human rights such as rape, violence and displacement. The prevalence of these crimes is exacerbated by a lack of protection for women, who often do not possess the right to own land, have no means to receive adequate health care and have no access to justice.

Canada has long been a champion of women's economic, social, and cultural rights. As an original signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Canada has a formal commitment to gender equality and, more specifically, supports the explicit and systematic integration of a gender perspective into all peace-building and foreign aid initiatives. Canada continues to press for specific initiatives with concrete and measurable outcomes when addressing gender inequality. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has developed its own Framework for Addressing Gender Equality Results. This framework has been an important advance in assessing the effectiveness of its initiatives and has consistently provided CIDA with useful and relevant data. Canada recognizes the advancements made in Security Council resolution 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009) to strengthen the original principals of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). However, Canada firmly believes that ensuring the implementation of SCR 1325 (2000) at the national level is vital. That is why Canada suggests that the CEDAW committee issue recommendations to both the Security Council and ECOSOC on positive models for National Action Plans (NAP) for incorporating SCR 1325 (2000), a set of progress and impact indicators through which its implementation can be monitored, and benchmarks designed towards strengthening the principals of SCR 1325 (2000).

Canada recommends that the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), along with the ECOSOC Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) reach out to local NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) to coordinate the monitoring of, and reporting on, the progress of these NAPs. CSW will then report its findings to ECOSOC, the Security Council, and the Secretary-General. Canada urges for the adoption of benchmarks requiring 30% of UN-mandated peacekeeping forces and negotiating delegations be women. Canada also believes that while peacekeeping troops are vital to facilitating the cessation of hostilities, a separate unit with a specialized mandate is necessary to deal with

the psychological and health issues of women that continue in post-conflict situations long after the violence is over. The specialized mandate will also lay the groundwork for legal procedures that may need to be taken to ensure just peace. Canada calls for the creation of this specially trained unit to be deployed in post-conflict situations, with a specific mandate to address sexual and gender based violence, help to eliminate impunity, and offer same-sex interviewers for rehabilitation purposes. The newly created unit will facilitate reconciliation and violence prevention.

II. Implementing International Agreements to Ensure Global Public Health

Effectively addressing global public health lies at the center of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Through agreements such as the Paris Declaration on AID Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), and global health initiatives such as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI), and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, the international community has made significant progress in addressing the world's health concerns. Canada is focused on creating frameworks and resolutions that foster greater coordination, eliminate corruption and overlap, improve AID consistency, encourage the untying of AID, emphasize a focus on national health systems, and hold all the countries involved accountable for producing tangible and measurable results.

Canada has been a leader in the use of innovative funding mechanisms, such as the Advance Market Commitment (AMC), which provides incentives for pharmaceutical companies to accelerate the development of vaccines and sell them at prices that poor countries can afford. This project, which is being implemented in coordination with the World Bank and GAVI, is expected to save an estimated 7.7 million lives by 2030. Canada will continue to urge its fellow member states to become more involved in the creation and implementation of such innovative funding mechanisms.

Especially now, due to the downturn in the global economy, where the world's poor are disproportionately suffering, there is a greater need for all donor countries to fulfill their Official Development Aid (ODA) commitments. Canada was the first country to fulfill its G8 commitment to double ODA in Africa by 2008, and throughout the world by 2010. This has been accomplished through both the African Health Systems Initiative (AHSI) and the Catalytic Initiative to Save a Million Lives. Canada has not only committed USD 450 million to these initiatives, but with them has demonstrated its focus on both strengthening, and developing local ownership, of national health systems. Canada urges the implementation of year-by-year funding targets to ensure that ODA commitments for health initiatives are kept. Currently The Measles Initiative is facing a funding gap of \$59 million for 2010, and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria is also facing a funding crisis of \$5 billion for this year. These gaps in funding could cause millions their lives. Canada strongly urges its fellow member states to fulfill their commitments to these funds.

Canada is also a strong proponent of the International Health Partnership & Related Initiatives (IHP+). The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), through the IHP+ framework, is the chair of the Mozambique National AIDS Council (CNCS) and has made long-term financial commitments to IHP+. Canada believes that IHP+ will not only prove to be extremely effective in addressing the issues of AID effectiveness, redundancy, and accountability, but will also go a long way towards creating a united front dedicated to improving global public health. Canada urges for the creation of new commitments that compel 15 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries to join in either bilateral or compact agreements through IHP+ by 2020.

The General Assembly Plenary at NWMUN-Portland 2015

The NWMUN-Portland Secretariat works to create as accurate a simulation as is possible for our delegates. Therefore, we have developed some additional ways for delegates to interact within the simulation, including enabling delegates to take multiple forms of action on an issue, including but not limited to adopting resolutions. This section aims to provide additional, specific information for the General Assembly Plenary at NWMUN-Portland 2015.

Briefings

While discussing a topic, General Assembly delegates are able to receive briefings from representatives of relevant member states or UN subject matter experts. The specific thematic experts available will be announced at the beginning of the committee's sessions.

Mandate

The mandate of the General Assembly Plenary at NWMUN-Portland 2015 is:

The General Assembly may discuss any questions or any matters within the scope of the [UN] Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the present Charter, and [...] may make recommendations to the Members of the United Nations or to the Security Council or to both on any such questions or matters.

Selected Functions & Powers

- To recommend to the Security Council or UN Member States actions that would help achieve the principles of the United Nations with regard to “disarmament and the regulation of armaments”;
- To discuss any “questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security” referred to the Assembly by the Security Council and/or individual State;
- To recommend to the Security Council the consideration of any situations “which are likely to endanger international peace and security”;
- To promote “the progressive development of international law and its codification”;
- To promote “international co-operation in the economic, social, cultural, educational, and health fields”.

Outcome Documents

When taking action, the General Assembly Plenary may adopt **resolutions**. General Assembly Plenary resolutions are non-binding, but are recommendations to the Economic and Social Council, Security Council, or other international organizations or United Nations entities that may encourage those latter bodies to take action as well. Additionally, the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly carry considerable weight behind them, as the Assembly represents the entirety of the membership of the United Nations, and the assessments of the General Assembly Plenary are therefore “world opinion.”

Rules of Procedure

The General Assembly Plenary will use the standard NWMUN rules of procedure, available on our website under “Delegate Preparation” as well as in printed form at the conference.

Members of the General Assembly Plenary at NWMUN-Portland 2015

The General Assembly Plenary will include all Member States of the United Nations, as well as two observer delegations, the delegations of the Holy See and Palestine. The General Assembly Plenary's membership will reflect the current membership of the United Nations at the time of the conference, and should Palestine or any other prospective member achieve UN membership prior to NWMUN-Portland 2015, the General Assembly Plenary at NWMUN-Portland 2015 will include these new members with full membership and voting rights.

General Assembly Plenary Committee Overview

“For decades, the UN has in fact made a real difference – from helping to eradicate disease, to educating children, to brokering peace. But like every generation of leaders, we face new and profound challenges, and this body continues to be tested. The question is whether we possess the wisdom and the courage, as nation-states and members of an international community, to squarely meet those challenges; whether the United Nations can meet the tests of our time.”

– U.S. President Barack Obama¹

Introduction

Following the conclusion of the Second World War, there was a desire within the international community for a more effective forum to facilitate dialogue and diplomacy.² The failure of the League of Nations to prevent the conflict that consumed the better half of the prior decade had demonstrated that the League was incapable of providing satisfactory collective security or international cooperation.³ In 1945, 50 countries met in San Francisco during the United Nations Conference on International Organization to draft the Charter of the United Nations and open it for ratification.⁴ The United Nations General Assembly was created in Chapter IV of the Charter.⁵ The General Assembly held its first session on 10 January 1946 in London, England, and was originally comprised of 51 Member States.⁶

Mandate, Structure, Powers, and Functions

The General Assembly was created with the adoption of Chapter IV of the Charter of the United Nations.⁷ Article 10 of the Charter outlines the general mandate of the body and authorizes the body to discuss any questions or matters within the scope of the present Charter or which are related to the function of the body’s numerous subsidiary organs.⁸ Additionally, the General Assembly has the ability to make recommendations to individual Member States and the Security Council.⁹ The mandate only broadly describes the duties of the General Assembly, as its powers and functional abilities do not end here.¹⁰ Some articles of the Charter that grant specific or particularly important powers to the General Assembly include: Article 11, which gives further authority to discuss matters of international security; Article 13, which dictates that the General Assembly may address issues concerning international cooperation in politics and development; and Article 17, which ensures that control of the budget of the United Nations as a whole falls under the stewardship of the General Assembly.¹¹

In addition to these powers, General Assembly resolution 377A (V), entitled “Uniting for Peace,” further authorizes the General Assembly to consider security issues upon the failure of the Security Council to do so.¹² The General Assembly has utilized the power given by this resolution on several occasions, including most notably the creation of the United Nations Emergency Force, the first ever United Nations peacekeeping force, to facilitate the cessation of hostilities associated with the Suez Crisis in 1956.¹³ This ability has only been sparingly used by the General

¹ Perry, *Text of Obama’s Speech at the U.N.*, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/25/us/politics/text-of-obamas-speech-at-the-un.html?pagewanted=all%20&_r=1&

² United Nations, *The United Nations: An Introduction for Students*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/pubs/cyberschoolbus/unintro/unintro.asp>

³ United Nations Office at Geneva, *League of Nations (1919-1946)*, n.d.

[http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006AC19C/\(httpPages\)/17C8E6BCE10E3F4F80256EF30037D733?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006AC19C/(httpPages)/17C8E6BCE10E3F4F80256EF30037D733?OpenDocument)

⁴ United Nations, *History of the United Nations*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/history/1941-1950.shtml>

⁵ United Nations, *San Francisco Conference*, n.d. http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/history/sanfrancisco_conference.shtml

⁶ United Nations, *History of the United Nations*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/history/1941-1950.shtml>

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ United Nations Conference on International Organizations, *Charter of the United Nations; Chapter IV: The General Assembly*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter4.shtml>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² United Nations General Assembly, *General Assembly Resolution 377*, 1950. <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/landmark/pdf/ares377e.pdf>

¹³ United Nations, *United Nations Emergency Fund Background*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unef1backgr1.html>

Assembly, as building international consensus on what exactly constitutes a failure of the Security Council is increasingly more difficult.¹⁴

The General Assembly also oversees several specialized deliberative organs.¹⁵ There are six separate main committees under the GA umbrella, each with an area of focus: The First Committee, which focuses on issues related to disarmament and international security; the Second Committee, which focuses on economic and financial issues; the social, humanitarian and cultural issues-centered Third Committee; the Fourth Committee, which addresses special political and decolonization issues; the Fifth Committee, focused on administrative and budgetary issues; and the legally-focused Sixth Committee.¹⁶ While each main committee has the capacity to develop resolutions and recommendations, all of the subsidiary committees' decisions are subject to vote during the Plenary Sessions of the General Assembly.¹⁷ In addition, there are also subsidiary and parallel commissions which work closely with the General Assembly.¹⁸ Notable examples of such organizations are the Disarmament Commission and the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, which primarily coordinate with the First Committee of the General Assembly as well as the Security Council regarding strategies and in-depth consideration of relevant agenda items.¹⁹ In addition to subsidiary bodies, the General Assembly also oversees several funds, programs, and working groups, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).²⁰ These organizations are critical to the General Assembly's success, as the wide scope of the topics addressed by the Assembly require tailored technical expertise and specialized programs of work.²¹

The UN Secretary-General plays an important role in the deliberations, debate, and research that goes into the many decisions rendered by the General Assembly.²² The Secretary-General and his designated Special Representatives, Advisers, and Envoys carry out several functions for the General Assembly, such as the creation of the Logistical Report on the Operations of the General Assembly, coordination between the many subsidiary bodies that provide substantive reports, and the creation of reports at the request of the General Assembly.²³

Membership and Procedure

The General Assembly has included all Member States of the United Nations since its initial inception; as a result, it now includes all 193 Member States and two non-member Observer States: Holy See and Palestine.²⁴ These Observer States have limited powers: only Member States are capable of participating in substantive voting procedures, but observers are fully capable of participating in the substantive work of the bodies at all stages other than substantive voting.²⁵

In addition to the Observer States, the General Assembly works with various intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).²⁶ Much like the observer states, these organizations are capable of contributing to the Assembly's work.²⁷ The General Assembly holds annual sessions and also meets for special sessions at the behest of the Secretary-General, Security Council, or a majority of Member States.²⁸ Due to the structure of the General Assembly as a deliberative body with a particularly wide scope, there has been an

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ United Nations Foundation, *The General Assembly*, n.d. <http://www.unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/united-nations/the-general-assembly.html>

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ United Nations General Assembly, *Rules of Procedure (A/520/Rev.17)*, 2007.

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/520/rev.17&Lang=E

¹⁸ United Nations, *Subsidiary Organs of the General Assembly*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/subsidiary/>

¹⁹ United Nations, *The Disarmament Commission*, n.d.

<http://www.un.org/disarmament/HomePage/DisarmamentCommission/UNDiscom.shtml>

²⁰ United Nations, *Subsidiary Organs of the General Assembly*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/subsidiary/>

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² United Nations, *The Role of the Secretary-General*, n.d. http://www.un.org/sg/sg_role.shtml

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ United Nations, *General Assembly: Rules of Procedure*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/ropga/index.shtml>

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ United Nations, *The Role of Permanent Observers*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/members/nonmembers.shtml>

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ United Nations, *General Assembly: Rules of Procedure*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/ropga/index.shtml>

increased focus on developing consensus among participants.²⁹ This increased emphasis on consensus-building is intended to strengthen the support for the resolutions and actions of the General Assembly among the international community.³⁰

Upcoming Agenda Items and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

In 2000, the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration as resolution 55/2; the declaration included the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are goals for the international community primarily in the field of development.³¹ With the 2015 deadline for achievement of the MDGs approaching, the General Assembly is evaluating progress towards these goals and developing a post-2015 development agenda to replace them.³² The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) outcome document entitled “The future we want” formed a 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) to create a proposal for the next generation of development goals, called the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).³³ The OWG began meeting in March 2013.³⁴ Though only initially planned to last for eight sessions, the OWG has met 13 times, the last of which concluded on 18 July 2014 with a final proposal of 17 goals.³⁵ The General Assembly subsequently decided in September 2014 that these proposed SDGs will provide the foundation for sustainable development elements in the post-2015 development agenda.³⁶ As the main deliberative body of the United Nations, the General Assembly will remain at the center of the discussion regarding the post-2015 development agenda.³⁷

The Committee will also address other significant topics during this year’s sessions, including: integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences; the Arms Trade Treaty; macroeconomic policy questions regarding the effects of atomic radiation, and science and technology for development.³⁸

Conclusion

The General Assembly has become one of the most important diplomatic fora available to the Member States of the United Nations. While the committee’s resolutions are not necessarily binding international law like those of the Security Council, the Assembly’s resolutions are statements of international opinion, and the Assembly’s debates are one of the most important mechanisms for ongoing dialogue and discussion regarding nearly all aspects of international development. The General Assembly usually demonstrates a high level of both political will and cooperation, and is an example which other UN organs can look to.

²⁹ United Nations, *Powers and Functions of the General Assembly*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

³² Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, *Post-2015 Process*, n.d. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1561>

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*, n.d. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html>

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ General Assembly, *Draft Resolution A/68/L.51*, 10 September 2014. <http://undocs.org/a/68/L.51>

³⁷ Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, *Post-2015 Process*, n.d. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1561>

³⁸ United Nations General Assembly, *Agenda of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly (A/68/251)*, 2013. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/251

I. Agriculture Development, Food Security and Nutrition

“Over the coming decades, feeding a growing global population and ensuring food and nutrition security for all will depend on increasing food production.”³⁹
-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon

Introduction

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 805 million undernourished people exist in the world today.⁴⁰ Hunger can result in the slowing down of physical and mental activities and a weakened immune system.⁴¹ The exacerbation beginning in 2008 of an existing food crisis has posed a greater challenge to low-income countries with a food deficit trying to attain and distribute food to their people.⁴² Though there is enough food to feed everyone in the world adequately, the distribution of food is a major challenge.⁴³

It is estimated that by 2030, the demand for food will result in an increase of 50% due to the predicted growth of the global population.⁴⁴ In addition, approximately 30% of worldwide food produced per year will be wasted or lost.⁴⁵ The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.”⁴⁶ Food security is comprised of three pillars involving availability, access, and the use of food.⁴⁷ Poor food security can be the outcome of economic hardships or the environment, and can also become a contributing factor to poor health by causing malnutrition.⁴⁸ Furthermore, food and agricultural trade is a major component of global trade activities and economic development and is the largest employment sector in most developing countries.⁴⁹

Agriculture development plays a major role towards food security by producing enough food to guarantee access.⁵⁰ However, such development can be disrupted by inadequate agrarian infrastructure such as improper irrigation systems.⁵¹ Inadequate agricultural infrastructure like scarce storage facilities contribute to limited agricultural yields.⁵² Investing in proper agricultural practices is important to improving food security.⁵³ Improvements in food security can be made through expenditures that improve agriculture development by increasing water efficiency and improving land management.⁵⁴

International Framework

Article 25.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that all individuals are entitled to an adequate standard of living through proper health and well-being; the right of food is one component of this standard.⁵⁵ Similar to the UDHR, Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) guarantees the right to a sufficient living standard involving access to adequate food, and further obligates States Party to the ICESCR to take action collaboratively to ensure this right is realized.⁵⁶ The measures

³⁹ UNDESA, *International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life*, 2014. http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/food_security.shtml

⁴⁰ WFP, *Hunger*, n.d. <http://www.wfp.org/hunger>

⁴¹ WFP, *What is hunger?*, n.d. <http://www.wfp.org/hunger/what-is>

⁴² CFS, *The Global Food Security Crisis*, n.d. <http://www.un-foodsecurity.org/background>

⁴³ <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story028/en/>

⁴⁴ United Nations, *Water and Agriculture in the Green Economy*, 2011.

http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/green_economy_2011/pdf/info_brief_water_and_agriculture_eng.pdf

⁴⁵ UNDESA, *International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life’*, 2014. http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/food_security.shtml

⁴⁶ World Health Organization, *Food Security*, n.d. <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story028/en/>

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ WFP, *What causes hunger?*, n.d. <http://www.wfp.org/hunger/causes>

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ United Nations, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a25>

⁵⁶ OHCHR, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, n.d. <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

taken in order to achieve this recognized right involve programs that focus on ensuring equal trading of global food supplies, with special attention towards those in need of food resources.⁵⁷ It also addresses improving food production, preservation, and distribution methods implemented to the full extent of technical and scientific use.⁵⁸ The ICESCR also calls for the development of rural systems that guarantee the most successfully efficient utilization and development of natural resources.⁵⁹ The UN Special Rapporteur on Food also states that the right to food is protected by international humanitarian law, which confirms state obligation to ensure the exercise of that right by individuals.⁶⁰ This position was established due to the right of food being recognized in the UDHR and the ICESCR.⁶¹

Target 1.C of Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) calls for decreasing the number of people suffering from hunger by half between the years of 1990 and 2015.⁶² The current rate of progress in achieving the MDGs is marginally insufficient, with a projected 13 percent prevalence of hunger in developing countries and a target of 12 percent to achieve the goal by 2015.⁶³ Northern Africa possesses a lower undernourishment prevalence than sub-Saharan Africa, but the continent as whole has not made enough progress to stay on track towards achieving the MDG target.⁶⁴ In contrast, Latin America and the Caribbean are within reach of achievement if past trends hold.⁶⁵ Additionally, the Caucasus and Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeastern Asia regions have achieved the target.⁶⁶

Goal 2 of the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for an end to hunger by the year 2030 while ensuring access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for all, with an emphasis on people living in vulnerable situations.⁶⁷ This goal also includes doubling the agrarian production rate and incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly for women and indigenous peoples.⁶⁸ Goal 2 additionally calls for the strengthening of systems for sustainable food production in order to be more resistant to climate change and extreme weather.⁶⁹ This strengthened system, if implemented as part of the post-2015 development agenda, will help improve the quality of land and soil used in agrarian settings and to expand overall productivity.⁷⁰ Additionally, Goal 2.b specifically proposes preventing trade restrictions that lead to instability in food prices and poor distribution of food to those in need.⁷¹ Stabilizing food prices and distributing food to those in need were both mandated by the Doha Development Round, a set of trade negotiations intended to enhance the likelihood of trade for developing countries.⁷² It sought major reform of the international trading system via the lowering of trade barriers and amended trade rules.⁷³

In 1999, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which monitors implementation of the ICESCR, issued General Comment 12, entitled “The Right to Adequate Food”; the document reaffirms ICESCR state parties’ obligation to protect the right to food and to guarantee access to food and food aid.⁷⁴ The document calls upon state parties to abstain from using food as a means of invoking economic or political pressures.⁷⁵ This sentiment was also acknowledged in the Rome Declaration on World Food Security, created by the World Food

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ United Nations Special Rapporteur, *The right to food as a human right*, n.d. <http://www.srfood.org/en/right-to-food>

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>

⁶³ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*, 2013. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3458e/i3458e.pdf>

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ United Nations, *Outcome Document – Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals*, n.d. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² WTO, *The Doha Round*, n.d. http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dda_e/dda_e.htm

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ FAO, *The right to adequate food (art. 11)*, 12 May 1999.

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/righttofood/documents/RTF_publications/EN/General_Comment_12_EN.pdf

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Summit in 1996.⁷⁶ This Summit created a Plan of Action that included seven commitments ranging from the eradication of poverty to the pursuit of sustainable food.⁷⁷ In 2004, the Food and Agriculture Organization created the Voluntary Guidelines of the Right to Food to supplement the World Food Summit Plan of Action.⁷⁸ The action items mentioned in the guidelines include preventive measures to dispel contamination of food, as well as encouraging healthy eating habits and dietary diversity.⁷⁹

UN System Involvement

In 2013, the General Assembly adopted resolution 68/233, titled Agriculture Development, Food Security and Nutrition, which calls for an increase in productivity of sustainable agriculture.⁸⁰ The resolution requests that excessive volatility of food prices be addressed in a manner that allows for the timely distribution of food market information to the public.⁸¹ Resolution 68/233 also requests the removal of restrictions placed on food exports as well as high taxes on food intended for non-profitable and humanitarian use.⁸² In addition, the resolution calls for a significant reduction in food loss and waste through increased promotion of adequate agrarian techniques and food storage.⁸³ General Assembly resolution 66/288 (2012) similarly calls for enhancing and supporting sustainable agriculture that is economically feasible while eradicating hunger without impacting ecosystems.⁸⁴ This resolution also expects that these actions be undertaken in ways that can improve the resilience of the agricultural sector to climate change and natural disasters.⁸⁵

There are three main UN organizations that handle food-related topics: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), WFP, and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which are collectively called the United Nations Rome-based Agencies (RBAs).⁸⁶ The mandate of WFP is to provide food aid for social and economic development, as well as to satisfy the needs of refugees and emergency situations.⁸⁷ WFP targets their assistance to vulnerable groups, such as young children and mothers.⁸⁸ WFP also promotes purchasing nutritious food commodities and producing food locally.⁸⁹

The FAO differs from the WFP in that they focus on disaster prevention to alleviate disaster-related food emergencies.⁹⁰ In addition, the FAO promotes initiatives focused on risk management of disasters and decreasing the likelihood of agricultural sector-produced food loss.⁹¹

The goal of IFAD is to provide monetary assistance to smallholder farmers to help them scale up production.⁹² Their assistance also goes towards improving land conditions for future agrarian use as well as sustainable management of land and water.⁹³

⁷⁶ FAO, *World Food Summit*, 13-17 November 1996. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/W3613E/W3613E00.HTM>

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ FAO, *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Food In the Context of National Food Security*, 2004. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/y7937e/y7937e00.htm>

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ United Nations General Assembly, *Agriculture development, food security and nutrition*, 2014. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/233

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ United Nations, *Decisions by Topic: Food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture*, n.d. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1269>

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ FAO, *Rome-based Agencies*, March 2014. http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/post-2015/Targets_and_indicators_RBA_joint_proposal.pdf

⁸⁷ WFP, *Mission Statement*, n.d. <http://www.wfp.org/about/mission-statement>

⁸⁸ United Nations, *Food*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/food/index.shtml>

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ FAO, *Mission Statement*, n.d. <http://www.fao.org/focus/s/disaster/img/ENG.PDF>

⁹¹ United Nations, *Food*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/food/index.shtml>

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

The World Bank is another organ involved in improving food security, particularly through attempts to reduce the distortion of trade subsidies and barriers and increasing agrarian production of food.⁹⁴ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) focuses on supporting developing countries so they become adept at responding to international food crises.⁹⁵ This is done by aiding in the development of strategies to enhance production of sustainable agriculture and by informing governments of their options.⁹⁶ In addition, the UNDP works with the World Bank to coordinate funding.⁹⁷ The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) focuses on supporting developing countries with the development of sustainable agrarian methods as well as foreign investments that can improve their food security.⁹⁸ Their work also focuses on the removal of non-tariff barriers.⁹⁹ Specifically tailored towards assessing and monitoring malnourishment, WHO provides assistance to countries by promoting food hygiene as well as safety of food supplies.¹⁰⁰ The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) exists to review policies relevant to global food in order to ensure food security and nutrition for all.¹⁰¹ Additionally, the WFP, UNDP, and UNCTAD belong to the United Nations system of funds and programs, which report to the General Assembly.¹⁰²

Key Issues

Access of Food and Globalization

WHO states that there are ample amounts of food to feed the population globally, but poor distribution hinders proper food security.¹⁰³ It is estimated that by 2050, the world population will total 9 billion, and projected growth in production will create enough food worldwide to feed even that increased population.¹⁰⁴ However, increases in agricultural productivity will not guarantee *access* to food resources.¹⁰⁵

Access barriers can come in many forms, including infrastructure, such as lack of roads and railways, and economic access, such as the ability to purchase food.¹⁰⁶ In places where there has been rapid economic growth, such as South Asia, growth centers in urban areas and can leave behind a large and impoverished portion of the population; therefore, many do not have the means to purchase food even in countries with tremendous growth.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, armed violence, natural disasters, and extreme weather events increases the challenges in dealing with food insecurity and malnutrition.¹⁰⁸ These situations often reinforce the poverty cycle, place additional economic burdens on families, and often damage local infrastructure, all of which limit access to food.¹⁰⁹

Environmental Impacts and Climate Change

Small-scale farmers who depend heavily on rainfall provide a majority of the global food supply.¹¹⁰ These farmers can be drastically impacted by fluctuations in precipitation patterns as well as extreme weather conditions like droughts and floods.¹¹¹ In addition, agriculture can become susceptible to waste due to the effects of climate change combined with poor management techniques being used by farmers.¹¹² By 2030, it is predicted that Southern Africa

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ UNDP, *Partners*, n.d. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/partners.html>

⁹⁸ United Nations, *Food*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/food/index.shtml>

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ CFS, *Global Food Security*, n.d. <http://www.un-foodsecurity.org/>

¹⁰² United Nations, *The United Nations System*, 2013.

http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/structure/pdfs/UN%20system%20chart_lettercolor_2013.pdf

¹⁰³ WHO, *Food Security*, n.d. <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story028/en/>

¹⁰⁴ FAO, *World Summit on Food Security*, n.d. <http://www.fao.org/wsfs/world-summit/wsfs-challenges/en/>

¹⁰⁵ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*, 2014. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4030e.pdf>

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ United Nations, *Water and Agriculture in the Green Economy*, 2011.

http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/green_economy_2011/pdf/info_brief_water_and_agriculture_eng.pdf

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

and South Asia will be most susceptible to food shortages as a result of climate change.¹¹³ Degrading land resources, loss of crops, and outbreaks of pests and disease all contribute to climate change-induced food insecurity.¹¹⁴

Economic Issues

In 2011, UN-Water released the Water and Agriculture in the Green Economy information brief, which observed that increasing food prices poses a hindrance to the food security of developing countries.¹¹⁵ Spikes in prices can cause food riots as well as broader economic and political fluctuations.¹¹⁶ Less-developed countries are most susceptible to poor food security resulting from volatile food prices.¹¹⁷ Sustainable growth in the economy at the national level does not result in decreasing hunger in lower-income areas unless growth can reach such areas.¹¹⁸ For example, landlocked countries face constraints in accessing global markets since the cost of trade is higher; these states must rely on infrastructure and positive relations with neighboring countries to facilitate their trading.¹¹⁹ Food trade can, however, facilitate positive economic impacts as it opens up new economic opportunities.¹²⁰

Use of Food

Wasted food is a common outcome of market speculations on food prices and can occur at all stages of the food supply chain.¹²¹ About 1.3 billion tons of food produced goes to waste or is lost every year.¹²² A higher rate of food waste is seen in high-income regions such as North America and Europe in comparison to low-income regions such as Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.¹²³ This pattern is a result of consumer behavior and communication issues in the supply chain.¹²⁴ Quality standards set by the food industry in these countries may be focused on “best-before-dates” that are quite strict and force the consumer to discard food before it actually becomes spoiled.¹²⁵ Food that is produced but not eaten also strains other resources like water; the production of food not eaten each year uses 250 billion cubic meters of water, and creates 3.3 billion tons of greenhouse gases.¹²⁶

Conclusion

All people have the right to food as confirmed in resolution 68/233, the MDGs, the UDHR, and the ICESCR. Efforts by organizations such as the WFP, FAO, and IFAD have taken action to promote and fund the creation and implementation of policy and practices that promote fairness in the economy of food markets. Gaps in achieving food security occur as a result of poor access, food wastage, economic issues, and environmental impacts. Sustainable agriculture is capable of ensuring sufficient production to achieve food security, but achieving food security additionally requires adequate distribution, minimizing waste, and proper use. .

Questions for Further Consideration

What efforts should be taken to address food insecurity in regions showing little progress of achieving the MDG? In what ways can better food access assist in combatting poverty? How will climate change impact access to food? What preventive measures can be taken to deter food loss as a result of climate and environmental impacts? What can be done to reduce food waste? Finally, what mechanisms can be taken to resolve access issues?

¹¹³ UNDESA, *International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life’*, 2014. http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/food_security.shtml

¹¹⁴ UNDP, *Gender, climate change and food security*, n.d.

http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Gender%20and%20Environment/PB4_Africa_Gender-ClimateChange-Food-Security.pdf

¹¹⁵ United Nations, *Water and Agriculture in the Green Economy*, 2011.

http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/green_economy_2011/pdf/info_brief_water_and_agriculture_eng.pdf

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*, 2013. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3458e/i3458e.pdf>

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ United Nations, *Innovation for Sustainable Development*, 2008

<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/publication.pdf>

¹²¹ United Nations, *Water and Agriculture in the Green Economy*, 2011.

http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/green_economy_2011/pdf/info_brief_water_and_agriculture_eng.pdf

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ FAO, *Food Wastage Footprint Impacts on Natural Resources*, 2013. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3347e/i3347e.pdf>

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

II. The Environmental Pillar in the Context of Sustainable Development

“Whatever befalls the Earth – befalls the sons of the Earth. Man did not weave the web of life – he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.”
– Chief Seattle ¹²⁷

Introduction

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), also known as the Brundtland Commission, produced a report known as “Our Common Future” in 1987.¹²⁸ This report defines the concept of sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹²⁹ The report elaborates further on sustainable development, establishing its three main pillars: economic development, social development, and environmental protection.¹³⁰ The Brundtland Report produced a basis for the conceptualization of sustainable development worldwide, and its definitions have been used for the past 27 years to elaborate further on how sustainable development should occur.¹³¹

In particular, the environmental pillar refers to how human development impacts the environment, such as through deforestation and climate change.¹³² It can be considered the foundation of sustainable development in that without proper protection of the environment, social and economic development cannot be sustained.¹³³ When he called for the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan highlighted that the environment is key to sustaining the current human lifestyle.¹³⁴

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a series of eight goals set by the United Nations that range from decreasing extreme poverty to improving maternal health.¹³⁵ Adopted after the Millennium Summit in 2000, the MDGs have become the focal point for international policy within the United Nations system.¹³⁶ These goals were designed to be reached by 2015, and while all of the goals will not be met, the progress made has been paramount for increasing the quality of human life.¹³⁷ With the 2015 deadline fast approaching, the United Nations is creating a post-2015 development agenda to replace the MDGs, which would potentially include a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹³⁸ Initially developed at the request of the Rio+20 conference of 2012, the SDGs are a series of proposed goals designed to work beyond the MDGs to further increase human development, sustainably.¹³⁹ The General Assembly has decided the 17 proposed SDGs will form the foundation of sustainable development plans in the post-2015 development agenda.¹⁴⁰

¹²⁷ Chief Seattle, *We May be Brothers After All*, 1854. <http://www.mountainman.com.au/thechief.html>

¹²⁸ High Level Panel on Global Sustainability, *Sustainable Development: From Brundtland to Rio 2012*, 2010.

http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/climatechange/shared/gsp/docs/GSP1-6_Background%20on%20Sustainable%20Devt.pdf

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, *About Rio+20*, n.d. <http://www.uncsd2012.org/about.html>

¹³¹ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, 1987. <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>

¹³² United Nations Environmental Programme, *Issue Brief #1: The Environmental Dimensions of IFSD, 2004*.

<http://www.unep.org/environmental-governance/Portals/8/InstitutionalFrameworkforSustainabledevPAPER1.pdf>

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Overview of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*, 2005.

<http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/About.html>

¹³⁵ Millennium Development Goals, *Background*. n.d. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Sustainable Development, *Topics: Sustainable Development Goals Topics*, n.d. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ General Assembly, *Draft Resolution A/68/L.51*, 10 September 2014. <http://undocs.org/a/68/L.51>

Sustainable development is used as an all-inclusive, long-term approach to developmental decision-making on every level, including for governments, civil societies, and the private sector.¹⁴¹ However, implementation of sustainable development has been difficult, especially in the environmental context. Reasons for this include the heightening scale and intricacy of environmental change; complications related to restoration and management of the environment; development and investment related to implementing sustainable development; and conflicts between global policy initiatives and national sovereignty.¹⁴² Environmental degradation, in turn, has caused harm to human wellbeing, especially for vulnerable groups in society.¹⁴³

International Framework

In 1980, the International Union for the Conservation of Natural Resources (IUCN) released the World Conservation Strategy (WCS), which became the foundation for the concept of sustainable development.¹⁴⁴ Created jointly by IUCN, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), WCS provides countries with strategies to preserve key ecological processes and life-sustaining systems, conserve genetic biodiversity, and safeguard the sustainable use of species and ecosystems.¹⁴⁵

In 1983, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), also known as the Brundtland Commission, was created by General Assembly resolution 38/161.¹⁴⁶ Four years later, the Commission published the Brundtland Report.¹⁴⁷ The report reaffirmed environmental protection as vital to maintaining the human population, and produced the first definition for sustainable development.¹⁴⁸

In 1988, UNEP assembled the Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts on Biological Diversity to explore the need for a legally-binding framework to help protect biodiversity.¹⁴⁹ Soon after, the Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts on Biological Diversity created the Ad Hoc Working Group of Technical and Legal Experts, who in turn drafted the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which was adopted at the Nairobi Conference in 1992.¹⁵⁰ The CBD pursues three main goals: “conservation of biological diversity; sustainable use of components of biological diversity; and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.”¹⁵¹ The CBD is considered a landmark in international law, as it was the first legally-binding UN document to recognize that conservation of biological diversity is paramount for development and an imperative concern for humanity.¹⁵² Previous conventions had only addressed specific species or habitats; however, the CBD states that all ecosystems, species, and genes should be used to the benefit of humanity as a whole in a way that does not decrease biodiversity in the long term.¹⁵³ It also states that lack of scientific evidence should not be used as reasoning to postpone addressing a possible threat to biodiversity.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴¹ High Level Panel on Global Sustainability, *Sustainable Development: From Brundtland to Rio 2012*, 2010. http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/climatechange/shared/gsp/docs/GSP1-6_Background%20on%20Sustainable%20Devt.pdf

¹⁴² United Nations Environmental Programme, *Issue Brief #1: The Environmental Dimensions of IFSD*, 2004. <http://www.unep.org/environmentalgovernance/Portals/8/InstitutionalFrameworkforSustainabledevPAPER1.pdf>

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, *The History of Sustainable Development in the United Nations*, 2012. <http://www.uncsd2012.org/history.html>

¹⁴⁵ International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. *World Conservation Strategy*. 1980. <https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/WCS-004.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, *The History of Sustainable Development in the United Nations*, 2012. <http://www.uncsd2012.org/history.html>

¹⁴⁷ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, 1987. <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Convention on Biological Diversity, *History of the Convention*, n.d. <http://www.cbd.int/history/>

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Convention on Biological Diversity, *Introduction*, n.d. <http://www.cbd.int/intro/default.shtml>

¹⁵² Convention on Biological Diversity, *Sustaining Life on Earth: How the Convention on Biological Diversity Promotes Nature and Human Well-Being*, 2000. <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-sustain-en.pdf>

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Implementation of the CBD has come to address issues including:

“measures and incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity; regulated access to genetic resources; access to and transfer of technology, including biotechnology; technical and scientific cooperation; impact assessment; education and public awareness; provision of financial resources; and national reporting on efforts to implement treaty commitments.”¹⁵⁵

States party to the CBD are obligated to uphold commitments in policy and practice to promote and maintain biodiversity.¹⁵⁶ States party meet every two years at the UN Conference of Parties to the CBD (CoP).¹⁵⁷ During these meetings, states party examine new concerns and adopt new goals and programs to combat biodiversity loss.¹⁵⁸ States party to the CBD are then required to implement action plans and national policies to fulfill the decisions made during the CoP.¹⁵⁹ The CoP is also used to evaluate the effectiveness of the CBD in addressing the issues mentioned above.¹⁶⁰

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is also notable, as it is the primary intergovernmental structure for setting climate change policy.¹⁶¹ Specifically, UNFCCC is tasked with determining what Member States can do to limit global temperature increases and cope with the impacts of the current increases.¹⁶² With 195 Member States, UNFCCC holds a Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP) annually to address the issues related to climate change.¹⁶³ In 1995, when Member States realized that previous emission reduction protocols of the UNFCCC were inadequate, negotiations for a stronger and more universal agreement to strengthen those protocols were launched.¹⁶⁴ The result of this was the Kyoto Protocol, adopted in 1997.¹⁶⁵ An international and binding agreement, the Kyoto Protocol’s aim was to decrease emissions through commitments by Member States.¹⁶⁶ It is split into two commitment periods – one from 2008 to 2012, and a second from 2013 to 2020.¹⁶⁷ In December 2012, the Doha Amendment was added to the Kyoto protocol to help with implementation of Kyoto for the second period from 2013 to 2020.¹⁶⁸ As of September 2014, 18 states have ratified the amendment.¹⁶⁹ After the completion of the first commitment period, the data collected by the UNFCCC showed that global emissions have *increased* by eleven percent, which clearly demonstrates that the protocol has not been successful in decreasing global carbon emissions as intended.¹⁷⁰

UN System Involvement

The first UN conference to recognize the need to renew the connection between humanity and nature was the UN Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm Sweden in 1972.¹⁷¹ A landmark conference, its

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ World Wildlife Fund, *Convention on Biological Diversity*, n.d.

http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/policy/conventions/cbd/

¹⁵⁸ Convention on Biological Diversity. *Conference of the Parties (COP)*. n.d. <http://www.cbd.int/cop/>

¹⁵⁹ World Wildlife Fund. *Convention on Biological Diversity*, n.d.

http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/policy/conventions/cbd/

¹⁶⁰ Convention on Biological Diversity. *Review of the Effectiveness*. n.d. <http://www.cbd.int/financial/gef/review.shtml>

¹⁶¹ Open Working Group on Sustainable Development, *Outcome Document of the Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals*, 2014. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

¹⁶² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Background on the UNFCCC: The international response to climate change*, n.d. http://unfccc.int/essential_background/items/6031.php

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Status of the Doha Amendment*, n.d.

http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/doha_amendment/items/7362.php

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Clark, *Has the Kyoto Protocol made any difference to carbon emissions?*, 2012.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2012/nov/26/kyoto-protocol-carbon-emissions>

¹⁷¹ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, *The History of Sustainable Development in the United Nations*, 2012. <http://www.uncsd2012.org/history.html>

conclusions led to the creation of various UN organizations and conventions, most notably the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration and the creation of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).¹⁷² The Stockholm Declaration was the first international declaration to acknowledge the importance and necessity of a healthy environment; UNEP has become the main UN body to draft and implement international environmental policy.¹⁷³ Through these two entities, the UN has been able to enhance its involvement in environmental law, especially with regards to sustainable development.¹⁷⁴ UNEP in particular has promoted the legal framework for international environmental law, which has had a paramount impact on state practices related to sustainable development, through its Division of Environmental Law and Conventions.¹⁷⁵ This division is devoted to the implementation of progressive changes in global environmental law across all levels of government and environmental sectors.¹⁷⁶

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, was held in 1992 with 172 governments and over 2,400 non-governmental organizations (NGO) representatives in attendance.¹⁷⁷ At the conference, representatives discussed the environment and sustainable development.¹⁷⁸ The resulting documents were Agenda 21, a Programme of Action (PoA) for sustainable development in the 21st century; the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; and the Statement of Principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests.¹⁷⁹ The conference also resulted in the creation of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in December 1992 to ensure implementation of the documents produced through the UNCED, particularly the implementation of Agenda 21.¹⁸⁰

In December 2009, the General Assembly adopted resolution 64/236, which called for the organization of a conference on sustainable development.¹⁸¹ On the twenty-year anniversary of UNCED, the United Nations held the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), also known as Rio+20, in Rio de Janeiro. The outcome document of this conference was “The Future We Want,” which was endorsed by General Assembly resolution 66/288 in July 2012.¹⁸²

Section C of “The Future We Want” is solely devoted to the environmental pillar in context of sustainable development.¹⁸³ It commits to strengthening UNEP through multiple means: universal membership; better financial resources; enabling UNEP to create UN system-wide strategies for the environment; promoting the creation of a “strong science-policy interface”; “sharing of evidence-based environmental information” via public awareness campaigns; capacity building to countries; and “progressively consolidating headquarters functions in Nairobi” to “strengthen regional presence.”¹⁸⁴ It also stresses the need for regular reviews of earth’s changing environment and the impact these changes have on humans.¹⁸⁵

Section C of “The Future We Want” also agreed to begin the creation of SDGs, which build on the MDGs and are based on Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, Rio principles, international law, and commitments

¹⁷² Convention on Biological Diversity, *Sustaining Life on Earth: How the Convention on Biological Diversity Promotes Nature and Human Well-Being*, 2000. <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-sustain-en.pdf>

¹⁷³ United Nations Environmental Programme, *Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment*, 1972. <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?documentid=97&articleid=1503>

¹⁷⁴ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, *The History of Sustainable Development in the United Nations*, 2012. <http://www.uncsd2012.org/history.html>

¹⁷⁵ United Nations Environmental Programme, *DELIC: Division of Environmental Law and Conventions*, n.d. <http://www.unep.org/delc/EnvironmentalLaw/tabid/54403/Default.aspx>

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, *The History of Sustainable Development in the United Nations*, 2012. <http://www.uncsd2012.org/history.html>

¹⁷⁸ Earth Summit, *UN Conference on Environment and Development*, 1992. <http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/enviro.html>

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, *The History of Sustainable Development in the United Nations*, 2012. <http://www.uncsd2012.org/history.html>

¹⁸¹ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, *About Rio+20*, 2012. <http://www.uncsd2012.org/about.html>

¹⁸² United Nations General Assembly, *The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288)*, 2012. http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

already made by the UN towards sustainable development.¹⁸⁶ The SDGs were here envisioned to contribute to all three pillars of sustainable development, not divert focus or progress from MDGs, and involve all relevant stakeholders in the process.¹⁸⁷ An inter-governmental 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) was created for this purpose, and submitted its proposals for the SDGs to the 68th session of the General Assembly.¹⁸⁸ On 8 September 2014, the General Assembly officially adopted the SDGs through passing resolution 68/309.¹⁸⁹

Three of the proposed SDGs fall under the environmental pillar of Sustainable Development: Goals 13, 14, and 15.¹⁹⁰ Goal 13 addresses the need to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, while acknowledging that the UNFCCC is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.¹⁹¹ Goal 14 addresses the need to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.¹⁹² Goal 15 concerns the protection, restoration and promotion of sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems; sustainable management forests; diminishing desertification; and halting and reversing land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.¹⁹³

The SDGs also clarify the associated responsibilities of Member States. For example, Goal 13 has subsections calling for “integrat[ing] climate change methods into national policies, strategies, and planning” and improving public awareness to climate change through education and institutional capacity building.¹⁹⁴ Goal 14 details further goals by setting a timeline for when actions should be taken by, such as “conserv[ing] at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas” by 2020.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, Goal 15 commits states to more specific actions for urgent priorities, such as “tak[ing] urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protecting species of flora and fauna.”¹⁹⁶

In addition to being associated with the Kyoto Protocol, the UNFCCC also hosts ecosystem management services. This means the UNFCCC hosts programs that aim to protect key ecological services and promote sustainable use of natural resources, while also considering economic, social, and political needs of future generations.¹⁹⁷ One such program is Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+).¹⁹⁸ REDD+ is a joint effort between the UN and the World Bank, which assigns monetary values to the carbon stored in forests while also offering incentives to developing states for reducing emissions via use of sustainable development.¹⁹⁹ It does this through initiatives such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), which provides values to standing forests therefore assisting developing states in the pursuit of sustainable development; and the Forest Investment Program (FIP), which gives developing countries “scaled-up financing for readiness reform and public and private investments” which are identified through national REDD readiness or other similar strategies.²⁰⁰ REDD readiness refers to the efforts a county has made or is making towards building its capacity to be ready for a REDD+ initiative.²⁰¹ Payment through this system also becomes a source of income for impoverished peoples, increasing the

¹⁸⁶ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Sustainable Development. *Topics: Sustainable Development Goals Topics*. n.d. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Sustainable Development, *Major Groups: Sustainable Development Goals*, n.d. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1565>

¹⁸⁹ Open Working Group on Sustainable Development, *Outcome Document of the Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals*, 2014. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ United Nations Environmental Programme, *Managing ecosystems for multiple environmental services and biodiversity in the context of climate change*, 2013.

http://unfccc.int/files/science/workshops_meetings/application/pdf/epple_securing_multiple_ecosystem_services.pdf

¹⁹⁸ UN-REDD Programme, *About REDD+*, n.d. <http://www.un-redd.org/AboutREDD/tabid/102614/Default.aspx>

¹⁹⁹ UN- *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Forest Carbon Partnership Facility. *Home Page*. n.d. <http://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/>; Climate Funds Update. *Forest Investment Program*. n.d. <http://www.climatefundsupdate.org/listing/forest-investment-program>

²⁰¹ UN-REDD Programme, *About REDD+*, n.d. <http://www.un-redd.org/AboutREDD/tabid/102614/Default.aspx>

effectiveness of the program.²⁰²

Joint UN and World Bank incentive programs are another form of ecosystem management service.²⁰³ An example of one of these is the Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), which provides a new source of funding for restoration, conservation, land management, and sustainable-use programs with goal of promoting sustainable development.²⁰⁴ Projects involving PES include West Africa Regional Fisheries Programs, Lebanon-Water Supply Augmentation Projects, and Management and Protection of Key Biodiversity Areas in Belize.²⁰⁵

In 2000, Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), a program tasked with determining the consequences ecosystem alterations can cause on human populations, as well as determining what scientific actions are required to improve conservation and sustainable development.²⁰⁶ The MA became a basis for the UNEP Ecosystem Management Goals.²⁰⁷ These three goals are: providing leadership by promoting ecosystem management and the advantages of it for development; restoration and management through tools and methodologies, produced by the UNEP for national governments and regions, aimed at restoring and managing biodiversity and ecosystems; and development and investment through national governments by integrating ecosystem services into investment decisions and development plans.²⁰⁸ Achieving these goals will also help to alleviate poverty, because healthy ecosystems are paramount to the survival of many poverty-stricken communities.²⁰⁹ It is therefore critical for development that ecosystems be maintained and protected.

Key Issues

Restoration and Management

UNEP has recognized restoration and management as a key issue in the implementation of sustainable development.²¹⁰ Through their report “Dead Planet, Living Planet – Biodiversity and ecosystem restoration for sustainable development,” UNEP sets out eleven recommendations for how to restore and manage ecosystems and genetic diversity.²¹¹ This report details best practices for ecosystem restoration, biodiversity conservation, water supply maintenance, food security, health and waste water management, climate change mitigation, and disaster prevention and mitigation.²¹² However, even with the resources and guidelines provided by UNEP, Member States still have difficulty adequately safeguarding biodiversity due to financial constraints and a lack of political will.²¹³

Development and Investment

One of the largest difficulties within these policies is the significant cost associated with implementation of the recommended policies.²¹⁴ While services provided by the ecosystem value around 72 trillion USD, worldwide nearly two-thirds of the ecosystems are believed to be damaged as a result of maladministration and the failure to invest in their efficiency, fitness, and sustainability.²¹⁵

²⁰² United Nations Environmental Programme, *Towards a Green Economy*, 2011.

http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/ger/GER_synthesis_en.pdf

²⁰³ United Nations Environmental Programme, *Payments for Ecosystem Services: Getting Started*, 2008.

http://www.unep.org/pdf/PaymentsForEcosystemServices_en.pdf

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ The World Bank, *Environment Projects & Programs*, 2014. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/environment/projects>

²⁰⁶ Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Overview of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*, 2005.

<http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/About.html>

²⁰⁷ United Nations Environmental Programme, *Ecosystem Management*, 2009.

http://www.unep.org/pdf/UNEP_Profile/Ecosystem_management.pdf

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Nelleman, *Dead Planet, Living Planet – Biodiversity and Ecosystem Restoration for Sustainable Development*, 2010.

http://www.unep.org/pdf/RAecosystems_screen.pdf

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Biodiversity Loss

Earth is composed all different types of creatures, from mammals to reptiles to insects to plants. Scientists have identified about 1.7 million species of animals alone; however, estimates put the total number in the range of three million to one hundred million.²¹⁶ This vast diversity is termed “biodiversity” and it includes any species that are genetically, behaviorally, or spatially different from each other.²¹⁷ The scientific community can deem species different from one another via a series of ecological and genetic testing.²¹⁸

The most studied kingdom – mammalia – is composed of 5,416 existing or recently extinct species.²¹⁹ However, in the past one hundred years, the world has seen a rapidly increasing extinction rate for mammals, especially among carnivores.²²⁰ The World Wildlife Federation asserts that this has been caused by competition with humanity for habitat and prey.²²¹ Deforestation and land degradation are also influential factors, as they can decrease endangered species’ habitat and increases the likelihood a species may go extinct.²²²

A key document related to the preservation of biodiversity is the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.²²³ As part of the CBD, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets address the underlining reasons for the decrease in biodiversity by promoting three types of actions: reduction of threats to biodiversity, creating the safeguards needed for protecting ecosystems and genetic diversity, improving the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and further implementation of planning, learning, and capacity-building associated with slowing the loss of biodiversity.²²⁴

The loss of these species, especially carnivores, can destroy the structure of an ecosystem.²²⁵ For example, as wolf populations in North America declined, deer populations soared, as there were no longer predators to maintain population levels.²²⁶ Conversely, should the deer population have declined, the wolf population would have declined as well, as they have had less of a food source.²²⁷ With an increase in deer populations, the amount of vegetation in the ecosystem decreased causing other herbivore populations to suffer.²²⁸ Conversely, if the deer population had decreased, vegetation would have increased and other herbivore populations would have benefited, which could affect other species.²²⁹

Other species, termed “keystone species,” can also highly affect how an ecosystem works.²³⁰ An example of a keystone species is sea otters in kelp forests.²³¹ The sea otter’s main food source is sea urchins, and sea urchins eat kelp.²³² In kelp forests, sea otters help keep the sea urchin populations low to allow the kelp to maintain a level where it can benefit other species which live in the forest, such as sea stars and sharks.²³³ Should the sea otter

²¹⁶ Convention on Biological Diversity, *Sustaining Life on Earth: How the Convention on Biological Diversity Promotes Nature and Human Well-Being*, 2000. <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-sustain-en.pdf>

²¹⁷ University of California at Berkeley: Understanding Evolution, *Evidence for Speciation*. n.d. http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/evo_45

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Jones and Safi, *Ecology and evolution of mammalian biodiversity*, 2011. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3138616/>

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ World Wildlife Fund, *What are the major reasons why we are losing so much biodiversity?*, n.d. http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/biodiversity/threatsto_biodiversity/

²²² Jones and Safi, *Ecology and evolution of mammalian biodiversity*, 2011. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3138616/>

²²³ Convention on Biological Diversity, *Aichi Biodiversity Targets*, n.d. <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Johnson and Singer, *Biology, Seventh Edition – Answers to Questions* 2005. http://highered.mheducation.com/sites/0072437316/student_view0/chapter55/answers_to_text_questions.html

²²⁶ Schultz, McCaffery, and Wydeven, *Impacts of Wolves on Deer in Wisconsin*, 2006. http://www.timberwolfinformation.org/info/wolfmanplan/final/appendix/appendix_e.htm

²²⁷ Johnson and Singer, *Biology, Seventh Edition – Answers to Questions* 2005. http://highered.mheducation.com/sites/0072437316/student_view0/chapter55/answers_to_text_questions.html

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ National Geographic. *Keystone Species*, n.d. http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/encyclopedia/keystone-species/?ar_a=1

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

population decline, sea urchin populations would likely increase, causing a decrease in kelp and an effect, either beneficial or detrimental, on the other species in the habitat.²³⁴ Either way, the ecosystem structure is transformed.

Marine ecosystems in particular have experienced a high rate of biodiversity loss, especially in areas used for fisheries.²³⁵ For example, Bluefin tuna are one of the largest species of tuna, and because of this they are highly valuable in Asian markets as a delicacy for sushi and sashimi; a single fish can go for up to 1.75 million USD.²³⁶ This has caused fishermen to seek out these fish more than others, causing a drastic decline in their populations.²³⁷ Overfishing by the human population has caused the Bluefin tuna to become endangered.²³⁸ Bluefin tuna are also a predator in their ecosystems, so as their population decreases, the population sizes of its prey are thrown out of balance.²³⁹

Nearly every year, the General Assembly passes a resolution on sustainable fisheries, particularly on maintaining dwindling populations and on conservation and management of vulnerable fish populations; this topic was most recently discussed in General Assembly resolution 68/70.²⁴⁰ Coral bleaching, the dying off of the keystone species coral, which causes other marine populations to suffer, has also been addressed frequently, most recently by General Assembly resolution 66/100 (2011).²⁴¹

Conclusion

The environmental pillar is paramount to sustainable development, as it is the foundation on which the other two pillars are maintained.²⁴² Through actions and organizations, such as the UNCED, CBD, and UN CSD, the UN has set up a policy base for sustainable development. However, it is clear that this basis is not adequate for reaching the goals set out by international policy. For instance, UNCED has not been updated for many years, and the UNCSO has been abolished. The challenge for the international community is to address not only goals and targets for the various measures of environmental sustainability, but to also create implementation frameworks and accountability for those goals and targets. The General Assembly has at its disposal various tools to accomplish this, including most notably its central role in the finalization of the SDGs as part of the post-2015 development agenda.

Questions for Consideration

Three of the proposed SDGs relate to the environmental pillar: combatting climate change, protecting the oceans and marine ecosystems, and protecting and restoring terrestrial ecosystem sustainable use.²⁴³ What reforms can be put in place to increase the ability of the UN to reach these SDGs? How will these SDGs be implemented? What UN bodies will be in charge of their implementation? What can be done to increase the likelihood of achieving the targets in goals 13-15?

How can the General Assembly act to support UNEP in achieving the Ecosystem Management Goals?

More broadly, how can international frameworks improve to prevent loopholes from occurring? How does humanity value the environment and educate individuals on its importance? How can we strengthen the effectiveness of existing international frameworks to better protect ecosystems?

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ World Wildlife Fund, *Blue-Fin Tuna*, 2014. <http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/bluefin-tuna>

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ United Nations General Assembly, *General Assembly Resolutions*, 2013.

http://www.un.org/depts/los/general_assembly/general_assembly_resolutions.htm

²⁴¹ United Nations General Assembly, *Protection of coral reefs for sustainable livelihoods and development (A/RES/66/100)*, 2011. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/resources/res_pdfs/ga-66/SG%20report_Coral%20Reefs.pdf

²⁴² United Nations Environmental Programme, *Issue Brief #1: The Environmental Dimensions of IFSD*, 2004.

<http://www.unep.org/environmentalgovernance/Portals/8/InstitutionalFrameworkforSustainabledevPAPER1.pdf>

²⁴³ Open Working Group on Sustainable Development, *Outcome Document of the Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals*, 2014 <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

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