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Medium-term Strategy 2010–2013

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**United Nations Environment Programme
Medium-term Strategy 2010–2013**

Environment for Development



Table of contents

The Strategy at a glance.....	3
I. Introduction and background.....	5
A. Purpose of the Medium-term Strategy 2010–2013.....	5
B. Current state of the global environment and major trends	5
C. Evolution in the role and mandate of UNEP and recent directional shifts	6
1. Evolution in the UNEP mandate	6
2. Recent directional shifts	7
D. Lessons learned and comparative advantage	8
1. Lessons learned.....	8
2. Comparative advantage	8
II. Vision for UNEP	9
III. Strategic direction: cross-cutting priorities and objectives	9
A. Climate change	10
B. Disasters and conflicts.....	11
C. Ecosystem management.....	11
D. Environmental governance.....	11
E. Harmful substances and hazardous waste.....	12
F. Resource efficiency – sustainable consumption and production	12
IV. Implementing the priorities and objectives	13
A. Sound science for decision-makers: early warning, monitoring and assessment	13
B. Awareness-raising, outreach and communications	14
C. Capacity-building and technology support: Bali Strategic Plan	14
D. Cooperation, coordination and partnerships	15
1. Multilateral environmental agreements.....	16
2. United Nations system and international institutions	16
3. Civil society and the private sector	17
4. Collaborating centres of excellence	17
E. Sustainable financing for the global environment	17
V. Institutional mechanisms	17
A. Strategic presence.....	17
B. Planning for results.....	18
C. Institutional knowledge management	18
D. Gender responsiveness	19
E. Human resource management	19
F. Resource mobilization.....	19
VI. Monitoring, evaluation and mechanism for review of the Medium-term Strategy	20
Annexes	
I UNEP Medium-term Strategy 2010–2013	21
II. Recent directional shifts.....	22
III. Evolution in the role and mandate of UNEP	23
IV. Results matrix – objectives, expected accomplishments and indicators	26
V. Hierarchy of results	30

The Strategy at a glance

At the dawn of the millennium heads of State and Governments gathered at United Nations Headquarters and reaffirmed their faith in the Organization and its Charter “as indispensable foundations of **a more peaceful, prosperous and just world**” and their “collective responsibility to uphold **the principles of human dignity, equality and equity** at the global level.”¹

Mounting scientific evidence² shows that global prosperity and human well-being depend on the productivity of the world’s ecosystems and the services that they provide. As ecosystems are now under unprecedented pressure, prospects for sustainable development are under serious threat.

The UNEP publication, *Global Environment Outlook 4: environment for development (GEO-4)*, highlights the fact that ecological and social systems can reach tipping points beyond which there are abrupt, accelerating, or potentially irreversible changes. The *GEO-4* scenarios show an increasing risk of crossing such tipping points.

While current environmental challenges may sometimes seem insurmountable, they also represent opportunities for individuals, local communities and businesses and for international cooperation. New and exciting avenues to achieve sustainable development will emerge from the use of economic and regulatory instruments, new and existing technologies and the empowerment of stakeholders to establish enabling environments for innovation and creative solutions.

The current environmental challenges and opportunities will cause the environment to move from often being considered as a marginal issue at the intergovernmental and national levels to the centre of political and economic decision-making. The linkages between environmental sustainability and the economy will emerge as a key focus for public policymaking and a determinant of future markets opportunities.

In order to secure the environmental conditions for prosperity, stability and equity, the United Nations systems needs to respond to current challenges in a manner that is commensurate with their scale and the nature of the opportunities. As the environmental programme of the United Nations, UNEP is mandated to serve as a lead authority in articulating, facilitating and supporting a response to these environmental challenges and opportunities.

A number of recent directional shifts are affecting the United Nations system itself. There is renewed emphasis on the future evolution of international environmental governance, including calls for greater coherence within the United Nations system, for harmonization of aid under a new architecture, for increased focus on the role of the private sector, for national ownership of development programmes and for results-based management.

UNEP will respond proactively to these directional shifts.

“We must spare no effort to free all of humanity, and above all our children and grandchildren, from the threat of living on a planet irredeemably spoilt by human activities, and whose resources would no longer be sufficient for their needs.”³

Against this backdrop, UNEP has developed the Medium-term Strategy 2010–2013 in consultation with the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives, the secretariats of UNEP-administered multilateral environmental agreements and representatives of civil society and the private sector.

The Medium-term Strategy sets out the next phase in the evolution of UNEP as it becomes a more effective, efficient and results-focused entity, meeting the expectations of Governments and its stakeholders in responding to global environmental challenges and opportunities.

The strategic direction contained in the Medium-term Strategy provides a clear, results-based focus for UNEP programmes of work. This focus will enable UNEP to deliver on its mandate more effectively by building on its existing expertise and comparative advantage in a limited number of priority areas.

UNEP has identified six cross-cutting thematic priorities. Delivering tangible results against each of the priorities will be the focus of its efforts in the period 2010–2013. The means that UNEP will use to implement these priorities and the institutional mechanisms that will need to be put in place to deliver results in an effective and efficient manner have also been specified.

1 United Nations Millennium Declaration 2000, General Assembly resolution A/55/L.2.

2 As presented in *GEO-4*, the fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007 and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2003, among other publications.

3 United Nations Millennium Declaration 2000, General Assembly resolution A/55/L.2.

The selection of the six cross-cutting thematic priorities was guided by scientific evidence, the areas in which UNEP has a comparative advantage, the UNEP mandate, priorities emerging from global and regional forums and an assessment of where UNEP can make a transformative difference. The means of implementation have been informed by directional shifts affecting the United Nations system.

The six cross-cutting thematic priorities are, in alphabetical order:

- (a) **Climate change;**
- (b) **Disasters and conflicts;**
- (c) **Ecosystem management;**
- (d) **Environmental governance;**
- (e) **Harmful substances and hazardous waste;**
- (f) **Resource efficiency – sustainable consumption and production.**

UNEP will deliver on the six cross-cutting thematic priorities by utilizing the capacity and expertise of UNEP divisions and regional offices and will actively reach out to Governments, other United Nations entities, international institutions, secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, civil society, the private sector and other relevant partners to support delivery of the Medium-term Strategy.

The Medium-term Strategy places strong and renewed emphasis on UNEP operating to become a more effective, efficient and results-focused entity, through:

- (a) **Significantly enhancing its capacity to deliver on the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building;**
- (b) **Further embracing its role as the environment programme of the United Nations;**
- (c) **Ensuring its interventions are founded on sound science;**
- (d) **Fully implementing results-based management.**

The **vision of UNEP** for the medium-term future is to be:

“The leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, that promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and that serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.”

I. Introduction and background

A. Purpose of the Medium-term Strategy 2010–2013

1. The world faces unprecedented environmental change, which presents both challenges and opportunities. At the same time, UNEP faces the internal challenge of becoming a more effective, efficient and results-focused entity, delivering as “One UNEP”. The Medium-term Strategy 2010–2013 has been developed to respond to both sets of challenges.⁴
2. The Medium-term Strategy constitutes the high-level programmatic results framework against which the overall performance of UNEP will be judged. Consequently, the Strategy provides the vision and direction for all UNEP activities for the period 2010–2013, including results delivered through:
 - (a) UNEP biennial programmes of work for 2010–2011 and 2012–2013;
 - (b) UNEP Global Environment Facility (GEF) portfolio for 2010–2014;
 - (c) UNEP earmarked contributions.⁵
3. The Medium-term Strategy identifies six cross-cutting thematic priorities. Each priority includes an “objective” and “expected accomplishments”, in accordance with the definitions for those terms contained in the relevant United Nations Instructions.⁶ Building on UNEP comparative advantages, responding to directional shifts and drawing from lessons learned, the Medium-term Strategy also sets out the means of implementation and institutional mechanisms necessary to achieve its objectives.
4. In order to implement results-based management fully within UNEP, the subprogrammes within the UNEP programmes of work for the duration of the Medium-term Strategy will be based on the six cross-cutting thematic priorities.
5. The Medium-term Strategy will benefit Governments and other UNEP stakeholders by creating a framework for:
 - (a) Focused, effective and efficient delivery of results;
 - (b) Clear and transparent monitoring and evaluation of performance.

B. Current state of the global environment and major trends

6. The UNEP publication, *GEO-4*, assesses environmental change and how it affects people’s security, health, social relations and material needs (human well-being) and development in general, including major atmospheric environmental issues, most notably the global challenge of climate change, and the decline in the health of ecosystems and the services that they provide.
7. *GEO-4* and other recent assessments tell a tale of unprecedented environmental change at global and regional levels, which may reach tipping points, beyond which there are abrupt, accelerating, or potentially irreversible changes. This unprecedented change is due to human activities taking place in an increasingly globalized, urbanized and industrialized world, driven by expanding flows of goods, services, capital, people, technologies, information, ideas and labour.
8. Environmental change affects human development options, with women, children and other disadvantaged groups being the most vulnerable. For example, conflicts, violence and persecution displace large civilian populations, forcing millions of people into marginal ecological areas within countries and across international boundaries. This undermines, sometimes for decades, sustainable livelihoods, economic development and the capacity of ecosystems to meet an increased demand on resources.
9. The benefits of early action to protect the environment outweigh the difficulties. Environmental action and efforts to improve resource efficiency and sustainability create significant opportunities for

4 At its twenty-fourth session, the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum requested the Executive Director to develop a Medium-term Strategy for 2010–2013 with a “clearly defined vision, objectives, priorities, impact measures and a robust mechanism for review” (decision 24/9, paragraph 13). The Medium-term Strategy was developed in consultation with the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives and also reflects input from UNEP administered multilateral environmental agreement secretariats and from civil society and the private sector obtained through extensive consultations during the last half of 2007. Preparation of the Strategy was further informed by a review of the medium-term strategies of other United Nations entities, development banks and other relevant inter-governmental and civil society organizations.

5 See annex I to the present document.

6 Proposed Strategic Framework for the biennium 2010–2011, Instructions, issued by the United Nations Programme Planning and Budget Division on 11 October 2007. The Instructions will be made available at <http://ppbd.un.org>.

individuals, local communities and businesses and for international cooperation. Furthermore, knowledge about the value of, for example, ecosystem services, can facilitate the transition to sustainable development. This transition will require trade-offs, which may involve hard choices between different values and concerns in society, and support from well-governed, innovative and results-oriented institutions able to create the right conditions for change.

10. Nations and the international community must pursue the transition to sustainable development more intensively by means including capacity-building and technological support to developing countries. Timely action can be promoted by integrating prevention, mitigation and adaptation efforts into the core of decision-making through sustained efforts.

11. The environmental change described in *GEO-4* and other recent assessments such as the fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, released in 2007, and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2003, highlight the environmental issues that most urgently require attention. This compelling scientific evidence underpins the identification of the cross-cutting thematic priorities for UNEP for the period 2010–2013.

C. Evolution in the role and mandate of UNEP and recent directional shifts⁷

1. Evolution in the UNEP mandate

12. The Medium-term Strategy is based upon the UNEP mandate, which has continually evolved since the creation of UNEP in 1972.⁸ This evolution included the creation of two new high-level bodies in 1999: the **Global Ministerial Environment Forum**, as the United Nations high-level environment policy forum, and the United Nations **Environmental Management Group** to bring about improved inter-agency policy coherence and collaboration.^{9, 10}

13. The ministers of the environment and heads of delegation attending the first session of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum in **Malmö** in 2000 noted an “alarming discrepancy between commitments and action” and “the tremendous risk of climate change” and called for a strengthened UNEP with a broader and more predictable financial base. The need for a strengthened UNEP was repeated in the “**Cartagena Package**” decision of 2002,¹¹ by which the UNEP Governing Council called for, among other things, a strengthening of the role, authority and financial situation of UNEP; strengthening of the science base of UNEP; improved coordination and effectiveness of multilateral environmental agreements; and enhanced coordination across the United Nations system, with an emphasis on the role of the Environmental Management Group.

14. The most recent evolution in the role and mandate of UNEP occurred in February 2005 through the **Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building** (the Bali Strategic Plan), which, amongst other matters, aims at a more coherent, coordinated and effective delivery of environmental capacity-building and technical support at all levels and by all actors, including UNEP, in response to country priorities and needs.

15. The UNEP mandate continues to comprise five overall, interrelated areas:

- (a) Keeping the **world environmental situation under review**;
- (b) Catalysing and promoting **international cooperation and action**;
- (c) Providing **policy advice and early warning** information, based upon **sound science and assessments**;

⁷ For a thorough description of the evolution in the mandate of UNEP see annex III to the present document.

⁸ General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII).

⁹ General Assembly resolution A/RES/53/242.

¹⁰ The Global Ministerial Environment Forum and the Environmental Management Group were created as a response to the Secretary-General's report entitled, “Renewing the United Nations: a program for reform”, which was presented to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session in 1997.

¹¹ By its “Cartagena Package” decision on international environmental governance (SS.VII/1), the Governing Council adopted the report of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives on International Environmental Governance, which had been established pursuant to Governing Council decision 21/21. In that report it was suggested that “strengthening international environmental governance should be evolutionary in nature” and that “preference” be given to “making better use of existing structures”. The Open-ended Intergovernmental Group also expected the decisions of the Governing Council at its seventh special session to be “the commencement of a longer-term enterprise to develop international understanding, commitment, and resolve towards ensuring the sustainability of the global environment”.

(d) Facilitating the development, implementation and evolution of **norms and standards** and developing **coherent interlinkages** among international environmental conventions;

(e) Strengthening **technology support and capacity** in line with country needs and priorities.¹²

2. Recent directional shifts¹³

16. The evolution of the mandate of UNEP has taken place in the context of wider international developments. The entire international community is striving towards sustainable development – a concept firmly established by the report of the Brundtland Commission, entitled “**Our Common Future**”,¹⁴ in 1987 and subsequently locked into the international agenda through the outcomes of the “**Earth Summit**” held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.¹⁵

17. UNEP promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development – a concept that was intended to integrate economic, environmental and social considerations as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars.

18. Annex II to the present report contains an overview of major international developments and directional shifts, including the **United Nations Millennium Declaration**,¹⁶ the **Millennium Development Goals**,¹⁷ the **Paris Declaration** on Aid Effectiveness¹⁸ and **Rome Declaration** on Harmonization.¹⁹ While not all of these directional shifts are specifically related to the environment, they are still of great significance to UNEP.

19. A number of recent directional shifts are affecting the United Nations system itself. There is renewed focus on the future evolution of international environmental governance, including calls for greater coherence within the United Nations system and an increased focus on the role of the private sector, on being responsive to country level priorities, and on results-based management.

20. These directional shifts have informed the means that UNEP will use to achieve its objectives, including in relation to implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan.

21. With regard to international environmental governance, the Options Paper of the Co-Chairs of the **Informal Consultative Process on the Institutional Framework for the United Nations’ Environmental Activities**²⁰ gives a sense of the kind of ambitious yet incremental adjustments that could be made to the international environmental governance system to better address current demands. While there seems to be considerable agreement on the functions required of an environmental entity within the United Nations system, the debate on the appropriate form of such an entity continues.²¹ UNEP will take on board the conclusions of the international environmental governance debate as determined by the United Nations General Assembly.

12 Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building, adopted by the UNEP Governing Council in decision 23/1 I.

13 Annex II to the present document contains an overview of recent major directional shifts.

14 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission, 1987): Our Common Future (General Assembly document A/42/187, annex).

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