



**A Synthesis Paper of Decisions Taken at
United Nations Environment Assembly
(UNEA) 5.1, 22-23 February 2021,
With Consequences for UNEA 5.2 and the
Final Outcome of UNEA 5**

**By Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Senior Adviser
Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future**

**UNEA 5 Overall Theme:
“Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve
the Sustainable Development Goals”**

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DISCLAIMER

This report has been written by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Senior Adviser at Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future. He has made all possible efforts to give a correct and truthful overview of decisions made during UNEA 5.1. Mr. Strandenaes has participated actively in deliberations at United Nations Environment Assemblies since their beginning, and also participated in the greater majority of UNEP's Governing Councils before that. He has utilised official reports and background papers from UNEP as the basis for his writing, including publicly available information from the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) and their coverage of UNEA 5.1. The analysis in the paper is based on his own interpretations and understanding of politics at UNEA, processes in which he is actively involved as a keen observer. While this paper was commissioned by UNEP, it is not an official UNEP document and any mistakes or errors found within are the sole responsibility of the author.

**UNEA 5 Overall Theme:
“Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”**

1.0 A Short Introduction

Substantive matters that require in-depth negotiations, including a Ministerial Declaration under the UNEA-5 theme, have been deferred to a resumed in-person session of UNEA-5 which will take place from 28 February – 2 March 2022 (UNEA-5.2). This meeting will be preceded by a Resumed Fifth Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR), from 21 February - 25 February 2022. It is possible that the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, MGFC, will convene a meeting following the OECPR. If so, the dates will be announced later.

This report is covering in some detail the main decisions taken in the first part of the Fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly referred to herein as UNEA 5.1. UNEA 5.1 and UNEA 5.2 are two elements of the same UNEA. It is thus important to keep in mind what was decided in February 2021 when attending UNEA 5.2 in February/March of 2022. The outcomes from UNEA 5.1 from February 2021 will have an effect and influence on the deliberations at UNEA 5.2. Hence this synthesis paper.

1.1 - Background to the Two Sessions of UNEA 5

UNEA 5.1 overcame technological challenges, time zone difficulties, and was able to fulfil what was needed to give UNEP a mandate and operative decisions to continue its work for the global environment. Due to the ongoing and unresolved global corona pandemic, UNEA 5.1 was conducted as an online session. 151 member states were registered to the session. More than 12 000 non-state stakeholders had also signed on and observed all or parts of the sessions. Much seemed the same, the sessions followed the same protocol as earlier years, and on paper, the Assembly appeared to be a normal set of affairs: agenda adopted, delegates presented statements, there were dialogues with stakeholders, a Science Policy Business Forum took place, major groups made their interventions, and side events were organised. But appearances can be deceptive, and UNEA 5.1 was nothing like an ordinary event. Logistically speaking, that is. And that also affected content and decisions. These were extraordinary times and the fact that UNEA 5 had been divided into two separate but interlinked sessions, to be held one year apart, clearly demonstrated this.

UNEA 5.1 was held for two days in February 2021, Monday the 22nd and Tuesday the 23rd. The reason for this rather peculiar arrangement was the global pandemic caused by the outbreak of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which had effectively closed down all physical conferences in the world. The World Health Organization, (WHO), declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020, and a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. As WHO called the outbreak of the disease a global pandemic, the UN was quick to close down all scheduled conferences for an indefinite time, thus throwing the entire global multilateral system into a logistical nightmare. It did not take the globally interconnected world much time, however, to make use of the internet as a substitute for physical in-person conferences, and the UN followed suit.

Norway had been elected by UNEA 4 in 2019 to hold the Presidency for UNEA 5, and by March 2020 preparations were well underway for Norway to fulfil its obligations. The first conference of the UNEP Bureaux¹ with invited non-state stakeholders had been planned to take place in Oslo in June 2020. This meeting was held, but by using a digital platform. The use of the internet and digital

¹ There are two bureaux at UNEP, the elected Presidency and the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, (CPR). The plural reference is therefore Bureaux.

platforms were soon to become the modus operandi for the UNEP Presidency and all subsequent Bureau meetings and CPR meetings were held online. The six Regional Consultation Meetings, the RCMs, for civil society and non-state stakeholders, the major groups, were also held online.

Realising that the pandemic and its many restrictions would severely affect UNEA 5 and UNEP, the Bureaux decided to split UNEA 5 into two interlinked sessions. The reason for this was two-fold: UNEA had to deliberate and agree to a few key decisions, such as a work programme and budget, to keep UNEP operational. The other reason was embedded in the hope that by 2022, the pandemic would be under control, travel restrictions would be eased, and a physical, in-person meeting would again be possible. With this in mind, a second part of UNEA 5 was to be held in February 2022. Still, the decision to split UNEA 5 into two interlinked sessions, a UNEA 5.1 and a UNEA 5.2 had to be kept within the regular framework of a ‘normal’ UNEA; a regular UNEA would be five days long, it would follow the agreed and established agenda modalities, allow for deliberations and necessary exchange of views, etc. The normal length of a UNEA is 5 days; thus, UNEA 5.1 lasted two days; UNEA 5.2 would last three days – and the sum total of UNEA 5.1 and UNEA 5.2 would be five days.

It also became imperative that the structure and logistics of UNEA.5.1 and UNEA 5.2 had to be kept within the normal framework of a regular UNEA. This was mirrored within the agenda decisions made on day one of UNEA 5.1. A quick agreement on what to deal with during the two days of UNEA 5.1 was accomplished, with all outstanding issues to be dealt with at the second session of UNEA 5, designated as UNEA 5.2. As a consequence of this, the two bureaux of UNEA, the Elected Bureau with the Presidency and the CPR came to play an important role in preparing for UNEA 5.1; maybe more so than what had been the case during an ordinary in-person session.

It was, however, an extraordinary event in an extraordinary situation, and even though delegates praised UNEP’s secretariat for being able to organise the event, more often than not delegates emphasised that online meetings could never properly replace in-person meetings.

South Africa in its opening statement and also speaking for the African Group, stressed that virtual sessions will not be able to provide a level playing field for participants, a sentiment echoed by many other participants.

2.0 Key Decisions Taken at UNEA 5.1

The budget and a work programme were among the two key decisions UNEA 5.1 had to make – and this was also done. In fact, a limited set of three procedural decisions were made:

- The Medium Term Strategy (MTS) for 2022-2025 including a programme of work (PoW).
- The budget for the biennium 2022-2023 with the management of trust funds and earmarked contributions.
- The agreement to convene a resumed, in-person UNEA 5.2 session in 2022.

The implications of these three procedural decisions were quite significant. It allowed first and foremost UNEP and its secretariat to continue its regular work within the context of the pandemic restrictions; it allowed UNEP to continue its work in strengthening the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also maintained the basic formalities of UNEP and thus kept its mandate alive supported by member states. Legitimacy was upheld.

Reflecting the way that UNEA 5.1 had been organised, with over half the time devoted to so-called ‘leadership dialogues’, UNEA 5.1 endorsed a statement with the captive headline “Looking ahead to

the resumed UNEA in 2022 – Message from online UNEA-5².” A key element of this message was highlighting the three major environmental crises that made up the essence of the MTS: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Not surprisingly, the Assembly also launched the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the creation and establishment of UNEP by the UN Conference on the Human Environment which had been held in 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden. A two-day Special Session celebrating the event will take place in Nairobi, Kenya, on 3rd and 4th March 2022. In fact, the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta had already commenced the commemoration at UNEA 5.1, stressing that it provided an opportunity for both celebration and reflection.

These were the three decisions of major significance. Still, a closer look at some of the deliberations, reports, and comments on the outcome report is warranted.

2.1 - What was the Final Agenda for UNEA 5.1

The UNEA 5 President, the Norwegian Minister of Environment and Climate, Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, opened the assembly and with the delegates agreed to the agenda (UNEP/EA.5/1/Rev.1) including the organisation of work (UNEP/EA.5/1/Rev.1/Add.1). There were no amendments proposed. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the online session of UNEA-5 would only undertake initial consideration of Agenda Items 1- 4, 6, 8, 12, and 15. With the agreement of the Assembly, the remaining items on the agenda would be considered at the resumed in-person meeting of UNEA-5, to be held in February/March 2022.

The following agenda is based on what may be called a standard format of the agenda at UNEA, and which was presented to the UNEA 5.1 Assembly. As one can see, there are specific items added, reflecting some of the urgent issues of the day. The agenda points that were dealt with by UNEA 5.1 are all bolded and underlined. The rest will be part of the UNEA 5.2 agenda in February 2022.

1. **Opening of the session.**
2. **Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.**
3. **Credentials of representatives.**
4. **Report of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.**
5. International environmental policy and governance issues. UNEP/EA.5/25
6. **Programme of work and budget and other administrative and budgetary issues.**
7. Stakeholder engagement.
8. **Contributions to the meetings of the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development and implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**
9. Commemoration of the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972.
10. High-level segment.
11. Provisional agenda and dates of the sixth session of the Environment Assembly.
12. **Adoption of the resolutions, decisions, and outcome document of the session.**
13. Election of officers.
14. Other matters.
15. **Adoption of the report of the session.**
16. Closure of the session.

²<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34808/Revised%20Messages%20from%20%20UNEA-5.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

Organisational matters are issues that follow the adoption of the agenda. On running the two UNEA 5.1 days, the Assembly agreed that two identical sessions of a leadership dialogue would be held. The reason for two identical leadership dialogues was to accommodate different time zones of the world. The theme of the dialogue session was: “Contribution of the environmental dimension of sustainable development to building a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world.” (for some of its content, see below).

2.2 - Other Decisions Made at UNEA 5.1

Reading the key outcome documents on decisions made (UNEP/EA.5/L.4 including all final and official reports: <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/outcomes-online-session-unea-5>), one gets an impression of what was discussed as well as what member states may want to further discuss at UNEA 5.2.

According to this document, the Assembly called upon Member States, with the support of the Secretariat as appropriate:³

- To continue joint efforts to strengthen actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
- To follow up on relevant mandates emanating from the outcomes of previous sessions of the UNEA.
- To take note of the reports of the Executive Director of UNEP submitted to UNEA at its fifth session on progress achieved in the implementation of resolutions agreed to by earlier assemblies, as listed in the annex to the present decision (see below for the enumeration of these reports).
- To review those reports and take action on these reports at UNEA 5.2.
- To finalize implementation of the mandate entrusted to UNEA by the UNGA resolution 73/333 of 30 August 2019 and prepare a political declaration for a United Nations high-level meeting and invite the UNGA to consider the appropriate event for the adoption of such a declaration, including the option of adopting it as one of the outcomes of the special session of UNEA 5.2 to be held to commemorate UNEP’s fiftieth anniversary taking into account the result of further consultations on the follow-up to General Assembly resolution 73/333.
- That the CPR shall continue to review the implementation of resolutions adopted by the Environment Assembly.
- Decides that UNEA 5.2 shall consist of plenary meetings, a sessional ‘committee of the whole,’ and a high-level segment, including leadership dialogues and a multi-stakeholder dialogue.
- Encourages Member States to submit draft resolutions for consideration by UNEA 5.2 at an early stage, preferably at least eight weeks in advance of the resumed meeting of the fifth session of the OECPR (which will be in February 2021).
- Decides to convene a special session of the UNEA to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of UNEP back to back with UNEA 5.2 on March 3 and 4 in 2022. This commemoration will be held under the leadership of the Presidency and Bureau of UNEA 6.

The themes of the reports from the Executive Director (ED) referred to in the decisions may be of particular significance as they will be revisited at UNEA 5.2. As such, it is well worth paying

³ Please note that the decisions referred to here have been rewritten and shortened without compromising its proper content.

attention to the themes covered by these reports. There are 21 such reports, and they are listed here with their reference numbers so they can be easily found and downloaded:

1. UNEP/EA.5/4: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/1 on innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production
2. UNEP/EA.5/5: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/2 on the promotion of sustainable and innovative solutions for curbing food loss and waste
3. UNEP/EA.5/6: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/4 on addressing environmental challenges through sustainable business practices
4. UNEP/EA.5/7: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/5 on sustainable infrastructure
5. UNEP/EA.5/8: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/6 on marine litter and microplastics
6. UNEP/EA.5/9: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/8 on sound management of chemicals and waste
7. UNEP/EA.5/10: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/10 on innovation on biodiversity and land degradation
8. UNEP/EA.5/11: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/15 on innovations in sustainable rangelands and pastoralism
9. UNEP/EA.5/12: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/17 on the promotion of gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls in environmental governance
10. UNEP/EA.5/13: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/18 on the poverty-environment nexus
11. UNEP/EA.5/14: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/19 on mineral resource governance
12. UNEP/EA.5/15: Availability of adequate funding to support the implementation of the fifth Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law pursuant to resolution 4/20
13. UNEP/EA.5/16: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/22 on implementation and follow-up of United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions
14. UNEP/EA.5/17: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/23 on keeping the world environment under review: enhancing the United Nations Environment Programme science-policy interface and endorsement of the Global Environment Outlook
15. UNEP/EA.5/18: Progress in the implementation of resolution 3/3 on contributions of the United Nations Environment Assembly to the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development
16. UNEP/EA.5/19: Progress in the implementation of resolution 3/6 on managing soil pollution to achieve sustainable development
17. UNEP/EA.5/20: Progress in the implementation of resolution 3/10 on addressing water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems
18. UNEP/EA.5/21: Progress in the implementation of resolution 2/14 on illegal trade in wildlife and wild products
19. UNEP/EA.5/22: Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/1 on the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2020–2021, resolution 2/20 on the proposed Medium Term Strategy for 2018–2021 and programme of work and budget for 2018–2019, and resolution 1/15 on the proposed programme of work and budget for the biennium 2016–2017
20. UNEP/EA.5/23: Action plan for the implementation of paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
21. UNEP/EA.5/24: Providing options for the future of the Global Environment Outlook

2.3 - A Consensual Statement Agreed to by the Assembly

On the second day at the closing of UNEA 5.1 the President of the UNEA 5 Bureau, Mr. Rotevatn presented what he referred to as a Consensual Statement called “Looking ahead to the resumed UNEA in 2022 – Message from online UNEA-5” (UNEP/EA.5/L.5). Rotevatn clarified to the Assembly that the statement does not constitute a negotiated intergovernmentally agreed document of UNEA-5 and shall as such, not set a precedent for either the resumed fifth session or any of UNEA’s subsequent sessions. With this clarification, the Assembly endorsed the consensual statement.

The statement embraced a number of vital issues that UNEP will have to work on immediately and in the future. In his intervention presenting the Statement, Mr. Rotevatn underlined the need to strengthen multilateral cooperation and collective action to successfully address global challenges. He expressed deep concern about the devastating global effects of the pandemic, undermining our common efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

In addition to referring to the MTS and PoW, the Statement underscored the need for UNEA member states to enhance and continue support for the:

- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Addis Ababa Action Agenda.
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement.
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the negotiations on a post-2020 global biodiversity framework.
- UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
- Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020.

2.4 – What are the Implications of the Medium Term Strategy for UNEP?

Decision 5/2 of UNEA 5.1 was on one of the three necessary decisions that had to be taken at UNEA 5.1: the Medium Term Strategy for the period 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023.

The MTS is the result of an ongoing process where all stakeholders accredited to UNEP were given the opportunity to contribute with thematic inputs as well as with background papers and analysis of the environmental challenges of the time. During online meetings, member states and representatives of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee and invited experts were also allowed to speak and contribute.

The MTS will direct UNEP’s operative profile from 2022 until 2025. Ideally, the MTS should also permeate all UNEP’s programmes, and its Member States and accredited non-state actors should make efforts to integrate these elements in their own plans and make strides to implement these elements.

The MTS builds on earlier acquired experience including UNEP’s vision for the 2030 Agenda. The MTS's main points are highlighted in the MTS overview below. To access documentation around the MTS, see: <https://www.unep.org/resources/policy-and-strategy/people-and-planet-unep-strategy-2022-2025>

For the detailed MTS, download the full document from:

<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/35162/Doc3%20Reve1%20EnglishK2100501.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

The MTS overview:

UNEP's vision for Agenda 2030 and its contribution to the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 has 9 strategic approaches - UNEP will:

1. Support an integrated and balanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
2. Strengthen institutional capacity for gender-responsive programme delivery.
3. Work with its many partners and deliver transformational results on:
 - Alignment to UNEP's core mandate areas focuses on the delivery of this strategy with high expectations of outcomes that lead to transformative change.
 - Delivery on multiple Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed environmental goals and aspirations, including the UNEA Resolutions.
 - Demonstration of new and/or innovative concepts that provide opportunities to leapfrog' past outdated paradigms.
 - Demonstration of value for money through optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes.
4. Provide a clear "line-of-sight" for its delivery of Agenda 2030 from the internationally agreed environmental goals to regional and national action.
5. Make full use of the UN Development System reform, support member states in their pursuit of the SDGs.
6. Pursue collective action on environmental sustainability, resilience, and environmental risk across all aspects of the UN charter, including peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development.
7. Strengthen South-South and triangular cooperation to enable all Member States to progress towards environmental sustainability.
8. Work to "leave no one behind," while increasing its focus on the special needs of disaster and conflict-affected states.
9. Work with special attention to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

As a basis for the MTS, UNEP identified three planetary crises – giving three interconnected strategic objectives

1. "Climate stability" where net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and resilience towards climate change are achieved
2. "Living in harmony with nature" where humanity prospers in harmony with nature
3. "A pollution-free planet" where pollution is prevented and controlled while ensuring good environmental quality and improved health and well-being for all

To address these three crises, UNEP has identified **7 subprogrammes** consisting of Three interconnected areas of action, two foundational subprogrammes, and facilitated by two enabling subprogrammes.

Three interconnected areas of action

- 1 - Climate Action
- 2 - Nature Action
- 3 - Chemicals and Pollution Action

Two foundational subprogrammes

- 4 - Science-Policy
- 5 - Environmental Governance

Facilitated by two enabling subprogrammes

- 6 - Finance and Economic Transformations enabling subprogramme
- 7 - The Digital Transformations enabling subprogramme

UNEP will employ a three-pronged delivery approach throughout all of these 7 sub-programmes. The three-pronged approach will consist of:

- Applying cutting-edge scientific advances in data collection and display.
- Working with relevant partners from science, industry, indigenous peoples and local communities, vulnerable groups, the investor community, and other non-government actors and policymakers.
- Working across regions, countries, and all subnational levels to strengthen effective environmental governance and rule of law.

The 7 subprogrammes will support, accelerate and scale-up a shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns to achieve planetary sustainability for people, prosperity and equity through 5 approaches:

1. Transitions to clean energy, resource efficiency, and circularity in the use of energy, materials, and greenhouse gas-emitting sectors - including agriculture - to reach net-zero or low emission targets.
2. Champion cleaner production with efficient and circular processes, to deliver goods and services which reduce environmental degradation and detoxify land, cities, the ocean, rivers, and the air.
3. Enhanced support for ecosystem-based policies and restorative and regenerative practices, to reduce habitat fragmentation from agriculture and food systems, extractive industries, infrastructure, and other resource and nature intensive value chains.
4. Increased advocacy and information sharing on behavioural and educational tools and curricula, and mechanisms to inform and influence consumer choices through increased awareness of the chemical, greenhouse gas, environmental, and resource and waste footprint of goods and services.
5. Promoting alignment of private finance (investments, banking, and insurance) with sustainability, responsibility, and net-zero emissions, to in turn influence investment and production decisions.

An overarching concern for the MTS and the Programme of Work will always be to collaborate with the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) which will be central to all actions across UNEP's subprogrammes to secure stronger synergies and enhance impact.

3.0 Highlights from the Leadership Dialogues

Ms. Joyce Msuya, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, summarised what she referred to as the highlights of the Leadership Dialogues in a statement at the adjournment plenary of the online meeting of the 5th United Nations Environment Assembly, 23 February 2021.

A total of 87 Ministers and high-level representatives participated over two days in the Leadership Dialogue, including the engagement of UN Resident Coordinators. (A more detailed summary can be found in Vol. 16 No. 156, Page 11 and onwards in the Earth Negotiations Bulletin Friday, 26 February 2021.)

Ms. Msua summarised the dialogue in the following major points:

- Referring to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the risks of future zoonotic diseases, almost all presentations in the leadership dialogue referred to the health of nature and human health being inextricably linked.

- Referring to the three interlinked crises focused on in the MTS, climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution, almost all statements declared that the nature crisis is inter-linked with the climate and pollution crises. Degrading nature contributes to increased emissions and makes us less resilient to the impacts of climate change. Pollution damages health and undermines the ability of natural processes to regulate the climate. The three crises must be addressed together, in a coordinated, integrated, and equitable way.
- The pandemic is both a threat and an opportunity. It has exposed our vulnerability and it is undermining the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. But it also provides an opportunity. We now have the chance to put in place a green recovery that will transform our relations with nature and heal our planet. We need to address the three crises in a way that we failed to do until now.
- The green recovery should put us on a pathway towards a low-carbon, resilient, and inclusive post-pandemic world allowing us to invest in the transition to a circular economy to achieve sustainable consumption and production and make full use of the role that nature-based solutions can offer to address climate change, nature loss, and pollution.
- The green recovery must address the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable, generate new, green jobs, and provide work to bridge the digital divide. Some nations repeated the need to recognise the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, others emphasised that the green recovery will need to ensure that all countries have the means of implementation that they need for such implementation.
- Many Member States are already putting in place key components of a green recovery including actions on chemicals and waste, plastic pollution, oceans, the energy transition, including enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions, sustainable cities, resilience, and nature protection.
- There is a need to scale up and accelerate all these actions. The green recovery, however, is not the responsibility of national governments alone. Regional approaches must be employed, and a whole-of-society approach is needed to fully engage youth, local communities, and the business community.
- 2021 is the year when the transformation must be consolidated. The meetings of the Rio Conventions, the Food Systems Summit, and the launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration provide opportunities to raise ambition and, more importantly, catalyse action.
- UNEP, as the leading global environmental authority, has a crucial role to play in all this. The adoption of the MTS, founded on good science, provides the necessary tools. The three planetary crises know no boundaries. Our response too must be globally coordinated. Multilateralism has never been more important.

4.0 An Analysis of UNEA 5.1: A few General Observations

It had to be a different meeting unlike any other meeting in the soon-to-be fifty-year history of UNEP. With all meetings cancelled by the UN by March 2020 because of the ongoing pandemic, there was no other choice than to organise the meeting online. And the meeting could not be postponed as UNEP needed an agreed budget and a work plan.

The outbreak of the COVID 19 virus with the ensuing pandemic, also resulting from the continued mishandling of nature, shook the world and gave us a concept earlier understood primarily by specialists, and which now may have entered our common vernacular –a zoonotic disease. Maybe fate had orchestrated the outbreak? It followed close on the heels of the publication in 2019 of the dramatic report on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services⁴ by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy

⁴ https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf

Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warning of a dramatic biodiversity loss and permanent damage to the environment unless we change our modus operandi on Earth.

Even before the outbreak of the pandemic, the President and his Bureau had expressed strong ambitions concerning the title, content, and outcome for UNEA 5. The President of the Bureau had referred numerous times to the IPBES report in his statements to the Bureau, and it was also frequently referred to during the Oslo consultation of the two UNEP Bureaux in June 2020, a first larger preparatory conference for UNEA 5.1.

We may remember that a first paper by the Bureau, published back in June 2019, expressed a strong interest in having Nature Based Solutions (NBS) as the overarching title and goal of UNEA 5. This was met with scepticism and opposition, especially by G-77, and the title and its possible content and policy repercussions were left unsolved for a while. Nature Based Solutions appeared too politically ambitious. But the title had been coined both as a policy response to the dramatic 2019 IPBES report and in response to what 2021 could hold as hopes for improving and safeguarding the environment. Back in the summer of 2019, 2021 was expected to be the super year for nature and it was thought that UNEA 5 would be one of the first global conferences on the environment initiating the super year for nature and heralding a new approach to solving environmental challenges in the decade leading up to 2030 and the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda. A series of conferences dealing with key environmental issues were supposed to follow in 2021. The UNEP secretariat and several member states had expressed an interest in making this decade a decade for nature and seemed willing to fight for a nature-focused title and content for UNEA 5. Two decisions focussing on environmental issues for the decade had already been made within the UN family highlighting the need to focus on saving the environment. UNESCO had dedicated this decade to ocean science, naming it the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)⁵ – with an engaging working title: the Science we need for the Ocean we want. UNEP with FAO had also designated the decade on ecosystem restoration – naming the decade “The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration”⁶, a global rallying cry to heal our planet. And the September 2019 UN GA Summit on Sustainable Development had also declared this decade a Decade for Action and Delivery to complete the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development⁷.

Moreover, the new targets for biodiversity are soon to be finalised within the post-2020 biodiversity framework negotiations of the UNCBD⁸. There were always going to be some uncertainties tied to these negotiations as several biodiversity targets similar to the Aichi targets were also integrated into the SDGs (SDG 15). The issue was that the Aichi targets had an earlier “maturity” date than the SDGs. The Aichi targets should all have been completed by 2020. They were not. It was hoped that the CBD conference originally scheduled for 2020, could have dealt with this and raised the ambition in the implementation of these life necessity goals. The conference was stopped, it seemed, by nature itself, as the pandemic broke out. As the SDGs have been adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and it seems there is no appetite to reopen the 2030 Agenda (see Ministerial declaration of 2021 HLPF where the integrity of the 2030 Agenda is emphasized⁹), could harmonizing the biodiversity goals be a concern that UNEP and UNEA might feel compelled to deal with? This delicate issue had been raised – the 2021 HLPF had a session on the issue - and has been on the radar screen of the diplomats for a while now.

⁵ <https://www.oceandecade.org/>

⁶ <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/>

⁷ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/>

⁸ <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

⁹ [E/HLS/2021/1 - E - E/HLS/2021/1 -Desktop \(undocs.org\)](https://undocs.org/E/HLS/2021/1-E-E/HLS/2021/1-Desktop)

The world was obviously gearing up for a momentous focus on working on the environment and nature. Besides, environmental issues were fast becoming key issues in national politics and several green parties had made it into parliaments in several countries. And UNEP should not be seen to fall behind environmental policy ambitions.

But on a policy level, opposition within UNEP member states was growing against the focus on safeguarding nature, and a compromise title for UNEA 5 was sought, which can be said holds something for everybody without being really focussed and ambitious. “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” was an acceptable compromise. Several observers opined the conflict over title and content had reflected the age-old G-77 attitude, that a focus on nature was a rich man’s concern obscuring the real goals, embracing development to fight poverty.

Then COVID 19 happened at the beginning of 2020 and turned every agenda upside-down.

4.1 - Policy Differences Lurking in the Background

We will never know if the old controversy between prioritising development over nature would have surfaced at UNEA 5. We will also never know if delicate diplomatic conundrums between the various UN family members, such as those tied to the biodiversity Aichi targets, would have found a workable solution. The fact that all meetings preparing for UNEA 5 had to be held online had the effect of lulling to sleep these and other deep-rooted policy controversies. While the world was gradually self-isolating and physical communication was put on hold, seasoned diplomats and savvy UN observers were wondering if this unexpected hiatus would increase fragmentation or perhaps allow the UN system to seek new ways to harmonize their efforts? At least on matters that relate to the environment. Coherence was sorely needed to be able to generate a concerted action-oriented effort to save the world from irreparable environmental devastation. We knew what to do, we had the money, but decision-makers dithered, and a few key ones were against proper environmental policies, their opposition supported by right-wing and opportunistically inclined populist movements, negating science, facts, and democracy.

An observation from a UN DESA report during these years¹⁰ reflects this controversy on a global scale and unfortunately shows that theory and practice relating to the environment and sustainable development were still far apart. The report states that sustainable development had by 2018/19 finally reached political legitimacy. However, all countries in the world, including those that had developed a national strategy on sustainable development, still prioritised traditional development thinking and implementation over strategies and plans based on sustainable development.

The final title for the UNEA 5 process, including a majority of statements from the Leadership Dialogues held during UNEA 5.1, reveals a growing interest in realising the importance of safeguarding and protecting nature in a much more rigorous and generous manner than ever before. What has been expressed for years by a small global minority of people, often referred to as the ‘green nerds,’ seem to be moving closer to mainstream policy acceptance. But decision-makers are not fully accepting (or understanding?) the need for a transformative change, as strongly stated in the 2030 Agenda¹¹, and several key nations seem reluctant to admit that the environment and nature are at the moment in a perilous situation and actions to restore nature are long overdue.

The following story may illustrate this reluctance. The governments of Sweden and Kenya have together announced their commitment to organise a conference in June 2022 to commemorate the

¹⁰ <https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Research/World-Public-Sector-Reports>

¹¹ UNGA A/Res/70/1. “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

50th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment which in 1972 agreed to establish UNEP. This issue will also be discussed during UNEA 5.2 in February and March 2022. The two governments had opted for an UNGA resolution for what has become known as the Stockholm+50 Conference. The idea behind the resolutions was to give the proposed Stockholm+50 conference the necessary political weight. And the Swedish Prime Minister had also invited the world to send high-level representatives to Sweden for this important conference. And when a Prime Minister invites to a high-level conference, it means participation at the Heads of State level. But the initiative was met with unexpected opposition. Two resolutions were needed to acquire the formalities for the Stockholm+50 conference, an enabling resolution and a modalities resolution. However, negotiating and finalising the texts for the resolutions became an arduous task, and what had initially been expected to be smooth sailing through the bureaucracy of member state participation in New York, sailed into rough waters almost immediately. Working only online does not allow for much ‘reliable gossip’ to be gleaned. It transpired, however, that the difficulties encountered in the deliberations over the resolutions were often on issues that were of little importance to environmental concerns. However, observers opined that these difficulties were used as a proxy for a more serious issue. What transpired from this opposition was that a number of governments represented by their missions in New York were opposed to discussing environmental issues at the Heads of State level. If this be the case, it was and is obvious that environmental issues are still not the key concerns of national or global politics. Gleaning information that slowly emanated from the New York debates at UN Headquarters on the two resolutions also illustrates an important issue, silently recognised, never openly pronounced or addressed: there is a serious gap in knowledge and understanding of the environment as well as differences in policy priorities between the UN Headquarters dominated by policy understanding coming from the Permanent Missions of nations working on directives from their ministries of foreign affairs, and UNEP in Nairobi, where at least a handful of embassies employ functionaries with an environmental background and with an embassy responsibility of a focussed environment portfolio. Just as the working title of UNEA 5 was the result of a watered-down compromise, so the two resolutions on the Stockholm+50 Conference were agreed over a watered-down compromise. And to add to the confusion over the compromise, the Stockholm+50 conference is not even called a UN conference in the resolution, it is referred to as an international meeting. Why then the need for a UNGA resolution, and what were the real issues behind the difficulties to reach the compromise agreement, which also reduced the meeting from its original three days to two? The obscurity of diplomatic deliberations will never cease to baffle us.

4.2 – Do the Mid Term Strategy and the Leadership Dialogue provide direction? Does the Mid Term Strategy Contain More Challenges Than First Meets the Eye?

The goals of the adopted MTS are reasonably ambitious. Still, are they ambitious enough? UNEP’s secretariat and Bureaux spent a lot of time on developing and consulting on the MTS. And for the first time, the major groups were consulted and invited to present issues at Bureau and CPR meetings discussing the MTS in the run-up to UNEA 5.1.

Implicit in some of the statements concerning the content of the MTS – and it must be said, these statements come from the ‘environmentally conscious’ nations – the three thematic foci of the MTS (climate, biodiversity, and pollution) could open up a discussion within UNEP to see if clustering and strengthening the MEAs would make sense. There are discussions throughout the world, in political and scientific contexts, of what may be termed thematic coherence. This has inspired a wider understanding of the interlinked nature of themes and issues. The discussions around the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals are proof of this. And efforts to strengthen coherence are underway. The chemical conventions are meeting regularly in Geneva as a super Conference of Parties (COP) with the Stockholm, Rotterdam, and Basel Conventions.

The Minamata Convention on mercury has yet to be added to the chemical super COP so there is still work to be done there. As a policy issue, this could easily be related to the ongoing discussions on the MTS and a mandate from UNEA could direct this to happen.

The fact that the MTS has focussed on biodiversity may also open up for policy directions for UNEP, provided UNEA can give the secretariat a mandate. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and within it the Sustainable Development Goals including their targets are formally a UNGA matter. It should be well known that several of the 169 targets that belong to the 17 SDGs are also biodiversity targets, and the Aichi targets on Biodiversity may be upgraded after the CBD conference is finalised in 2022 which hopefully will give the world, and UNEP an impetus to look again at nature-based solutions. It is also unclear what the relationship between the SDG targets that relate to biodiversity and any new targets agreed by the CBD will be.

A Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions¹² has been established and has been working on issues related to coherence. They have studied the need for harmonization of national reporting to biodiversity-related agreements and which preconditions for such harmonization exist.

The UNEP project on Knowledge Management among MEAs, led by UNEP and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) in partnership with the Biodiversity-related Conventions, has produced a paper on pre-conditions for harmonization of national reporting to help countries understand the rationale for and challenges to harmonization of national reporting.

Again, under the policy umbrella of the MTS, and as a related matter, UNEA might request the UNGA to address this biodiversity-related issue in the next UNGA general session in order to bring coherence before it gets too muddled. At present, there is no development on this matter, and apparently, governments will also be asked to continue reporting on the Aichi bio-targets that expired in 2020. This could actually create two different and even competing processes where the SDG bio-targets could be viewed as politically more important and distract attention and importance from the new and possibly more ambitious bio-targets under CBD.

Climate, atmosphere, and pollution are often linked in policy and these elements are also part of the MTS. Work on atmosphere could bring together the conventions on climate and ozone. Seen as a cluster, UNEP could play a significant role in facilitating and coordinating the work in this emerging cluster.

A foundational sub-programme of the MTS is identified as environmental governance. The recent decision by the Human Rights Council on the right to a clean environment fits well into this sub-programme. UNEP has a track record of rights-based approaches to the environment, and with the Human Rights Council decision on the right to a clean environment, UNEP's rights-based work is far from being explored to its fullest potential. This may well be revisited at UNEA 5.2 including several future UNEAs.

Concerning Stockholm+50, a few official statements have indicated that this conference should be strongly aspirational and look to the future with UNEP. Maybe the clustering of the MEAs and brave additions to existing environment conventions could aspire to such a future? Addressing creatively the MTS including the environmental conventions and agreements and connecting this to Stockholm +50 as indicated above would allow such a debate to be held at the prestigious UNGA level, as the two UNGA resolutions provide for that. This would give Stockholm+50 a political context that would be looking to the future and the conference would not be left as a stand-alone, commemorative international meeting. Such a theme would certainly respond to growing

¹² <https://www.cbd.int/blg/>

environmental and rights-based demands expressed by the younger generations of the world. It could be discussed – after all, there will be Leadership Dialogues in Stockholm as well.

We will never know what the goals of the MTS would have been had the preparation and deliberations followed a normal trajectory with in-person meetings. As was shown above, the MTS consists of a complex web of elements under the overarching crises analysis, where the MTS's focus is on climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The MTS does, however, provide UNEP with a broad mandate to cooperate and engage with the private sector, to amplify regional efforts, to work with other non-state actors, to increase assistance to countries, and make sure the MTS is driven by science. Delegates also spoke often forcefully that UNEP has been and will remain the preeminent organisation within the UN family to deal with the environment. It must have given the UNEP secretariat some encouragement to hear that several member states said they had fulfilled their agreed financial contribution to UNEP and actually stood ready to commit more when necessary. So, to answer the question posed, yes, the MTS gives UNEP directions – and opportunities - for the next four years. Under the umbrella of the MTS and by utilising its potential, all stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, can contribute to strengthen the environment and strengthen UNEP as the global pre-eminent and uniquely environment-focused organisation. Another question is whether the member states will feel compelled to honour what they have so far said, promised, decided, and agreed to.

A way forward implicit in Leadership Dialogues

The Leadership Dialogue had been prepared well by the secretariat of UNEP. A detailed concept note had been developed and a set of questions had been prepared¹³. Most importantly the member states were asked to provide political guidance through their participation in the Leadership Dialogues. More than 80 ministers with the environment in their portfolio made statements during the Leadership Dialogues. They and members of civil society addressed most issues raised in the concept paper. The statements were rife with references to the pandemic, its many consequences, and the need to build back better and as some observed – the need to make peace with nature. In fact, most issues with relevance to safeguarding, protecting, and restoring nature were mentioned in the Dialogues. Even issues that were only stated by the NGO community a few years back, were expressed by ministers – such as the need for a dramatic change in politics making sure it is based on a holistic understanding of the environment including the need for a new economic system.

A dialogue is an exchange of views and several observers remarked that digital platforms do not necessarily provide for an immediate exchange of ideas in the same way as when people sit together in the same room and debate. Perhaps because of that, the Leadership Dialogues would allow for statements that were often non-committal. Such statements are more often than not, seen as a litany of statements and expressions catering to what people at home want to hear from their leaders. Because of these obviously domestic concerns, it was at times difficult to see what direction the dialogues were taking. Non-state stakeholders, as represented through the Major Groups, were also quite active during the entire Leadership Dialogues process, although not allowed as much space to speak as they would have wanted. However, as many observed, civil society and non-state actors tend to concentrate on watchdog issues, access issues, governance questions, and rights-based approaches. Their statements are often more generic than concrete and without concrete references to action-oriented implementation. As such, the accredited global NGO community did not deviate too much from the general direction found in statements given by ministers.

¹³ <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34998/K2003029-E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

Did the Leadership Dialogues provide direction for UNEP? The summary of the dialogues given by UNEP's Deputy Executive Director Ms. Joyce Msuya was positive, and reading between her lines we may surmise that the answer is yes. Listening to a majority of statements given during the Leadership Dialogues gives a more complex, even possibly a slightly confusing picture of what a policy direction should be. But one thing seems to be agreed to by the vast majority of ministers – their statements acknowledged that UNEP was, is, and will be the preeminent body within the UN family dealing with the environment. And that is also a direction given.

5.0 How are UNEA 5.1 and UNEA 5.2 Connected Thematically?

First, the two elements (5.1 and 5.2) constitute together what should have been UNEA 5. The next UNEA, the 5.2, will complete the agenda of UNEA 5 (see paragraph 2.1 in this document to find the remaining issues for the agenda at UNEA 5.2). Two key decisions were made at UNEA 5.1 – the budget and the MTS. Hopefully, member states will refrain from opening the debate on these issues. A temptation to do so is obviously there. By December 2021, new resolutions on various issues will be presented to the Bureaux and secretariat to be dealt with during UNEA 5.2. Will these resolutions invite new issues, or will they strengthen old ones?

Twenty-one thematic reports were listed under paragraph 2.2 in this document. Deliberating on only one of these reports can easily take more than three days. The reports listed as no 5 and no 6 deal with plastics and chemical waste. The plastic issues suffered a minor defeat at UNEA 4. The US effectively opposed a far-reaching resolution on curbing plastic pollution and reducing its impact on nature. The plastics coalitions among civil society and non-state actors are strong and well-organised and may well want to revisit this urgent issue. Member states are aware of this, and some are in favour of stronger measures concerning plastic litter which was also seen at the High-level Political Forum held in July at the UN Headquarters in New York where some member states asked for a convention on plastics. This might resurface as an item during UNEA 5.2. Also, according to a decision made at UNEA 5.1, these 21 reports will be reviewed at 5.2 and action programmes discussed. Time will show the political urgencies and priorities attached to each theme.

The President of the Bureau during 5.1, the former Norwegian Minister for Environment and Climate, Mr. Rotevatn began circulating elements for a ministerial declaration to come out of UNEA 5.2. soon after UNEA 5.1 was over. These elements might be changed soon, due to preparations and a rather extraordinary circumstance.

5.1 – A Peculiar Incident May Provide for a Greener Outcome Than was Expected

Back in 2019, at UNEA 4, Norway was elected to hold the presidency of the UNEA 5 Bureau, with the Minister for Environment and Climate, Mr. Olav Elvestuen as President. He belonged to the Norwegian party Venstre, a middle-of-the-road liberal party and a member of the conservative coalition government in Norway. Due to a change of the coalition government and an ensuing reshuffle of positions within Venstre, Mr. Elvestuen was ousted from his position and Sveinung Rotevatn, also of Venstre, emerged as the new Minister of Climate and Environment. He subsequently became the second President of UNEA 5, replacing Elvestuen. In September this year (2021), Norway held its regular parliamentary elections, and the conservative coalition government of eight years, headed by Ms. Erna Solberg, lost to a new coalition consisting of representatives from the Labour party and the Centre Party. They have now formed a new government and this minority government has the support of a green-red group of parliamentarians. A new person has been appointed to serve as Minister of Environment and Climate, and that person, Mr. Espen Barth Eide will now become the third President of the UNEA 5 Bureau. Barth Eide will bring with him earlier experience in the government; he served as Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs

during the former red-green coalition government in Norway, and he has wide experience with the UN as well, having held several high-level assignments there. He will now replace Mr. Rotevatn. Norway will thus have provided three Presidents to the one and the same UNEA and will thus hold a rather peculiar record in the annals of UNEP. This new coalition government has a far stronger environment profile than its predecessor. Thus, in all likelihood, the Norwegian Presidency will now present a far more ambitious policy on the environment than its predecessor, an approach that might well affect the elements for the ministerial declaration.

5.2 – UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50

Following the three days of UNEA 5.2, the Bureaux have decided to organise a Special Session on UNEP@50. There are already plans on how to do this including key themes to be discussed. A decision has also been made to organise a Stockholm+50 conference on June 2nd and 3rd 2022. The two events shall be mutually supportive and as such strengthen each other. This sentiment is also reflected in the two UNGA resolutions on Stockholm+50.¹⁴

The two commemorative conferences have been given focal points and UNEP has also established two Task Force groups among non-state stakeholders to work and engage in the formal processes as well as working with the larger, global non-state stakeholder constituency. UNEP@50 is run tightly between the UNEP Secretariat and the two Bureaux and has developed a far-reaching work plan on the Special Session in March 2022. Whereas UNEP@50 on 3 and 4 March is about UNEP, Stockholm+50 is expected to be about the environment and also to have a more aspirational tone and outcome. The Stockholm conference organisers also have an ambition that this conference will cater to all stakeholders around the globe, and not just the UNEP accredited ones. Still, this conference will only last for two days in June 2022 (2 and 3 June).

Of particular interest to UNEA 5.2, UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50 is the resolution 73/333 on “Strengthening environmental governance and law”. A decision has been made to seek to finalise work on this resolution by the Special Session in March, and a few nations have expressed an interest in developing a follow-up programme as an integrated element of the outcome decision from UNEA 5.2 and the Special Session. Thus, this particular issue may well be carried over to the Stockholm+50 conference as well. The NGO community is in favour of such a development. Whether this work is enough to give Stockholm+50 a serious, credible, hopeful and aspirational nature, will remain to be seen. The mandate given the Stockholm+50 conference is to have a rather bland outcome, an outcome that might even defy the strongest optimist a belief in the future, as its states: “ ... the international meeting will result in a summary of discussions as its outcome document.”

Will discussions change the world, or is this foreign policy dominating environmental needs? Time will show.

5.3 – An Epilogue with an Optimistic Future

Ms. Inger Anderson, UNEP Executive Director, has been asked by the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres, to become the Secretary-General for the Stockholm+50 Conference. In his appointment letter, Guterres writes, among others:

¹⁴ A/RES/75/280, of May 24, 2020: “International meeting entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”
A/75/326 of 10 September, 2021, “Modalities for the international meeting entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”

“It is urgent that the global community agree on pathways and solutions to address the triple planetary crises of climate disruption, biodiversity loss, and pollution, destroying our planet. As highlighted in my recent report entitled Our Common Agenda, I trust that the Stockholm+50 International Meeting will contribute to this purpose and also demonstrate how an open, networked, and effective multilateralism can address the current environmental challenges we face as a global community.”

The UN Secretary-General then states: “To advance this critical piece of our work, and in line with General Assembly resolution A/75/326, I would like to appoint you (Ms. Inger Andersen) as the Secretary-General of the International Meeting and ask that you also serve as focal point within the United Nations system to support its organization.”

And with UNEP in charge, the Stockholm+50 Conference can be a momentous moment in the history of safeguarding the environment.

APPENDIX

The complete official report from UNEA 5.1 is found at:

<https://wedocs.unep.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/36412/English%20Report.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

The outcomes of the online first session of UNEA-5 (UNEA-5.1) is found at:

<https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/outcomes-online-session-unea-5>

About the Author

Jan-Gustav Strandenaes began working with the UN on environment and governance in the 1970s, and a first UN assignment brought him to Latin America. He has since then taught about the UN for more than four decades, worked with the UN Commission for Sustainable Development for 15 years, worked as an NGO liaison officer at the UN HQ in New York, worked for the Norwegian Foreign Office as a diplomat at embassies in Botswana and Uganda, and was for 15 years the director of a Norwegian aid/environment-NGO with projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Mr. Strandenaes has extensive stakeholder experience through 40 years of work on all continents, speaks several languages, is a seasoned university lecturer, has guest-lectured all over the world on UN issues. He has given numerous masterclasses for graduate students on global governance and sustainable development, has evaluated projects and organisations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, advised governments, chaired UN meetings, facilitated UN processes, and translated and authored books and numerous articles on governance, the environment, and sustainable development.

In 2018, Jan-Gustav was appointed by the German Government to be on a peer group assessing their national Sustainability Strategy. Chaired by former prime minister of New Zealand and UNDP Executive Director, Helen Clark, the final report was handed to the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel.

For decades, Jan-Gustav has delivered projects for UNEP on stakeholder engagement and governance issues and had assignments for the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), one which had him coordinating civil society input for the entire Rio+20 process, the open working group for the SDGs and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

During the last four years, he has also contributed chapters to several books on sustainable development, democracy, and governance.

Jan-Gustav has been affiliated Stakeholder Forum for more than 20 years, and now also advises the private sector, NGOs, and municipalities on implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. An independent researcher on the environment, governance, and sustainability issues, he is a keen traveller – he once crossed the Kalahari Desert in a Land Rover – and when not traveling he works out of his home outside Oslo, Norway.

About Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future

[Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future](#) (SF) is a not-for-profit international organisation working to advance sustainable development at all levels. Our work aims to enhance open, accountable, and participatory decision-making and governance on sustainable development through enhancing the involvement of all stakeholders. We provide a bridge between those who have a stake in sustainable development and the international forums where decisions are made in their name. To this end, we work with a diversity of stakeholders globally on international policy development and advocacy; stakeholder engagement and consultation; media and communications, and capacity building – all with the ultimate objective of promoting progressive outcomes on sustainable development through an open and participatory approach. In consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1996, SF also works with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) under an MOU to expand the engagement and participation of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders in the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and HLPF processes.



Company no. 05243470 • Registered in England and Wales
Registered Office: 2 The Links • Herne Bay • Kent • CT6 7GQ • UK
KVK-nummer 78620813 • Vurehout 373 • 1507 EC Zaandam • NL
www.stakeholderforum.org • e: info@stakeholderforum.org