

Looking at the 2020 targets: implementation and review

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When the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development was negotiated, Member States decided that certain targets within the SDGs should be achieved with an accelerated timeline, including those agreed in other intergovernmental processes such as the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and others. These “shared” targets have a completion date of 2020 in those parallel processes, and by carrying over this deadline to the SDGs, Member States effectively raised the ambition of the 2030 Agenda as a whole. There are 21 targets meant to mature in 2020, representing “shared” targets and others designated by the Member States: 2.5, 3.6, 4.b, 6.6, 8.6, 8.b, 9.c, 11.b, 12.4, 13.a, 14.2, 14.4, 14.5, 14.6, 15.1, 15.2, 15.5, 15.8, 15.9 and 17.11 and 17.18. None of these targets were achieved in 2020.

The Secretary-General’s SDG Progress report of this year shows that there has been some progress in some of these targets, but nowhere is the progress adequate. There has been, for instance, a decline in road traffic injuries (though this is still the leading cause of death globally for young people); an increase of ODA for scholarships; an increase in the number of countries that have developed youth employment strategies and national urban policies; an increase in climate-specific financial support; a doubling of key biodiversity, marine, freshwater and terrestrial areas from 2000 to 2020; a slowing-down of deforestation; and progress in instruments and policies to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and to address invasive alien species. On the other hand, many local livestock breeds are deemed at risk of extinction, the world’s river basins and wetlands are under increased threat, youth unemployment has increased significantly, mobile-broadband networks and e-waste recycling are progressing much too slowly, and species extinction risk has worsened by about 10 per cent over the last three decades. In addition, bilateral investment treaties with LDCs have slowed in 2020, and after an initial increase in support to high-quality, timely and reliable data especially in LDCs, this is now faltering due to the pandemic.

So, though 2020 has passed for these targets, now is the time to intensify efforts to achieve them, keeping in mind that many of them, especially those related to biodiversity, are being reviewed and likely made more ambitious through their own parallel processes. This session will thus provide the opportunity to discuss how to accelerate achievement of these targets and how best to reflect the increased ambition coming from related intergovernmental processes while maintaining the integrity of the 2030 Agenda.

Proposed guiding questions:

1. What would be the best ways to accelerate achievement of the 2020 targets?
2. What would be the best way to update the targets?
3. What role should GA and HLPF play in keeping the ambition of the 2020 targets?

UNEP’s responses

6.6	i. Freshwater ecosystems are changing dramatically. One fifth of the world’s river basins are experiencing either rapid increases or decreases in surface water area. Globally, lake water quality is poor: of the 2,300 large lakes assessed, nearly a quarter of them recorded high to extreme turbidity (water cloudiness) in 2019. Lakes with high turbidity can adversely impact human and ecosystem health. An assessment of 10 per cent of the world’s large lakes show that at least 21 million people, including 5 million children, live within a 5-kilometre radius of lakes with high turbidity.
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	Moreover, natural wetlands around the world are in long-term decline. More than 80 per cent of wetlands are estimated to have been lost since the pre-industrial era. Between 1970 and 2015, inland and marine/coastal wetlands both declined by approximately 35 per cent, three times the rate of forest loss. The area covered by coastal mangroves declined globally by 4.9 per cent between 1996 and 2016. Existing efforts to protect and restore water-related ecosystems must be urgently scaled up and accelerated
12.4	The COVID-19 pandemic has had many implications for chemicals and waste management and the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions. Rapid changes in the amounts and types of chemicals produced and wastes generated as well as adjustments regarding transboundary movements of wastes, in particular COVID-19-related wastes, are expected to impact the transmission of required information, in particular under the Basel Convention. Furthermore, the scope of information to be transmitted by Parties to the Basel Convention was broadened with the adoption of the Plastic Waste Amendments ¹ which came into effect in January 2021. Information on generation, imports and exports of additional plastic wastes and information on waste transboundary movements and generation as impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are to be reported by Parties in their annual national reports and will be taken into account subsequently under the indicator 12.4.1. Such data will be valuable in measuring target 14.1, that aims by 2025, to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.
14.2	No data – expected in 2022
14.5	<p>Safeguarding important sites for biodiversity is a core requirement for environmental sustainability. Over the last 20 years, the world's governments have made good progress in achieving this, with mean protected area coverage of marine key biodiversity areas increasing globally from 28% in 2000 to 44% now. There is however considerable spatial variation in this progress, with coverage still less than a quarter in Oceania. While there have been anecdotal reports that the COVID-19 pandemic has undermined environmental sustainability in some countries, there is as yet no evidence for this in protected area coverage of marine key biodiversity areas.</p> <p>As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, countries face a stark choice. Post-COVID recovery efforts could be directed towards activities which ensure safeguard of key biodiversity areas: green stimulus via protected area establishment, for example; or development of other effective area-based conservation mechanisms which are managed for objectives other than conservation but nevertheless effectively maintain the biodiversity for which they are important. This is essential if countries are to be successful in achieving SDG15 and the new Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. By contrast, if post-COVID recovery entails investments into business-as-usual, there is a danger that protected area coverage of important sites could plateau or even decline, jeopardizing not just environmental commitments but sustainability overall.</p>
15.1	<p>Safeguarding important sites for biodiversity is a core requirement for environmental sustainability. Over the last 20 years, the world's governments have made good progress in achieving this, with mean protected area coverage of key biodiversity areas increasing globally from 29% in 2000 to 43% now, for both terrestrial and freshwater environments. There is however considerable spatial variation in this progress, with coverage still less than a quarter in Oceania, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Central and Southern Asia. While there have been anecdotal reports that the COVID-19 pandemic has undermined environmental sustainability in some countries, there is as yet no evidence for this in protected area coverage of key biodiversity areas.</p> <p>As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, countries face a stark choice. Post-COVID recovery efforts could be directed towards activities which ensure safeguard of key biodiversity areas: green stimulus via protected area establishment, for example; or development of other effective area-based conservation mechanisms which are managed for objectives other than conservation but nevertheless effectively maintain the biodiversity for which they are important. This is essential if countries are to be successful in achieving SDG15 and the new Post-</p>

	2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. By contrast, if post-COVID recovery entails investments into business-as-usual, there is a danger that protected area coverage of important sites could plateau or even decline, jeopardizing not just environmental commitments but sustainability overall.
15.9	<p>In the face of climate change, biodiversity loss, and the need for a green recovery from COVID-19, more and more countries have been recognizing the need to mainstream biodiversity values into national accounting and reporting through implementation of the international statistical standard, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA). As of March 2021, 89 countries have implemented the SEEA as a way to make nature count in economic policy and decision making through accounts for natural resources and/or ecosystems. This number is an increase of 29 per cent from the number of countries implementing the SEEA in 2017 and is mostly made up of developing countries. A majority of the 89 countries (62, or 70 per cent) have integrated the SEEA into their regular statistical production and compile and publish the accounts on a regular basis.</p> <p>Moving forward, the number of countries implementing the SEEA is only expected to increase. In 2021, the United Nations Statistical Commission adopted the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA EA) as an international statistical standard, at the same level as the SEEA Central Framework (SEEA CF) and 2008 System of National Accounts. Thus, the United Nations Statistical Commission will encourage and support countries to implement the SEEA EA. Moreover, calls for a green recovery from COVID-19 are expected to promote SEEA implementation. Similar to how policymakers used the System of National Accounts to measure economic progress after WWII, today's policymakers will need to use a measurement system that provides them with the information needed to plan and track a green recovery.</p>

A. What would be the best ways to accelerate achievement of the 2020 targets?

- Given the continued weak focus to report on current SDG targets related to environment (that are directly related such as SDG 13, 14 and 15 as well as those that are cross-cutting in nature), it is important to have focused discussion on how countries will be reporting on achievement of the targets. One of the best ways to accelerate the achievement of the 2020 targets is to use common indicators across different environmental agendas as an opportunity to monitor progress on common goals and targets. While linking biodiversity with chemicals and waste, it is anticipated that the chemicals and waste as well as the biodiversity approaches will include a series of global targets and indicators. Alignment in this area is a critical consideration in moving forward, including linking to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is presumed that the targets and indicators under discussion will form the basis for any national reporting and for monitoring progress made at the global level. It is important to consider that although these are global frameworks, they must be delivered on the national and local level.
- It is important to update the existing targets under SDG, considering the ongoing negotiations related to a new global biodiversity framework (GBF) and under UNCLOS on BBNJ and ensure the implementation plans of the new targets and those under the SDGs are explicitly linked with options for mutually supportive implementation and reporting, including through Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) from 2022.
- Addressing the need for continued institutional strengthening and capacity building, to support developing countries and countries in economies in transition in their efforts to implement the relevant international instruments and achieve the SDGs will contribute to accelerating progress.

B. What would be the best way to update the targets?

The best way to update the targets would be to refer for biodiversity targets to refer/ align to biodiversity MEAs and the post 2020 Biodiversity frameworks and for Chemicals and Waste targets to align to the C&W MEAs and the development of the post 2020 C&W framework (SAICM).

From the Measuring Progress 2 report:

- UNEP undertook to provide an overview of data gaps and opportunities evaluating which aspects of the environment one can measure versus which aspects presently lack the information needed to understand the current global situation. Data gaps include gaps in the compilation, analysis, and effective use of data. The analysis highlights the underlying data sparsity for the environmental dimension of the SDGs. Gaps are found not only in the underlying data, but also in the tools and analytical methodologies for understanding the state of the environment, as well as interactions within the environmental dimension of the SDGs and interactions between the environmental dimension of the SDGs and the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development.
- Big Earth Observation Data, artificial intelligence, citizen science and other new forms of data have the potential to fill the data gap for monitoring progress towards the 2030 Agenda and supporting various aspects of the SDGs in other ways.
- Strengthening the National Statistical Offices' ability to undertake integrated analyses and explorations of interlinkages will be vital for designing, monitoring, and improving the efficacy of government interventions to achieve the SDGs.

C. What role should GA and HLPF play in keeping the ambition of the 2020 targets?

- In keeping the ambition of the 2020 targets, the GA and the HLPF can play a key role in mainstreaming and strengthening related discussions in the communities across different ministries to avoid them being addressed as silo communities. There is a depth of substantive knowledge and policy opportunities to strengthen the connection and dialogue of the chemical and biodiversity communities, in all levels and disciplines. Connecting biodiversity and chemicals management workstreams, as well as to the rest of the 2030 Agenda, at a national level could be particularly beneficial.