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14th Annual
Monterey County
Model UN
Middle School Conference

Sat., April 27, 2024

Middlebury Institute
Monterey, CA

Background Guide for the UNEA (UN Environment Assembly)

SDG 14: Life Below Water

Target 14.7/14.1: Promoting Developing Economies While Protecting the Marine Environment

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

- Target 14.7: By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism
- *Indicator 14.7.1: Sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP in small island developing States, least developed countries and all countries*

- Target 14.1: By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution
- *Indicator 14.1.1: (a) Index of coastal eutrophication; and (b) plastic debris density*

The UN Environmental Assembly

The UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA)[1] is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment. It was created in 2012 to replace the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). UNEA has the universal membership of all 193 UN Member States and the full involvement of major groups and stakeholders. It meets every two years in Nairobi, Kenya, where UNEP is headquartered.

The main function of UNEA is to address the critical environmental challenges facing the world today and to agree on policies and actions to protect and restore the natural world on which our economies and societies depend. UNEA also oversees the implementation of UNEP's work programme and budget, and elects its Executive Director3. UNEA aims to create momentum for governments to build on and catalyze impact on multilateral environmental efforts, and to support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[2]

The structure of UNEA consists of three main components: the plenary, the Committee of the Whole, and the Bureau. The plenary is the main deliberative organ of UNEA, where ministers of environment and other high-level representatives discuss and adopt resolutions and decisions on various environmental issues. The Committee of the Whole is a subsidiary body that assists the plenary in preparing draft resolutions and decisions for adoption. The Bureau is composed of 10 members elected by UNEA, representing the five UN regional groups. The Bureau provides guidance and support to UNEA on organizational and procedural matters.

In addition to these components, UNEA also has a number of subsidiary organs and mechanisms that support its work. These include: the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR), which is an intergovernmental body that meets regularly between UNEA sessions to review UNEP's work and prepare for UNEA; the Science-Policy Forum, which is a platform for scientists and policymakers to exchange knowledge and evidence on environmental issues; the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, which is a forum for civil society organizations to engage with UNEP and UNEA; and the Sustainable Innovation Expo, which is an exhibition of innovative solutions and technologies for sustainable development.

UNEA is a unique and influential forum that brings together governments, businesses, civil society, and other stakeholders to address the most pressing environmental challenges of our time. By strengthening actions for nature, UNEA contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and advancing global environmental cooperation.

[1] unep.org
[2] sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/unea

SDG14 Life Under Water

SDG 14 is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations in 2015. It is about "Life below water" and aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.[3]

SDG 14 has 10 targets and 14 indicators that cover various aspects of ocean health and management, such as marine pollution, ecosystem protection, ocean acidification, sustainable fishing, coastal and marine areas conservation, fisheries subsidies, economic benefits, scientific knowledge, research and technology.[4]

This goal recognizes the vital role of oceans and seas in supporting life on Earth, providing food, energy, water, climate regulation, and other ecosystem services. It also acknowledges the threats and challenges that oceans and seas face from human activities, such as overexploitation, pollution, habitat destruction, climate change, and invasive species.

SDG 14 calls for urgent action to protect and restore the health and productivity of oceans and seas, and to ensure their sustainable use for present and future generations. It also seeks to enhance international cooperation and coordination on ocean issues, and to increase the participation and benefits of developing countries, especially small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs), in the global ocean governance.[5]

SDG 14 is closely linked to other SDGs, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Achieving SDG 14 will require solutions that balance the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

SDG14.7 Increase Economic Benefits in Developing Countries

SDG 14.7 is a target of the Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14), which is about conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. SDG 14.7 aims to increase the economic benefits to small island developing States (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs) from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism.[6]

SDG 14.7 is very important for SIDS and LDCs, as they have a special dependence on and vulnerability to the oceans, seas and marine resources. SIDS and LDCs have large ocean

[3] sdgs.un.org/topics/oceans-and-seas
[4] globalgoals.org/goals/14-life-below-water
[5] sustainabledevelopment.un.org/SDG14
[6] ocm.iccrom.org/sdgs/sdg-14-life-below-water/sdg-147-increase-economic-benefits-sustainable-use-marine-resources

territories and rich marine biodiversity, but they also face many challenges such as limited land area, isolation, climate change, natural disasters, and external shocks.

By increasing the economic benefits from the sustainable use of marine resources, SDG 14.7 can help SIDS and LDCs to enhance their resilience, diversify their economies, reduce poverty and inequality, and improve their well-being.[7] For example, sustainable management of fisheries can provide food security, income, and livelihoods for millions of people in SIDS and LDCs. Sustainable aquaculture can offer opportunities for innovation, value addition, and export diversification. Sustainable tourism can generate revenues, create jobs, and promote cultural and environmental conservation.

However, achieving SDG 14.7 also requires addressing the gaps and barriers that hinder the sustainable development of SIDS and LDCs. These include lack of data and information, inadequate institutional and legal frameworks, limited human and financial capacities, weak regional and international cooperation, and unfair trade practices. Therefore, SDG 14.7 calls for the support and partnership of the international community, especially the developed countries, to assist SIDS and LDCs in realizing their potential and aspirations for a prosperous and sustainable future.

SDG14.1 Prevent & Reduce Marine Pollution

SDG 14.1 is a target of the Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14), which is about conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. SDG 14.1 aims to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution, by 2025.[8]

This target recognizes the serious threat that marine pollution poses to the health and productivity of the oceans and seas, and to the well-being of millions of people who depend on them for food, livelihoods, and recreation. Marine pollution can harm marine life, ecosystems, and biodiversity, as well as human health, safety, and security. Marine pollution can also undermine the economic potential of the oceans and seas, such as tourism, fisheries, and aquaculture.

SDG 14.1 calls for urgent action to prevent and reduce the sources and impacts of marine pollution, especially from land-based activities, which account for about 80% of marine pollution. Land-based sources of marine pollution include agricultural runoff, sewage, industrial effluents, solid waste, plastics, chemicals, metals, and radioactive substances. These pollutants can enter the oceans and seas through rivers, streams, stormwater drains, coastal erosion, or direct dumping.[9]

[7] stats.unctad.org/Dgff2016/planet/goal14/target_14_7.html

[8] sustainabledevelopment.un.org/SDG14

[9] sdgs.un.org/goals/goal14

SDG 14.1 requires the implementation of effective policies and measures to prevent and reduce marine pollution at all levels, from local to global. These include: strengthening the legal and regulatory frameworks; enhancing the monitoring and assessment of marine pollution; promoting the prevention, reduction, reuse, and recycling of waste; applying the polluter pays principle; increasing public awareness and education; fostering cooperation and coordination among stakeholders; and mobilizing adequate resources and technology.

Challenges of Balances the Targets

SDG 14.7 aims to increase the economic benefits to small island developing States (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs) from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism1. SDG 14.1 aims to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.[10]

Some of the challenges[11] that countries face when trying to balance SDG 14.7 and SDG 14.1 are:

- How to ensure that the exploitation of marine resources does not exceed the ecological limits and resilience of the oceans and seas, and does not compromise the health and productivity of marine ecosystems.
- How to prevent and reduce the negative impacts of marine pollution on marine life, biodiversity, ecosystem services, human health, and economic activities, especially for SIDS and LDCs that are highly dependent on and vulnerable to the oceans and seas.
- How to balance the competing social, economic and environmental demands for ocean resources, and to ensure that the benefits are equitably distributed among different groups of stakeholders, especially the poor and marginalized.
- How to strengthen the legal and institutional frameworks, the monitoring and assessment systems, the public awareness and education programmes, the regional and international cooperation mechanisms, and the financial and technological resources to support the implementation of both SDG 14.7 and SDG 14.1.

These challenges require integrated and holistic approaches that take into account the linkages and synergies between SDG 14.7 and SDG 14.1, as well as other SDGs related to oceans, seas and marine resources.

[10] ourworldindata.org/sdgs/life-below-water

[11] sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/sdg-14-life-below-water-a-review-of-research-needs-1.pdf

Trends by Geographic Region

According to the *Sustainable Development Goals Report*[12] as well as the *Sustainable Development Goals Progress Chart*,[13] the regional trends in meeting SDG 14.7 are as follows:

- The world as a whole has made some progress in increasing the proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels, from 66.9% in 2015 to 68.6% in 2019. However, this is still below the target of 100% by 2020.
- The regions that have achieved or maintained a high proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels are: Northern Africa and Western Asia (94.4%), Europe and Northern America (88.9%), and Australia and New Zealand (87.5%). The regions that have improved their proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels are: Latin America and the Caribbean (from 58.8% to 62.5%), Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (from 59.6% to 61.9%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (from 53.4% to 55.6%). The region that has declined in its proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels is: Central and Southern Asia (from 70.4% to 68.8%).
- The regions that have increased their share of gross value added (GVA) in marine fisheries and aquaculture as a percentage of total GVA are: Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (from 0.7% to 0.8%), Latin America and the Caribbean (from 0.3% to 0.4%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (from 0.2% to 0.3%). The regions that have maintained their share of GVA in marine fisheries and aquaculture as a percentage of total GVA are: Northern Africa and Western Asia (0.2%), Europe and Northern America (0.1%), and Australia and New Zealand (0.1%). The region that has decreased its share of GVA in marine fisheries and aquaculture as a percentage of total GVA is: Central and Southern Asia (from 0.4% to 0.3%).
- The regions that have increased their share of employment in marine fisheries and aquaculture as a percentage of total employment are: Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (from 1.5% to 1.6%), Latin America and the Caribbean (from 0.5% to 0.6%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (from 0.4% to 0.5%). The regions that have maintained their share of employment in marine fisheries and aquaculture as a percentage of total employment are: Northern Africa and Western Asia (0.3%), Europe and Northern America (0.2%), and Australia and New Zealand (0.2%). The region that has decreased its share of employment in marine fisheries and aquaculture as a percentage of total employment is: Central and Southern Asia (from 1% to 0.9%).
- The regions that have increased their share of international tourist arrivals in coastal areas as a percentage of total international tourist arrivals

[12] unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023
[13] unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/progress-chart-2021.pdf

are: Latin America and the Caribbean (from 51% to 54%), Europe and Northern America (from 41% to 43%), and Australia and New Zealand (from 40% to 42%). The regions that have maintained their share of international tourist arrivals in coastal areas as a percentage of total international tourist arrivals are: Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (49%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (48%). The region that has decreased its share of international tourist arrivals in coastal areas as a percentage of total international tourist arrivals is: Northern Africa and Western Asia (from 47% to 46%).

Overall, the regional trends show that there is still room for improvement in meeting SDG 14.7, especially for SIDS and LDCs, which face many challenges in accessing and benefiting from marine resources. Therefore, SDG 14.7 calls for the support and partnership of the international community, especially the developed countries, to assist SIDS and LDCs in realizing their potential and aspirations for a prosperous and sustainable future.

What Actions Can Students Take?

Some actions[14] that students can take to support SDG 14 and its targets are:

- ☐ Learn more about the importance of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, and the challenges and opportunities that SIDS and LDCs face in accessing and benefiting from them. You can read books, watch videos, or visit websites that explain these topics in an engaging and informative way. For example, you can check out the SDG Book Club reading list for SDG 14: Life Below Water3, or the UN website on SDG 14.[15]
- ☐ Raise awareness and advocate for the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems, and the promotion of sustainable practices in fisheries, aquaculture and tourism. You can organize or participate in campaigns, events, or projects that highlight the issues and solutions related to SDG 14.7. For example, you can join the World Oceans Day on June 8 every year, or the Ocean Action Hub online platform.
- ☐ Support local and global initiatives that aim to increase the economic benefits to SIDS and LDCs from the sustainable use of marine resources. You can donate, volunteer, or

[14] un.org/sustainabledevelopment/student-resources/

[15] un.org/en/chronicle/article/achieving-sdg-14-role-united-nations-convention-law-sea

partner with organizations that work on these issues, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), or the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). For example, you can support the Blue Economy Challenge, which is a global competition that seeks innovative solutions to enhance food security and livelihoods in SIDS.

- ☐ Reduce your own environmental footprint and consumption of marine resources. You can adopt more eco-friendly habits and choices that reduce your impact on the oceans and seas, such as using less plastic, saving water, choosing renewable energy sources, or eating more sustainably sourced seafood. For example, you can follow the tips from the ActNow campaign, or use the Seafood Watch app to find ocean-friendly seafood options.

Source: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/