

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY

Agenda: Discussing sustainable urban planning and transportation with emphasis on air quality

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear Delegates,

We welcome you to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) Session to be hosted on 4th & 5th November 2023 at Excellencia MUN 2023. We hope that through this study guide we give an impetus to your initial and brief research but while using this study guide you should keep in mind that this document is a merely co-operative document meant to give a direction to you the prospective delegates, this in no way shall be understood as substantive research or proof for that matter. We do not intend to influence or present any bias through the content of the study guide. The delegates shall remember that the executive board will be mere moderators and the direction of the committee and its debate shall be the delegates' prerogative. With this, we hope you look at this agenda from a compassionate yet practical point of view and come up with constructive debate in the upcoming days. If you face any queries related to the agenda or the guide, you can send a mail to any of the Executive Board Members or get it cleared in the span of the event.

Looking forward to working with you all.

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MANDATE:-

The mission of the UN Environment Evaluation Office is to provide strategic information to Member States, UN Environment senior management and other UN Environment managerial and project staff to enable them to review progress made by the organization and to reflect critically on the constraints and challenges of delivering a quality global environmental programme.

The mandate for conducting evaluations in UN Environment derives from several UN General Assembly Resolutions, summarized in the regulations and “Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation” (ST/SGB/2000/8). The rules and regulations require all UN programme activities to be evaluated (regulation 7.2) and that evaluation findings are communicated to Member States through intergovernmental bodies (rule 107.1c). This mandate is further supported by a number of UN Environment Governing Council decisions (75(iv), 83, 6.13/1, 12/15 13/1 14/1, 23/3 – 11 and 27/13). These decisions authorize evaluation of UN Environment activities.

According to the Secretary General’s bulletin on programme planning, monitoring and implementation (ST/SGB/2000/8), which consolidates the General Assembly decisions on the evaluation function, “the objective of evaluation is:

(a) To determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities in relation to their objectives;

(b) To enable the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the main programmes of the Organization by altering their content and, if necessary, reviewing their objectives" and that the associated rules require all UN programme activities to be evaluated.

The United Nations Environment Assembly has recognized the importance of evaluation as an integral part of the programme planning cycle, and has requested the Executive Director to ensure that the evaluation unit be made more managerially independent of the programming and project implementation and that it continue to refine evaluation methodologies in collaboration with Governments and partners within the United Nations system. The mandate covers all programmes and projects of the Environment Fund, related trust funds, earmarked contributions and projects implemented by UN Environment under the Global Environment Facility and under partnership agreements. The Evaluation Office reports directly to the Executive Director, works independently from the substantive programmatic divisions and reports of evaluation activities are submitted to the governance function of the organization.

NATURE OF PROOF AND EVIDENCE TO BE ACCEPTED

The following kinds of documents (in the order of decreasing precedence) can be admitted as proof in council:

1. UN Bodies: SC (<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>); GA (<http://www.un.org/en/ga/>); HRC (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/HRCIndex.aspx>) etc. WHO (<http://www.who.int/en/>)
2. UN Affiliated Bodies: International Atomic Energy Agency (<http://www.iaea.org/>); World Bank (<http://www.worldbank.org/>); International Monetary Fund (<http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm>); International Committee of the Red Cross (<http://www.icrc.org/eng/index.jsp/>); etc.
3. Treaty Based Bodies: Antarctic Treaty System (<http://www.ats.aq/e/ats.htm>); International Criminal Court (<http://www.icccpi.int/Menus/ICC>) etc.

State Reports- Any State's Report from their government portals or State owned media

State Department of the United States of America (<http://www.state.gov/index.htm>); Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (<http://www.eng.mil.ru/en/index.htm>); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of various nations like India (<http://www.mea.gov.in/>); France (<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/>); Russian Federation (http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/main_eng), etc.

3.2. Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Reports

<http://www.un.org/en/members/> (Click on any country to get the website of the Office of its Permanent Representative).

3.3. Multilateral Organizations

NATO (<http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/index.htm>); ASEAN (<http://www.aseansec.org/>); OPEC (http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/), etc.

4. Reuters reports on incidents: <http://www.reuters.com/>

NB: Reports from media houses like the ones mentioned below shall not be taken into consideration as substantive proof but only as supportive/persuasive proof: RIA Novosti (Russia) <http://en.rian.ru/> IRNA (Iran) <http://www.irna.ir/ENIndex.htm> BBC (United Kingdom)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/> Xinhua News Agency and CCTV (P.R. Of China)
<http://cctvnews.cntv.cn/>

Unacceptable Sources

Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>);

Amnesty International (<http://www.amnesty.org/>);

Or newspapers like The Guardian (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>); Times of India (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>); etc.

1. Introduction

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) Committee convenes today to address one of the most pressing global challenges of our time: sustainable urban planning and transportation with a specific emphasis on air quality. In a world where more than half of the human population resides in urban areas, the way we design, manage, and move within our cities has profound implications for our environment, our health, and our collective future.

The rapid urbanization of the 20th and 21st centuries has transformed our cities into hubs of activity and innovation. However, this transformation has also brought about complex issues, including traffic congestion, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and social inequality. As we gather here today, we are presented with a unique opportunity to tackle these challenges head-on and shape a more sustainable and inclusive urban future.

This committee's task is paramount. We must explore strategies for sustainable urban planning, efficient transportation systems, and improving air quality in urban areas. The nexus between these elements is undeniable: environmentally responsible urban development and transportation systems not only mitigate the adverse effects of climate change but also lead to healthier, more prosperous communities.

Delegates, as you deliberate on these critical issues, keep in mind that the decisions made here will influence the well-being of billions of people and

the health of our planet. Let us work together to devise innovative solutions, establish robust policies, and foster international collaboration to ensure that our cities become beacons of sustainability, where clean air, quality of life, and economic prosperity coexist.

2. Importance of Sustainable Urban Planning and Transportation

- **Environmental Sustainability**

Mitigating Climate Change: The transportation sector is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Sustainable transportation systems, such as electric vehicles and public transit, can help reduce carbon emissions and combat climate change.

Air Quality Improvement: Sustainable urban planning and transportation reduce air pollution, which, in turn, enhances air quality. Improved air quality leads to better health outcomes and preserves natural ecosystems.

- **Economic Growth and Prosperity**

Job Creation: Investments in sustainable urban planning and transportation infrastructure create jobs in construction, maintenance, and related industries.

Enhanced Mobility: Efficient transportation systems allow people to access job opportunities, services, and markets more easily, fostering economic growth and reducing inequalities.

- **Reduced Congestion and Improved Quality of Life**

Traffic Congestion Mitigation: Sustainable urban planning can

alleviate traffic congestion by promoting public transportation, cycling, and walking, leading to less time wasted in traffic.

Safety: Well-planned urban environments with dedicated pedestrian and cycling infrastructure reduce traffic-related accidents and improve road safety.

Health and Well-being: Sustainable transportation options like walking and cycling improve public health, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being.

- **Resilience and Adaptation**

Climate Resilience: Sustainable urban planning can integrate climate-resilient infrastructure and land-use practices, reducing vulnerability to extreme weather events.

Adaptive Capacity: Efficient transportation networks ensure that cities can adapt to changing circumstances, whether it be shifts in population, technology, or environmental conditions.

- **Resource Efficiency**

Reduced Energy Consumption: Sustainable transportation systems can use energy more efficiently, such as through the adoption of electric or hybrid vehicles.

Land Use Optimization: Sustainable urban planning minimizes urban sprawl, optimizing land use and reducing the ecological footprint of cities.

- **Social Equity**

Accessibility for All: Sustainable urban planning ensures accessibility

for all members of society, including those with disabilities, low-income individuals, and marginalized communities.

Reduced Social Isolation: Public transit and active transportation modes like walking and cycling promote social interaction and reduce social isolation, contributing to a sense of community.

- **Global Goals and Commitments**

Sustainable urban planning and transportation are integral to achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal 13 (Climate Action).

International agreements like the Paris Agreement emphasize the need to reduce emissions from the transportation sector and encourage sustainable practices.

3. Challenges in Urban Areas

Urban areas face a multitude of challenges that can have wide-ranging social, economic, and environmental impacts. Addressing these challenges is essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive urban development. Some of the most pressing challenges in urban areas include:

- Traffic Congestion
- Air Pollution
- Inadequate Infrastructure
- Overcrowding and Overpopulation
- Housing Affordability
- Inequality

- Environmental Degradation
- Waste Management
- Noise Pollution
- Water Scarcity
- Public Health Issues
- Transportation-Related Accidents
- Social Isolation
- Climate Vulnerability
- Gentrification
- Urban Heat Islands

4. Air Quality & Its Impact

Air quality is a critical aspect of urban and environmental health, with profound implications for public well-being and ecosystem sustainability. The quality of the air we breathe is influenced by a range of factors, including emissions from various sources, weather conditions, and geographical location. Understanding the impact of air quality on human health and the environment is essential for implementing policies to improve it. Here are some key aspects to consider:

Health Impacts

- Respiratory Problems: Poor air quality, characterized by elevated levels of particulate matter and harmful gasses, can lead to a range of respiratory issues, including asthma, bronchitis, and lung infections.

- Cardiovascular Effects: Long-term exposure to air pollution has been linked to cardiovascular diseases, including heart attacks, strokes, and hypertension.
- Reduced Life Expectancy: Prolonged exposure to polluted air has been associated with decreased life expectancy, particularly in urban areas with high levels of pollution.
- Developmental Issues: Children exposed to air pollution may experience impaired lung development, leading to lifelong health problems.
- Cancer Risk: Certain air pollutants, such as benzene and formaldehyde, are known carcinogens and pose a risk of cancer when inhaled over extended periods.

Environmental Impacts

- Biodiversity Loss: Poor air quality can harm ecosystems by affecting soil and water quality, directly impacting plant and animal species.
- Acid Rain: Air pollution can lead to acid rain, which damages forests, aquatic life, and infrastructure.
- Climate Change: Some air pollutants, like black carbon (soot) and methane, are potent climate forcers, contributing to global warming.

- Ozone Layer Depletion: Emissions of certain chemicals, such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), can contribute to the depletion of the ozone layer, increasing exposure to harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation.

Economic Impacts

- Healthcare Costs: The treatment of air pollution-related illnesses places a significant financial burden on healthcare systems, reducing the resources available for other medical needs.
- Lost Productivity: Sick days and reduced productivity due to air pollution-related health problems can lead to economic losses for both individuals and employers.
- Decreased Property Values: Areas with poor air quality may experience lower property values, affecting homeowners and local tax revenues.
- Impact on Agriculture: Air pollution can harm crops, reducing agricultural yields and affecting food security.

Social Impacts

- Health Inequities: Vulnerable populations, including low-income communities and marginalized groups, are often disproportionately affected by poor air quality, exacerbating social inequalities.
- Quality of Life: Residents of areas with poor air quality experience a diminished quality of life, with implications for overall well-being and happiness.

Policy Implications

Governments, at various levels, must enact and enforce air quality regulations and standards to limit emissions from industrial, transportation, and energy production sources.

Promoting clean energy sources, such as renewables, can reduce air pollution and its associated impacts.

Encouraging sustainable urban planning and transportation can reduce emissions and alleviate air quality issues in cities.

5. International Agreements and Initiatives

International agreements and initiatives play a crucial role in addressing air quality and environmental issues in urban areas. These agreements and initiatives promote cooperation among countries to mitigate air pollution and its impacts on public health and the environment. Here are some key international agreements and initiatives relevant to this topic:

Paris Agreement (2015)

- Objective: The Paris Agreement aims to combat climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.
- Relevance: Although primarily focused on climate change, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, including those from the transportation sector, can have a significant positive impact on air quality in urban areas.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- Objective: The SDGs, particularly Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal 13 (Climate Action), promote sustainable urban development, clean energy, and measures to combat climate change.
- Relevance: These goals emphasize the need for sustainable urban planning and transportation to improve air quality and overall urban well-being.

UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda (2016)

- Objective: The New Urban Agenda advocates for sustainable, inclusive, and safe urban mobility, emphasizing public transportation and active transportation modes.
- Relevance: It guides urban planning and development with a focus on creating healthier, more sustainable, and equitable urban environments.

World Health Organization (WHO) Air Quality Guidelines

- Objective: WHO's air quality guidelines provide recommendations for reducing health risks associated with air pollution.
- Relevance: These guidelines serve as a reference for countries in setting national air quality standards and policies to protect public health.

Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP)

- Objective: CLRTAP, under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), addresses air pollution that travels across national borders and affects air quality in urban areas.
- Relevance: The convention aims to reduce transboundary air pollution, thereby improving air quality in urban and rural areas.

The BreatheLife Campaign

- Objective: Co-led by WHO, UN Environment, and the Climate & Clean Air Coalition, this initiative advocates for clean air in cities, highlighting the importance of air quality for health and climate.
- Relevance: The campaign raises awareness of the importance of clean air in urban areas and encourages cities to take action to reduce air pollution.

C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group:

- Objective: A network of major cities committed to addressing climate change, C40 supports cities in developing and implementing sustainable urban policies, including transportation and air quality improvements.
- Relevance: C40 cities collaborate on initiatives to reduce emissions, enhance air quality, and adapt to climate change.

Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy

- Objective: This coalition of cities and local governments commits to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting sustainable urban development.
- Relevance: By implementing measures to reduce emissions, participating cities improve air quality and public health.

6. Conclusion

In a world where urbanization continues to surge, the quality of air in our cities has emerged as a defining issue for public health, environmental sustainability, and overall well-being. Throughout this UNEA Committee session, we have delved into the profound significance of sustainable urban planning and transportation with an emphasis on air quality.

The discussions have illuminated the multifaceted challenges that urban areas face, from traffic congestion and inadequate infrastructure to social inequalities and environmental degradation. As our cities expand and evolve, it is essential to recognize the transformative power of urban planning and transportation systems in addressing these challenges.

The impact of air quality on public health is undeniable, with air pollution causing respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and even reducing life expectancy. The consequences extend beyond human health, affecting ecosystems, climate change, and the economy. This prompts us to take a more holistic approach to urban development, understanding that the health of our cities and the health of our planet are intrinsically linked.

In the international arena, numerous agreements and initiatives provide a framework for cooperation in addressing urban air quality. The Paris Agreement calls for global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while the Sustainable Development Goals emphasize sustainable urban development and climate action. UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda and organizations like WHO and C40 Cities contribute to the development of policies and best practices that can shape healthier and more sustainable cities.

In conclusion, the task before this UNEA Committee is of paramount importance. Our discussions and resolutions must acknowledge the intricate interplay between urban planning, transportation, and air quality. It is our collective responsibility to enact policies that promote sustainable urban development, invest in clean transportation systems, and reduce emissions to safeguard the air we breathe and the health of our urban communities.

By taking deliberate, coordinated action, we can envision cities where congestion is mitigated, air quality is improved, and residents enjoy a higher quality of life. Let our decisions reflect the urgency of the moment, the promise of sustainability, and our commitment to ensuring that urban areas become models of environmental responsibility, where clean air, equity, and prosperity flourish in harmony.