

Concept Note

Animal Welfare – Environment – Sustainable Development Nexus

1.0 Introduction

This concept note outlines how the exploitation and inhumane use of animals is a key driver of the triple environmental crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution, as well as the emergence of pandemics such as the current global COVID-19 pandemic, and how the integration of animal welfare in the work of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) would benefit the delivery of its Medium-Term Strategy and Programme of Work as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the urgency in this regard for the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) to consider the adoption of a resolution on “*Animal Welfare- Environment – Sustainable Development Nexus*”.

2.0 Why is a Resolution Needed?

The sustainable development agenda set out in UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 envisaged a world in which “*humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected.*” However, dedicated action to protect animals and their welfare in the UN policy process has been insufficient to date, with devastating consequences for biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution and global public and environmental health. The urgency to protect animals and their welfare was underscored in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), which highlighted animal welfare as a critical issue to be addressed explicitly by the UN system, as well as the 2021 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) Ministerial Declaration, in which the UN Member States called for “*increased ambition and urgency of action to protect wildlife and other living species*”.

3.0. Linkages with Sustainable Development Goals and the Theme of the Fifth UNEA

The existential threat for nature, animals and humans from the triple environmental crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution, compounded by the devastating economic and social impacts of COVID-19, and the understanding that the main drivers of these planetary/environmental crises include those that relate to human action which impacts negatively on animal welfare calls for the urgent need to fundamentally reorientate our relationship with animals from one of exploitation to one of promoting their welfare.

There is a growing global scientific and policy consensus that human actions that have a negative impact on animal health and welfare are the dominant drivers of biodiversity loss and zoonotic disease emergence and contribute significantly to climate change and environmental pollution. Moreover, an increasing body of science and experience demonstrates that improving animal welfare will produce direct positive benefits for nature and can strengthen our collective efforts at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4.0. The Objective of the Resolution

Given that human actions that have a negative impact on animal health and welfare are identified as the critical drivers of biodiversity loss and zoonotic disease emergence and contribute significantly to climate change and environmental pollution, it follows that improving animal welfare must be fully incorporated into the UNEP Programme of Work in an integrated manner and deliver actions that are needed to reshape our consumption and production patterns towards sustainability. To do so, as a first step, UNEP *should take action to undertake a thorough analysis of the nexus between animal welfare, the environment and sustainable development to develop a greater understanding of how improving animal welfare can assist UNEP in delivering on its mandate and streamline its efforts to “Strengthen Action for Nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”*. Such an analysis should include examining the causal relationship between improving animal welfare and mitigating the drivers of biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution and pandemic disease emergence.

5.0. Linkages with Existing UNEA Resolutions

The proposed resolution can be linked with a list of existing UNEA resolutions and governing council decisions, the implementation of which will be facilitated by promoting animal welfare as an essential and integral policy concern in relation to the three strategic objectives of UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy. The list includes, inter alia, Res. 2/6. Supporting the Paris Agreement, Res. 2/8. Sustainable consumption and production, Res. 2/9. Prevention, reduction and reuse of food waste, Res. 2/10. Oceans and seas, Res. 2/14. Illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products, Res. 2/15. Mainstreaming of biodiversity for well-being, Res. 2/17. Enhancing the work of UNEP in facilitating cooperation, collaboration and synergies among biodiversity-related conventions, Res. 2/24. Combatting desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands, Res. 3/2 Pollution mitigation by mainstreaming biodiversity into key sectors, Res. 3/4 Environment and health, Res. 3/6 Managing soil pollution to achieve Sustainable Development, Res. 3/8 Preventing and reducing air pollution to improve air quality globally, Res. 4/1 Innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production, Res. 4/2 Promoting sustainable practices and innovative solutions for curbing food loss and waste, Res. 4/10 Innovations on biodiversity and land degradation, Res. 4/11 Protection of the marine environment from land-based activities, Res. 4/18 Poverty environment nexus, and Res. 4/21 Implementation plan “towards a pollution-free planet.”

6.0. Value Addition of the Initiative

The consideration of animal welfare within UNEP's policy mandate would help to broaden and enrich its science-policy base, leading to better-informed and more effective policymaking and programme development. It will also help with the achievement of many SDGs and the prevention of future pandemics.

7.0. Potential Costs

The inclusion of animal welfare as a means of contributing to the delivery of UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy and Strengthening Action for Nature to achieve the SDGs would deliver significant

economic, social and environmental benefits. UNEP may incur some costs, possibly in relation to the recruitment of expertise in animal welfare and staff costs related to undertaking the analysis of the nexus between animal welfare, the environment and sustainable development. It is highly recommended for UNEP to solicit additional funding required to prepare and validate the report from voluntary contributions.