



Global **Youth** Declaration

On the Environment

AE	Advanced Economies
AMCEN	African Ministerial Conference on the Environment
APMF	Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific
BRS	Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
COP	Conference of the Parties
CPR	Committee of Permanent Representatives
CYMG	Children and Youth Major Group to United Nations Environment Programme
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EMDE	Emerging Market and Developing Economies
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
EWS	Early Warning Systems
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations
FPIC	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GFC	Global Framework on Chemicals
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
IEA	International Energy Agency
IFA	International Financial Architecture
IGF	Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organization
INC	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution
ISP-CWP	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution
KDMECC	Kampala Declaration on Climate Change and Migration
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LTS	Long-term strategy
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
Nbs	Nature-based Solutions
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
OEWG	Open-ended Working Group
PFAS	Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances
PMT	Persistent, Mobile, and Toxic
PPE	Personal protective equipment
RCM	Regional Consultative Meeting
SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-FI	United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative
YOUNGO	Children and Youth Constituency to UNFCCC
YEA	Youth Environmental Assembly
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Preamble

We, children and youth from across the globe, present this declaration to UNEA Member States, UNEP and all stakeholders as a collective call for urgent, ambitious, and inclusive environmental action.

We bring forward this Declaration at a time of profound global uncertainty, geopolitical realignment, and a deepening crisis of international cooperation. The multilateral system faces unprecedented challenges—from growing inequalities and geopolitical tensions to a widening trust deficit between institutions and the people they serve. These shifts have raised pressing questions about the relevance, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the UN system in the 21st century.

This broader crisis of international cooperation is starkly reflected in the environmental domain. The world is off track on nearly all global goals, as the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution continues to accelerate. These crises are closely linked to the current global economic and financial architecture. Global South countries, often hardest hit by environmental impacts, remain trapped in debt cycles and denied the fiscal space to act, while the trillions pledged for climate and biodiversity finance remain undelivered. The collapse of the IMO shipping levy and INC-5.2 plastics treaty negotiations further deepened the crisis of trust in global environmental governance.

But even amid systemic failures and a rapidly closing window for action, signs of renewed ambition are emerging. The Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations, adopted at the 2024 UN Summit of the Future, reaffirm Member States' commitment to accelerate sustainable development and centre future generations in global governance. Across regions and institutions, momentum is growing for more systemic, just, and inclusive environmental approaches. These efforts show that change is still possible, and that multilateralism can remain a platform for transformation if grounded in equity, accountability, and intergenerational justice.

UNEA-7 must rise to meet the scale of today's challenges. UNEA and UNEP have a critical opportunity to reinforce their roles as leading platforms for environmental ambition and coordinated action within an evolving multilateral landscape. This requires bold, systemic action grounded in science and community priorities and supported by the resources for implementation.

Children and youth must be at the center of designing and implementing solutions. We are already leaders in environmental action, shaping the global response to environmental crises through innovation, advocacy, and community initiatives. If UNEA is to remain relevant to the world it seeks to serve, it must recognise young people not just as future stakeholders but as present-day partners in decision-making and implementation.

Executive Summary

The **Global Youth Declaration** represents the collective voice of children and youth worldwide and articulates the priorities and policy solutions needed to address the triple planetary crisis. Grounded in the lived experiences and expertise of young people and the principle of intergenerational equity, it offers a clear roadmap for transformative change, calling on UNEA and UNEP to adopt bold, systemic measures that are fit for our future.

We present this declaration as multilateralism itself faces a crisis, with rising geopolitical tensions and eroding trust in the multilateral order. UNEA can play a critical role in helping restore faith in global cooperation. But to do so, it must champion just, inclusive, science-based and systemic solutions that address the root causes of the triple planetary crisis.

For UNEA to emerge as a future-fit platform, it must integrate children and youth as partners in environmental decision-making. Integration of children and youth as partners in UNEA decision-making will ensure more resilient, inclusive and sustainable decisions. The Children and Youth Major Group (CYMG) has already mobilised the voices of over 2,000 organisations and 12,000 members across dozens of regional and thematic environmental governance processes, demonstrating that youth can effectively contribute to identifying solutions to the triple planetary crisis and strengthening environmental multilateralism.

Building on these efforts, children and youth demand six interconnected transformations:

- 1. Reform environmental governance for greater coherence, efficiency, transparency and effectiveness.** Address fragmentation in the multilateral system by strengthening MEA synergies, encouraging MEA clustering where appropriate, and promoting UNEP and UNEA as the primary platforms for environmental governance. Embed scientific evidence at the core of multilateral decision-making by institutionalising pathways for providing scientific input into UNEA negotiations and ensuring UNEP's assessments inform other key UN processes, including Rio COPs. Recognise the importance of traditional knowledge systems and citizen science, whilst ensuring that children, youth and other underrepresented groups have the tools, capacity, and opportunities to engage with environmental science meaningfully.
 - 2. Embed intergenerational equity in environmental governance.** Institutionalise meaningful participation of children and youth at all levels of environmental decision-making, including via stronger mechanisms for participation of children with appropriate guardrails. Strengthen youth engagement within UNEP and UNEA by providing predictable, adequate funding and ensuring youth inputs feed into formal negotiations. Uphold environmental rights including the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Strengthen mechanisms to hold states and non-state actors accountable for environmental degradation and support access to justice for impacted communities.
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3. **Reform the global economic and financial systems.** Align economic structures and international financial architecture with environmental sustainability and social equity. This includes scaling up concessional finance, reforming the mandates of international financial institutions, and implementing innovative revenue sources like carbon and fossil fuel levies, while strengthening UNEP's role in aligning global financial flows with environmental goals through leadership, accountability, and substantial reform. Domestically, governments must phase out harmful subsidies, adopt well-being metrics beyond GDP, and accelerate a just and inclusive transition.
 4. **Transform the drivers of today's linear, extractive economic model.** Prioritise demand-side solutions to curb overconsumption. Accelerate a just energy transition by halting fossil fuel expansion and committing to their rapid phase-out, with support for affected workers and communities. Shift food production systems from industrial models to nature-positive agroecology, in a socially equitable and sustainable manner. Strengthen global resource governance through a binding critical minerals treaty that enforces human rights and traceability, alongside strict regulations to end planned obsolescence and mandate circular design.
 5. **Confront the global pollution crisis.** Tackle pollution across the full lifecycle of materials by securing a legally binding plastics treaty that caps virgin plastic production and eliminates toxic additives, alongside improvements in waste management, monitoring and evaluation schemes and a scale-up of financial support. Strengthen the scope and ambition of MEAs to phase out hazardous chemicals using a precautionary approach, while advancing synergies across MEAs and the Global Framework on Chemicals. Establish robust 'polluter pays' frameworks to ensure those responsible for pollution bear the full costs of remediation and community care.
 6. **Protect nature and build climate resilience.** Bridge the gap between global commitments and local action by integrating specific ecosystem resilience targets into national frameworks like NDCs, NAPs, and NBSAPs. A 'protect-manage-restore' hierarchy should be legally adopted to prioritise the conservation of intact ecosystems. Indigenous peoples and local communities must be legally empowered as key custodians of ecosystems, building the resilience of water, energy, and food systems, ensuring their right to FPIC is upheld and respected, consistent with UNDRIP provisions.
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1. The role of youth in environmental governance

Since UNEA-6, CYMG has deepened its engagement across UNEP processes, ensuring that youth priorities, perspectives, and expertise are meaningfully reflected in global environmental governance. From active participation in core processes like CPR, to thematic work across 13 issue areas and regional consultations in all six UNEP regions, CYMG has broadened and strengthened youth involvement. Today, it brings together over 2,000 youth organizations and 10,000 individual members. This growing and coordinated engagement reflects the increasing recognition of youth as essential partners in shaping UNEP's agenda and advancing environmental multilateralism.

Youth representatives have actively participated in the core UNEP processes, including regular Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) meetings, and contributed substantively to the 11th and 12th Annual Subcommittee sessions. CYMG has also engaged with the Group of Friends on Youth and Environment, and provided coordinated inputs to the development of UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (2026–2029) and the UNEA-7 Ministerial Declaration.

Recognising the importance of embedding youth voices from the outset, CYMG has worked to establish new mechanisms to ensure meaningful youth participation in emerging multilateral efforts and spaces where youth engagement is not yet institutionalised. CYMG contributed to the establishment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on a legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution. To strengthen involvement in the governance of new and evolving frameworks, CYMG co-founded the Youth Plastics Action Network (YPAN) for INC and the Ocean Science and Governance Network (OSG) to manage engagement in regional seas conventions.

Ahead of UNEA-7, CYMG held inaugural regional consultations and forums, achieving meaningful engagement in all six UNEP regions for the first time in 2025. Each meeting produced a youth statement reflecting regional priorities, rooted in local realities, and fed directly into UNEP processes:

- **Africa Youth Day (Nairobi, 10 July):** Held alongside the African Regional Consultative Meeting (RCM) and the 20th Ordinary Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN-20), this forum addressed climate resilience, biodiversity loss, and environmental justice.
 - **Asia-Pacific Youth Environment Forum (APYEF) (Fiji, 26 August):** Organised in connection with the Sixth Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific (6th AP Forum), discussions focused on plastic pollution, just transition, and nature-based solutions.
 - **European Youth Day (Virtual, 3-4 October):** This two-day consultation explored energy transition, biodiversity, and intergenerational equity, and fed into the European RCM.
 - **North America Regional Consultation (Virtual, 26 September):** The first-ever consultation in the region helped bridge UNEA-7 priorities with local youth-led environmental initiatives.
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- **Latin America and Caribbean Youth Environment Forum (LACYEF) (Peru, 27 September):** Organised ahead of the XXIV Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, the forum saw a focus on circular economy, forests, and community resilience.
- **Arab Youth Environment Forum, West Asia (AYEF) (virtual, 8 September):** As the region's first such event, the forum fed into the West Asia RCM and focused on conflict, peacebuilding, and environmental justice.

At the same time, youth contributed meaningfully to multiple global thematic processes, ranging from chemicals and waste, to climate protection, to nature and ecosystems. While not exhaustive, the examples below highlight key moments where CYMG and young people globally shaped emerging environmental dialogues and outcomes:

- **Youth Forum on the Future of the Environment (New York, September 20, 2024):** Convened ahead of the UN Summit of the Future, this forum provided a platform to amplify the voices of young environmental leaders, calling for intergenerational justice and equity through reinvigorated environmental multilateralism.
- **Youth Forum on Climate Protection, Montreal Protocol & Youth Action (Bangkok, October 27, 2024):** Centered on the Montreal Protocol and Kigali Amendment, this forum showcased youth innovation in sustainable cooling ozone protection, and climate action.
- **Youth and Stakeholder Assembly on Plastic Pollution (INC-5, Busan, 24 November 2024):** Ahead of the fifth INC negotiations, CYMG convened a dedicated assembly to consolidate positions and ensure youth priorities are reflected in the treaty on plastic pollution. This assembly builds on lessons from UNEA-5.2 and the adoption of resolution 5/14, strengthening the advocacy voice of children, youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, workers, and other constituencies.
- **Zero Waste & Circularity (Osaka, February 19, 2025):** During the UNEP IETC Global Dialogue on circular economy model of waste management, CYMG co-convened a dedicated Youth Day that produced the Mottainai Youth Declaration on Zero Waste and Circularity on responsible consumption and production, inspired by the Japanese concept Mottainai, symbolizing the urgency of reducing waste and embracing circularity.

For all regional and thematic youth statements, please see [Annex I](#) and [Annex II](#).

Through active engagement in global, regional, and thematic platforms, youth have shown their determination to shape environmental governance and push for ambitious, rights-based, and inclusive outcomes. The Global Youth Declaration for UNEA-7 builds on these processes, ensuring that youth voices and priorities are not only heard but translated into concrete commitments and decisions that advance intergenerational equity and a sustainable future.

2. Policy solutions for bold, systemic action in a time of overlapping crises

2.1. Reforming governance for efficient, effective environmental action

Addressing the planetary crises requires a coherent, coordinated, and politically empowered multilateral system capable of driving systemic change. Yet, the current system is hampered by disjointed governance, a weak science-policy interface, and a lack of political weight where it is most needed. Despite being the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, UNEA suffers from insufficient political recognition and institutional weight within the broader multilateral system. Fragmentation is also a key challenge. The 105 UNEA resolutions adopted over the past six sessions have often been too specific and/or disconnected from UNEP's core mandate, further stretching limited resources and negotiating time. This is mirrored in the growing number of MEAs and environmental finance mechanisms, with over 94 new environmental funds established since 1990.¹

Strengthening the science-policy interface must be prioritized as well. Scientific assessments are often not effectively integrated into decision-making processes or communicated to those shaping policy and investment decisions, creating an opportunity to better align policies with scientific evidence.

In the wake of the Pact for the Future and Declaration on Future Generations, and amidst the ongoing UN80 Reforms, Member States and UN Secretariat must urgently review today's governance model.

Recommendation 1: Address fragmentation within multilateral environmental fora

- a. **Establish a high-level task force, modelled on the Independent High Level Expert Group on Climate Finance (IHLEG), to identify opportunities to enhance MEA synergies** and propose recommendations ahead of the SDGs and Climate Synergies Conference and UNEA-8.
- b. **Strengthen collaboration between and, where possible, consider clustering related MEAs**, e.g., through joint secretariats, to enhance synergies and coordination, reduce duplication, and lower costs while enabling integrated implementation at the national level at a lower cost, building on examples such as the BRS Conventions cluster.
- c. **Harmonise reporting mechanisms**, including targets, indicators, and data architectures across MEAs to reduce duplication and enhance coherence.
- d. **Strengthen collaboration and, where appropriate, advance gradual integration among MEA science-policy bodies** through joint assessments and reciprocal participation (e.g., between SBSTTAs and the CMS Scientific Council).

¹ "Climate Funds: Time to Clean Up."

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the role of UNEP and UNEA as the primary forums for addressing environmental challenges

- a. ***Develop a deliberate strategy to position UNEP and UNEA as the primary forums for global environmental dialogue and coordination***, including stronger strategic communications, targeted high-level engagement, and thought leadership.
- b. ***Member States should promote more targeted and strategically aligned resolutions at UNEA*** to reduce duplication and fragmentation, ensure greater coherence, and support more effective implementation across the environmental multilateral system.
- c. ***Member States should expand their diplomatic representation in Nairobi*** to support more effective and equitable engagement and collaboration on UNEP programmes. Where in-person representation is not feasible, Member States should leverage virtual participation, regional coordination mechanisms, or shared diplomatic resources.

Recommendation 3: Embed science at the core of decision-making by strengthening the science-policy interface and ensuring UNEP's assessments shape multilateral processes

- a. ***Institutionalise scientific input into UNEA negotiation*** by facilitating exchanges between scientists and Member States, e.g., through requesting lead scientists to present policy-relevant scientific evidence during drafting processes—ensuring that resolutions account for the best available scientific understandings, as well as Indigenous and traditional knowledge.
 - b. ***Strengthen UNEP's science communications strategy***, including by more directly collaborating and sharing recommendations with other UN agencies (e.g., Rio Convention secretariats), knowledge institutions (e.g., OECD, IEA), and financing bodies (e.g., GCF, GEF) to solidify UNEP's position as the primary knowledge and environmental science institution within the UN system and ensure its scientific assessments are better integrated into and leveraged across other multilateral processes, including CBD, UNFCCC and Desertification COPs.
 - c. ***Conduct a systematic impact assessment*** to evaluate how effectively the multilateral environmental science system has influenced policy to date and identify pathways for improvement, accounting for recent findings on the limited readership of some UN reports. Strengthen engagement of young scientists in developing environmental assessments, e.g., through quotas and fellowships for early-career scientists as well as dedicated funding to support youth fellowships.
 - d. ***Strengthen engagement of young scientists in developing environmental assessments***, e.g., through quotas and fellowships for early-career scientists as well as dedicated funding to support youth fellowships.
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- e. **Maintain and strengthen the Global Environment Outlook (GEO)** as UNEP's flagship environmental assessment and continue to develop the GEO for Youth and associated fellowship programme.

2.2. Embedding intergenerational equity in environmental governance

Young people and future generations are disproportionately affected by environmental crises, yet remain underrepresented in the systems designed to address them. Despite growing recognition of their leadership, youth continue to face structural barriers to meaningful participation in environmental governance, including lack of resourcing, restrictive visa processes, and the absence of accountability mechanisms. This disconnect undermines both the legitimacy and long-term effectiveness of environmental policy, as well as the principle of intergenerational justice. Meaningful youth engagement must go beyond symbolic inclusion and be embedded across governance systems with clear mechanisms for influence, accountability, and sustained support.

Recommendation 4. Support meaningful children and youth participation across all levels of environmental action and decision-making

- a. **Member States should institutionalise meaningful youth participation in environmental governance** at local and national levels, including in the design and implementation of NDCs, NAPs, LTS, NBSAPs, and other key policy frameworks, e.g., through youth quotas and advisory bodies, ensuring regional balance and inclusion of youth in marginalised situations.²
- b. **Establish transparent feedback and follow-up mechanisms** to ensure that institutions are held accountable for their youth engagement commitments, e.g., via online platforms to track the implementation of youth inputs and funding allocations and/or regular stakeholder meetings.
- c. **Invest in capacity-building and resourcing for youth participation** to support equitable access to decision-making spaces, with targeted support for marginalised youth.
- d. **Provide dedicated funding and technical support for youth-led environmental initiatives** and ensure that environmental finance mechanisms and capacity-building programmes allocate resources specifically to support children- and youth-led efforts.
- e. **Expand youth participation pathways through partnerships with schools, universities, and youth organisations**, as well as through social media outreach, with a focus on promoting regional balance and increasing access in underrepresented regions and communities.
- f. **Promote and strengthen inclusive, age-appropriate channels for children to engage in environmental decision-making**, such as child-friendly consultations and support for child-led advocacy, in accordance with the UNCRC and General Comment No. 26.

² "Youth in marginalised situations" refers to young people who face systemic barriers to participation and decision-making due to their social, economic, geographic, gender-based, or political circumstances. This includes, but is not limited to, young women and girls; LGBTQIA+ youth; Indigenous youth; rural and remote youth; youth with disabilities; migrant, refugee, and displaced youth; youth living in poverty; and those from conflict-affected areas or historically oppressed racial, ethnic, caste, or religious groups.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen children and youth engagement within UNEP and UNEA

- a. **Reinforce the role of CYMG as a formal platform for youth engagement within all UNEP-administered MEAs and programmes** (e.g., the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans) to support meaningful youth engagement across the full range of UNEP activities.
- b. **Ensure dedicated core funding for CYMG**, including by providing sufficient, predictable resources for the Youth Environment Assembly, to enable CYMG to continue its efforts on capacity-building, policy advocacy, and expanding access to policymaking for young people.
- c. **Recognise the Global Youth Declaration on the Environment as an input into UNEA deliberations** to ensure it is distributed to all Member States and meaningfully reflected in outcome documents and decision-making processes.
- d. **Member States should actively engage youth constituency representatives throughout the full cycle of multilateral processes**, such as UNEA, through regular meetings, ensuring youth inputs are integrated into national priorities, positions, and efforts to implement outcomes.

Recommendation 6: Democratise environmental knowledge and foster planetary literacy

- a. **Ensure that scientific knowledge products and major policy documents are accompanied by accessible multi-lingual non-technical summaries** and information sessions designed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, particularly children and youth.
- b. **Integrate environmental education into formal curricula and strengthen vocational training** to build local capacity and equip youth with practical skills for green jobs in sectors like renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and circular economy.
- c. **Develop open-source environmental education modules**, such as UNEP Environmental Education Resources Guide for Latin America and the Caribbean, to act as ready-to-use educational materials that can be freely downloaded and adapted for schools worldwide.

Recommendation 7: Uphold environmental rights and strengthen accountability mechanisms

- a. **Recognise and enforce the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a legally enforceable human right at national and international levels**, in alignment with UN General Assembly Resolution 76/300, and ensure its integration into constitutions, environmental laws, and judicial systems, implementing relevant accountability mechanisms.
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- b. **Protect the rights and safety of environmental and land rights defenders** by enacting and enforcing laws that uphold their freedoms of expression, protest, and participation, and by ensuring access to protection, legal support, and safe advocacy spaces—alongside robust accountability mechanisms to address actions by perpetrators that undermine these rights.
- c. **Advocate for stronger mechanisms to hold states and non-state actors accountable for climate change and environmental degradation**, acknowledging legal precedents such as the ICJ advisory opinion on “Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change.”³
- d. **Support access to justice and legal empowerment for communities affected by environmental degradation**, including mechanisms for public interest litigation, legal aid, and establishment of independent environmental ombudspersons or commissions with the authority to investigate complaints and monitor compliance.
- e. **Safeguard the rights of people displaced or migrating due to climate and environmental impacts by strengthening legal and policy frameworks** that ensure access to basic services, cultural rights, participation in decision-making, and fair pathways to dignified relocation, integration, or return in accordance with the commitments set out in KDMECC.

2.3. Reforming the international financial architecture to enable systemic change

Insufficient progress in global economic and financial transformation is arguably the single greatest barrier to making progress towards global environmental goals. Dominant economic models continue to prioritise short-term profit over long-term planetary and human well-being, while the IFA remains unjust, underfunded, and structurally biased against the Global South.

Such foundational inequities demand urgent reforms to the economic and financial system, including the environmental finance architecture, to strengthen equity, access, and alignment with environmental priorities. It also underscores the need to rethink UNEP’s role in driving global financial transformation to ensure it is effectively contributing to catalysing the financial shifts needed for a just, sustainable global economy.

Recommendation 8. Strengthen commitments to transforming the global financial system to unlock fair, adequate, concessional finance for environmental action

- a. **Scale up high-quality, predictable concessional environmental finance**, particularly through public funding and contributions to multilateral climate and environment funds to address the triple challenges posed by the growing debt, nature and climate crises, with a focus on LDCs, SIDS, FCAS and vulnerable groups and communities.
- b. **Advocate for the reform of international financial institutions**, including the mandates and voting structures of the World Bank and IMF, to institutionalise strong environmental finance mandates and targets, increase EMDE's decision-making power, review debt sustainability frameworks, and reflect climate and nature considerations in lending criteria and decisions.
- c. **Promote access to innovative sources of finance**, including but not limited to financial transaction taxes, fossil fuel levies, aviation and shipping levies, with revenues ringfenced for environmental action and loss and damage, with more stringent obligations on AEs.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen UNEP's role in aligning global financial flows with environmental goals through leadership, accountability, and substantial reform

- a. **Review and strengthen the mandate of UNEP-FI** to ensure it delivers measurable outcomes aligned with UNEP's core environmental objectives, with greater transparency, accountability, and impact tracking across the financial sector and identification of areas for improvement.
- b. **Support countries in integrating environmental priorities into domestic financial systems** by providing technical guidance on sustainable budgeting, green fiscal policy, and nature-positive investment frameworks, with focused support for developing countries in recognition of limited domestic financial market growth to date.

Recommendation 10: Reform domestic economic systems to align finance and development with environmental sustainability and equity

- a. **Adopt alternative economic metrics beyond GDP**, including ones reflecting national well-being and ecological footprints, to guide national planning and measure progress toward sustainability and well-being.
 - b. **Phase out environmentally harmful subsidies** (e.g., for plastic production) and redirect public spending toward low-carbon, socially beneficial, nature-positive sectors.
 - c. **Encourage the growth of domestic capital markets in EMDEs**, with a focus on low-carbon, sustainable finance that can help close the growing environmental and SDG financing gap.
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- d. **Integrate climate-aligned fiscal reforms** such as carbon pricing, pollution taxes, and green public procurement into national budgeting processes to systematically redirect economic activity toward low-carbon and socially equitable pathways.
- e. **Require domestic financial institutions to incorporate climate and biodiversity risks into macroeconomic and financial stability assessments** to reflect environmental sustainability and social equity considerations in national economic planning.

2.4 Transforming the Drivers of the Extractive Economy

Today's unsustainable and linear model of resource extraction, consumption, and disposal is one of the root causes of environmental crises. UNEP's Global Resource Outlook 2024⁴ shows that resource extraction has tripled since 1970, outpacing population growth and driving biodiversity loss, pollution, and social inequality. Notably, the most destructive forms of this extractive economic model are found in our food and energy systems.

The industrial food system is a leading driver of biodiversity loss, antimicrobial resistance, and deforestation, a major GHG emitter, and a key source of water and soil pollution. The energy system, overwhelmingly reliant on fossil fuels, is responsible for nearly three-quarters of all GHG emissions, driving climate change while causing millions of deaths annually due to air pollution. Meanwhile, the necessary transition to a green economy is itself fueling demand for critical minerals, replicating the very extractive model it aims to replace. To navigate this, we must fundamentally rethink how we value, use, and govern natural resources.

Recommendation 11: Establish science-based boundaries for sustainable resource use and prioritise demand-side solutions for energy and resource consumption

- a. **Mandate national resource footprint accounting** using relevant indicators to assess and report total material use, in alignment with science-based thresholds for sustainable resource consumption.
- b. **Set legally binding, science-based national targets for absolute reductions in resource extraction and use in AEs**, with comprehensive metrics and timelines to ensure accountability and compliance.
- c. **Prioritise demand-side solutions to reduce energy and resource consumption**, including but not limited to designing for walkable cities, expanding public transport and disincentivising car ownership, shared living incentives, and mandating passive design in buildings.

⁴UNEP (2024). Global Resource Outlook.

Recommendation 12: Accelerate just and equitable global clean energy transitions

- a. **Commit to clear national and international timelines and targets for a just, equitable, and science-aligned phase-out of fossil fuels**—reflected in and reinforced through high-ambition NDCs—in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities.
- b. **Halt all fossil fuel development and exploration activities**, in line with the IEA’s guidance that achieving a Net-Zero by 2050 Scenario requires no new investments in oil and gas.
- c. **Accelerate the deployment of renewable and low-carbon energy technologies**, acknowledging their central role in abating emissions.

Recommendation 13: Advance food systems transitions

- a. **Promote a global sustainable food systems transition** that shifts from industrial, extractive agriculture and factory farming to nature-positive agroecological, agricultural, and farming practices and policies, moving towards food systems that prioritise environmental health, local livelihoods, animal welfare, and nutritious diets.
- b. **Develop national targets and roadmaps for food systems transformation** that address the interconnected issues of food sovereignty, climate resilience, and biodiversity, and promote local and regional cooperation, in alignment with principles of One Health and One Welfare.
- c. **Integrate consultative processes into the nationally-led food systems planning** to protect the rights, livelihoods, and knowledge systems of children and youth from indigenous, smallholder farming, fishing, and rural communities, guaranteeing their active participation in all stages of decision-making.
- d. **Designate food sovereignty protected areas** to safeguard areas where Indigenous Peoples and smallholder farmers can preserve traditional farming methods and native seeds.

Recommendation 14: Strengthen global cooperation in resources governance

- a. **Forge a legally binding treaty to govern the lifecycle of critical minerals**, establishing clear, enforceable standards for extraction, processing, and recycling, building on existing resolutions and guidance provided by multilateral fora and international organisations.
 - b. **Strengthen materials traceability systems** to ensure end-to-end traceability, verify compliance with environmental and labour standards, prevent illicit trade, and enable a robust circular economy.
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- a. **Embed human rights as a core feature of mineral resource governance** by mandating FPIC from local and Indigenous communities for all projects, strengthening protections against forced and child labour in line with international standards, and establishing inclusive oversight bodies that empower local communities and workers to participate directly in the governance of projects.
- b. **Mandate circular design and end planned obsolescence** by establishing regulations underpinned by the principles of extended producer responsibility and “right to repair,” making producers legally and financially responsible for their products throughout their lifecycle, prioritising high-impact industries such as electronics, plastics, and textile.

2.5. Confronting the polluting legacy

This year, the global community reaffirmed that pollution in all forms is a defining challenge of our time through the major milestones in global chemical, waste, and pollution governance, including meetings of the BRS Conventions, GFC OEWG-1, the resumed INC-5.2 negotiations, and the Minamata Convention COP-6, and the establishment of the ISP-CWP, a vital counterpart to the IPCC and IPBES.

We welcome these developments but stress that far more ambition is needed. The unsound management of chemicals, waste continues to threaten human and planetary health, while deepening climate change, biodiversity loss, and social injustice. Pollution now causes one in six deaths globally, and over 99% of the world’s population breathes air that fails to meet WHO standards, with the most severe impacts experienced by marginalised communities. The progress made must therefore be matched by real action to prevent harm and build a cleaner future.

Recommendation 15: Secure a legally binding, full-lifecycle global plastics treaty in 2026

- a. **Utilise a majority voting procedure to ensure timely adoption of an ambitious and legally binding global plastics treaty** that mandates a cap on virgin plastic production.
 - b. **Establish robust firewalls within the INC process** to prevent corporate lobbying and conflicts of interest from unduly influencing treaty negotiations, ensuring the process is guided by public interest and independent science.
 - c. **Prioritise upstream measures**, including reduction, reuse, refill, and redesign, supported by binding targets to cap and phase down virgin plastic production with accessible means of technical and financial implementation.
 - d. **Ensure a precautionary, hazard-based approach** to chemicals of concern, transparency across the value chain, and a science-driven review mechanism.
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Recommendation 16: Eliminate hazardous chemicals by strengthening global conventions

- a. **Expand the listings of "forever chemicals" (PFAS) and other persistent, mobile, and toxic substances under the Stockholm Convention** to achieve a time-bound, legally binding global phase-out of their production, use, and trade.
- b. **Establish legally binding limits for pharmaceuticals and endocrine disruptors** in all industrial and municipal wastewater effluents, and strengthen enforcement mechanisms to prevent contamination of water bodies and food systems.
- c. **Institutionalise the precautionary principle and hazard-based approaches** within the Global Framework on Chemicals and the ISP-CWP to safeguard human and ecological health for current and future generations.

Recommendation 17: Establish polluter accountability and remediation frameworks

- a. **Legislate and enforce a polluter accountability and liability framework** for the full costs of pollution, including decontamination, site remediation and long-term community health monitoring, and care for affected populations, while ensuring that such liabilities are supported by complementary national and international policy mechanisms.
- b. **Implement more stringent monitoring and regulation of the global waste trade** by more effectively implementing international rules including the Basel Convention, as well as national customs regulations to curb the illicit transboundary movements of waste and by-products to countries with weaker environmental protections, while implementing complementary measures (via international conventions) for secondary resource circulation.
- c. **Strengthen national environmental health programs** to address pollution hotspots through data transparency, citizen science, and basic WASH infrastructure, ensuring that polluters, not communities, bear the cost of remediation.

Recommendation 18: Advance inclusive waste management systems that empower the informal sector

- a. **Recognise waste pickers as essential environmental service providers under national labour laws**, and critical to the circular economy transition, with specific provisions to guarantee their labour rights, social protections, occupational safety (including PPE), and fair access to waste streams.
 - b. **Encourage cooperation between formal waste management institutions and local markets** to support circular economy principles and sustainable business models, enhancing the efficiency and transparency within the sector.
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- c. **Mandate municipal-level, source-separated waste collection and invest in public infrastructure for composting and cold storage** to combat food waste at the local level, integrating Indigenous and traditional knowledge on food preservation.
- d. **Create enabling conditions for youth-led and community-based enterprises** through national zero-waste funds, streamlined licensing, and removal of bureaucratic barriers to circular innovation.

2.6. Protecting nature and building climate resilience

While global frameworks like the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework have set clear, ambitious targets for climate and nature, a persistent gap remains between these high-level commitments and effective, on-the-ground action. This implementation gap is driven by several key challenges: environmental policies are often siloed and disconnected from economic and disaster planning, financial incentives continue to reward ecosystem degradation, and decision-making remains top-down, failing to reflect the knowledge and rights of Indigenous Peoples and communities. Furthermore, on-the-ground interventions are frequently reactive rather than proactive, lacking both the actionable data and the clear, prioritised guidelines needed for success. There is an urgent need for integrated, inclusive, data-informed approaches that bridge global ambition with local implementation.

Recommendation 19: Integrate ecosystem-specific targets into national planning

- a. **Embed ecosystem resilience in policy commitments**, including NDCs and NAPs, by incorporating actions and quantified targets to limit marine heat exposure and ocean acidification, reduce wildfire risks through prescribed burning, and maintain forest hydration.
- b. **Integrate biodiversity and ecosystem strategies**, including NBSAPs, with DRR frameworks to ensure that biodiversity conservation measures are recognised and funded as defenses against disasters, including through Green Disaster Prevention Budgets legally requiring that a share of disaster-related budgets are allocated to “NbS for DRR”.

Recommendation 20: Deploy integrated community-driven monitoring and EWS

- a. **Develop national and/or regional open-access, real-time ecological monitoring and EWS** that integrate AI, satellite, drone, and community-collected data via publicly accessible platforms providing multilingual alerts linked directly to disaster-response agencies and partners, while ensuring robust data privacy safeguards.
 - b. **Support citizen-centered science and data literacy programs** by formally integrating community-collected data into national monitoring efforts and embedding environmental data analysis into educational curricula to build capacity for local action and advocacy.
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Recommendation 21: Implement a "Protect-Manage-Restore" hierarchy

- a. **Adopt and legislate a "Protect First" principle within national environmental and biodiversity laws** to ensure that intact ecosystems are prioritised for conservation before considering restoration or offsetting of degraded areas, with biodiversity offsetting permitted only after all efforts to avoid, minimise, and rehabilitate impacts have been demonstrably exhausted.
- b. **Develop and disseminate context-specific ecosystem management and restoration guidelines** that are scientifically robust and reflect a focus on social and interspecies justice, ensuring that restoration efforts support ecological processes, use appropriate native or non-native species, and avoid adverse impacts on local livelihoods.

Recommendation 22: Empower local communities and Indigenous Peoples as ecosystem managers and co-managers

- a. **Establish legally-mandated Indigenous- and community-led co-management councils** for critical ecosystems, guaranteeing a significant share of seats, with full voting rights and decision-making authority, for Indigenous Peoples and local youth organisations to play an active role in upholding FPIC and shaping national and global environmental guidelines.
- b. **Uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their lands, territories, and resources** as central to their self-determination, cultural survival, and environmental stewardship, recognising restitution and reparation—such as land back—as essential to justice and future wellbeing.
- c. **Incorporate Indigenous knowledge, including TEK, into ecosystem management, environmental health, and biodiversity strategies**, including by integrating practices such as rotational grazing, water stewardship, and cultural burning.
- d. **Promote and fund Indigenous- and youth-led restoration initiatives** that integrate youth into long-term environmental co-management, health, and sustainable development efforts.

Recommendation 23: Integrate environmental protection into conflict prevention, response, and peacebuilding

- a. **Systematically monitor and report on the environmental impacts of conflicts**, including long-term ecosystem damage and missed environmental goal, e.g., via environmental peacebuilding missions.
 - b. **Establish a dedicated international fund or a sub-programme within an existing environmental finance body** for the post-conflict environmental remediation of affected territories, financed through post-conflict reparations, sanctions, and the seizure of assets from responsible state and non-state actors, to fund the cleanup of toxic hotspots and ecosystem restoration.
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