Coordinating water, land and ecosystem management to support multiple development objectives through UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks

### Briefing Note for UN Resident Coordinators and UN County Teams in Africa

**Aim**

This briefing note aims to: 1) underscore the importance of mainstreaming and coordinating water, land and ecosystem management across the UN Country Team’s programmes in the context of the Cooperation Framework; 2) identify some entry points for addressing this in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework cycle; 3) outline the support available from UNEP in this context.

**1) The case for integrated approaches to water, land and ecosystem management in Agenda 2030**

Sustainable management and use of water, land and ecosystems are at the core of the 2030 Agenda’s call to protect the planet and its natural and cultural resources, supporting inclusive and sustained economic growth, and enhancing human well-being. The resources’ contributions to, and implications on, the social, economic and environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda necessitate a clear policy coherence and more integrated, cross-sectoral approaches at national, sub-national, and transboundary levels. **The costs of inaction are simply too high to contemplate. For example, the loss of just** [**four landscapes in East Africa**](https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2022-06/NatCap%20Synthesis_Protecting%20East%20Africa%E2%80%99s%20Natural%20Capital%20The%20cost%20of%20inaction_USAID508_Feb2022.pdf) **would cost the region US$11 billion per year, and global losses have been estimated at over US$600 billion** (Box 1)**.**

An increasing recognition of this centrality by the Member States, development partners, and other actors is evidenced by the growing inclusion of integrated approaches in national development priorities and planning tools and guidelines as well as those for monitoring progress of interventions.

Conserving, restoring and sustainably using Africa’s freshwater ecosystems is therefore fundamental to all water-related sectors, with wide-ranging benefits, including: 1) sustaining livelihood conditions for local communities; 2) climate change adaptation and mitigation; 3) combating natural hazards, such as floods and droughts; 4) delivering water services; 5) producing food; 6) fostering human and environmental health; 7) protecting biodiversity; 8) tackling pollution; and 9) sustainable cities. **Examples and evidence of how integrated water, land and ecosystem management support multiple development objectives is provided in the** [***case for integrated water, land and ecosystems management***](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OlZmG24sPt7AUdtpxrwB_VxeISS0abOQWQm1yQ5B5eg/edit?usp=sharing)**.**

| **Box 1.** Four transboundary landscapes in [East Africa](https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2022-06/NatCap%20Synthesis_Protecting%20East%20Africa%E2%80%99s%20Natural%20Capital%20The%20cost%20of%20inaction_USAID508_Feb2022.pdf) - the Great East African Plains, Northern Savannas, the Albertine Rift Forests, and the Ruweru-Mugesera-Akagera Wetland system - provide US$11.3 billion per year regional in ecosystem services, including regulating services (e.g. water flow regulation, water quality amelioration, erosion control, crop pollination); carbon storage; livestock production; and nature-based tourism. The global value of these services is several orders of magnitude higher, estimated at US$617 billion, mostly in carbon storage, offering potential sources of revenue to fund regional development. *Source: USAID and East African Community 2022. Protecting East Africa’s natural capital: the cost of inaction* |
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However, freshwater ecosystems are under growing pressure from the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and nature loss. The impacts of all three of these interrelated planetary crises are directly, and in some cases disproportionately, felt on freshwater bodies, which are essential for the lives, livelihoods and health of people, economies and the planet. This has impacts across sectors - and their associated SDGs - including food and agriculture, energy security, health, poverty, urban planning, industry and business, and peace and security. At the same time, when functional - i.e. protected, restored and well managed - freshwater bodies are strong allies in combating all three crises.

| *Designing and implementing integrated water, land and ecosystem management, is critical to the achievement of multiple sustainable development objectives, cutting across all SDGs.* |
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It is therefore critical that an *integrated* approachis taken to the development, management and use of water, land and ecosystems, as called for by SDG 6 “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. Goal 6 is frequently misinterpreted to be a goal solely focussing on human water uses (WASH), but it is important to understand that these uses only account for 5-10% of water use globally, and that SDG 6 is a goal on sustainable management of water resources and freshwater ecosystems for all purposes. Target 6.5 makes this clear: “By 2030, implement integrated water resources management [IWRM] at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.”

**2) How can UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams improve delivery on integrated water resources management and ecosystems in countries?**

At the level of the UN Country Teams, water for human uses in the form of drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is expected to be well integrated into the Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs). However, sustainable and integrated approaches to water resources and environmental management across all sectors - in support of multiple development objectives, and as called for by SDG 6 - is typically not as well represented as WASH. This remains a challenge for UN Country Teams, governments, and non-government organisations, in the design and implementation of Cooperation Frameworks. In most countries, there is a need to strengthen the recognition of integrated approaches to water resources management, underpinned by sound ecosystem management, within CCAs, Cooperation Frameworks, and their operationalization through Joint Work Plans.

**Potential entry points:**

Common Country Analysis (CCA): for example, in terms of environmental transformation, economic transformation, comprehensive governance and institutional analysis, data assessment, causality analysis, and comprehensive ‘Leave No-one Behind’ analysis.

UNSDCF design:

* ensure that integrated approaches to water, land and environment are considered in the Theory of Change and Prioritization Analysis that leads to Cooperation Framework formulation.
* Budgeting: ensure integrated approaches are well included in the design for adequate and efficient use of financial resources.

UNSDCF implementation (Joint Work Plans): Many UN agencies are working on various aspects of sustainable water management, increasingly at a catchment level and in line with their mandates, under the Cooperation Frameworks. Agencies that typically have the most active programmes in this area include UNDP, FAO, WFP, UNICEF, WHO, and UNEP. Other agencies that are likely to have a role include, but are not limited to: UN Women, UN Habitat, UNIDO, ILO, UNECE (hosting the secretariat of the international water conventions), WMO and UNESCO.

In most countries there is an opportunity to strengthen the coordination between UN programmes, for more sustainable outcomes, greater impact, strategic fundraising, and more efficient use of financial resources. The UN Resident Coordinator’s Offices (RCOs) have an important role in coordinating programmes in this context, but it also requires joint leadership from lead agencies.

**3) How can UNEP support as a member of the UN Country Teams?**

As UNEP is the [custodian agency](https://wesr.unep.org/article/goal-6-0#:~:text=Sustainable%20Development%20Goal%206%20goes,of%20people%20and%20the%20planet.) for SDG indicator 6.5.1 on implementing integrated water resources management, 6.3.2 on ambient water quality, and 6.6.1 on freshwater ecosystems, UNEP can provide technical support to the RCOs in coordinating the UN Country Team’s efforts related to sustainable water, land and ecosystems management.

Furthermore, as the leading global environmental authority, UNEP is the Custodian for [25 SDG indicators](https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/sustainable-development-goals/about-sustainable-development-goals) – across Goals 6, 8, 12, 14, 15 and 17. These indicators cover topics related to: resource management and protection of water, marine and terrestrial ecosystems; circular economy, including the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources; and environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste. Thus, UNEP has the mandate and expertise to support working towards, and reporting on, these various targets.

As UNEP is not a resident agency in most African countries, this has historically led to some challenges in fully harnessing UNEP’s engagement in areas related to integrated water resources management and ecosystem management. UNEP’s Africa Office has been working on increasing its capacity to better support UNRCs and UNCTs in Common Country Analyses, and in the design of Cooperation Frameworks and their operationalization through Joint Work Plans. This has included stronger collaboration with UNEP’s Divisions at its global head office (Kenya), as well as other UNEP entities.

As members of the UN Country Teams, UNEP’s Country Focal Points can provide data, information and technical assistance related to integrated water resources management and freshwater ecosystems. To better respond to requests coming from UNRCs, UNEP has developed a [Database Compendium](https://docs.google.com/document/u/0/d/1Q0TBWO9N0z-X4wvAtbyC2ZuUxV9iGhwr_JXrpxOyL2E/edit) for water and environment to identify relevant data sources as input to CCAs and Cooperation Frameworks. The Database Compendium can be made available to UNCT’s. UNEP can also assist in generating data and analysis on request from UNCT’s as well as executing bespoke assessments and projects.

UNEP can also carry out a rapid integrated water resources assessment in a limited number of key regions (hot spots) in a country, with the aim of making recommendations geared towards ensuing a more holistic and sustainable approach to water management, and proposed practical next steps for support to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (see Box 2).

| **Box 2: UNEP’s engagement in Kenya**At the request of the Technical Committee for Water Security in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) Regions of Kenya, UNEP-DHI conducted a rapid integrated assessment of water resources in 10 ASAL counties. The study identified key challenges and opportunities to build water security in the region so as to inform future interventions. The report included 9 high-level recommendations for improving water security, spanning three areas: improvement of physical infrastructure, governance arrangements, and data. The recommendations contributed to the development of a proposed *“UN Joint Programme for Sustainable Integrated Water Management for enhanced Health, Food security and Climate-resilient livelihoods in Kenya’s arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) and other fragile ecosystems”*, as a contribution to Kenya’s 2022-2026 Cooperation Framework (available on request). Source: UNEP-DHI Centre 2022, [project description](https://www.unepdhi.org/rapid-integrated-assessment-asal-counties-kenya/).  |
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Requests for support and inputs from the UNEP Africa Office can be coordinated by the Regional Development Coordination Unit, while the Assessment Unit takes the lead on inputs to CCAs. UNEP can also provide support in partnership with the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO), through its role in the “Quality Support and Assurance-Peer Support Group” (QSA-PSG). UNEP’s Africa Office can provide further support in the following areas through its six thematic sub-programmes: Climate Change; Disasters and Conflict; Ecosystem Management; Environmental Governance; Chemicals and Waste; and Resource Efficiency.

Through its global head office in Nairobi, UNEP provides a range of [services](https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/water) in relation to water and climate, water and nature, and water and pollution. The [UNEP-DHI Centre](https://www.unepdhi.org/) has supported UNEP for more than 25 years to implement its mandate by providing technical expertise, assessments and tools.