

UNEP at 50 should have guiding role what “green” means¹

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Abstract

In ongoing fashion of greening development paths, “green” as the word is using sometimes cosmetically, sometimes with the meaning. When trying in 2021, to answer the question: how can we make the UN system “fit for future,” and the UN itself “fit for purpose”, I found this issue extremely important. My thoughts are that these challenges have to be role of UN Environment Program, having relatively strong scientific track record and being a forum of international system for environmental (and climate change) information and assessment, and designed almost 50 years ago as an international information-based advocacy organization.

Key words: UNEP@50, United Nations Environment Programme, Sustainable Development, 2030 Agenda, Greening, Greenwashing, Climate Crisis, Nature loss, Pollution

Introduction

In 2022, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)⁵ will celebrate its 50th anniversary⁶, having served as an authoritative advocate for the global environment since 1972. UNEP’s aim is to inspire, inform and enable nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations⁷ (“Now more than ever, the multilateral discussions and actions that UNEP facilitates are crucial for solving the planetary crises we face”). UNEP’s medium-term strategy⁸ endorsed at UNEA-5⁹ was an initial step to make UNEP stronger and fit-for-purpose (“fit for future”)

¹ ACUNS 2021 Annual Meeting, presented at Panel Climate Change and International Institutions, June 25, 2021

² to engage citizens and all parts of society in climate action; https://europa.eu/climate-pact/ambassadors_en

³ <https://ambassadors-env.com/en/>

⁴ <http://www.ftn.uns.ac.rs/n1243898707/faculty-of-technical-sciences>

⁵ The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is established after the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden 5–16 June 1972

⁶ <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/video/unep-celebrate-50-years-work-2022>

⁷ <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/environmental-moments-un75-timeline>

⁸ For people and planet: the UNEP strategy for 2022–2025 - <https://www.unep.org/resources/policy-and-strategy/people-and-planet-unep-strategy-2022-2025>

⁹ https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea5?_ga=2.155778034.837024271.1623573997-914284954.1623573997

because it sounds the alarm on the three planetary crises: the climate crisis, the crisis of nature loss, and the pollution and waste loss. A detailed account of UNEP's origin and history and a vision for its future is presented in the book¹⁰.

With this paper, author would like to add “puzzle” of possible challenge and role of UNEP in guiding what “green” means, associated with sustainable human development, climate governance, and humanitarianism to be infused throughout these endeavors¹¹.

Points for discussion

Theme of concern is that in ongoing fashion of greening development paths, “green” as the word is using sometimes cosmetically, sometimes with the proper meaning for climate risk/environment/sustainable development.

It is important to consider what somebody considers to be sustainable or environmentally friendly, as it may differ from “common accepted” view. Starting from some of the “green” terms, bellow.

Term	Explanation	Noted key words
Greening	<p>.... is the process of transforming living environments, and also artifacts such as a space, a lifestyle or a brand image, into a more environmentally friendly version (i.e. 'greening your home' or 'greening your office'). The act of greening generally involves incorporating more environmentally friendly systems into one's environment, such as the home, work place, and general lifestyle¹².</p> <p>....¹³ the process of becoming more active about protecting the environment.....the process of making somewhere greener by planting grass, trees, and plants there.....the process of beginning to pay attention to the protection of the natural environment....</p>	<p>Environmentally friendly</p> <p>Protection of environment/natural environment</p>
Green economy	<p>... economies that are low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive¹⁴. An inclusive green economy is one that improves human well-being and builds social equity while reducing environmental risks and scarcities¹⁵.</p>	<p>Low carbon</p> <p>Resource efficient</p> <p>Socially inclusive</p>
Global Green New Deal	<p>.... for reviving the global economy and boosting employment while simultaneously accelerating the fight against climate change, environmental degradation and poverty. Based on a 2009 UNEP-commissioned report "Rethinking the Economic Recovery: A Global Green New Deal", UNEP has recommended five critical areas:</p>	<p>Economy</p> <p>Employment</p> <p>The fight against climate change/ environmental degradation/poverty</p>

¹⁰ M.Ivanova, The Untold Story of the World's Leading Environmental Institution: UNEP at 50, The MIT Press, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/12373.001.0001>, 2021

¹¹ https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/04/reflections-building-more-inclusive-global-governance?utm_source=linkedin.com&utm_medium=paid-social&utm_campaign=lnkd-inclusive-governance-intl-affairs&utm_content=linkd-pr-a1&li_fat_id=76f7aa4a-3a42-4796-a638-aa8de3cef998

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greening>

¹³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/greening>

¹⁴ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/green-economy>

¹⁵ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/green-economy/about-green-economy>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy efficiency, • Renewable energy technologies, • Sustainable transport technologies, • The planet's ecological infrastructure, including freshwaters, forests, soils and coral reefs; and • Sustainable agriculture. 	Energy efficiency Renewable energy technologies Ecological (environmental) infrastructure Sustainable agriculture
(USA) Green New Deal	The Green New Deal combines Roosevelt's economic approach (a set of social and economic reforms and public works projects undertaken by USA President Roosevelt in response to the Great Depression of the 1930s) with modern ideas such as renewable energy and resource efficiency ¹⁶ .	Economy Renewable energy Resource efficiency
European Green Deal is a set of policy initiatives by the European Commission with the overarching aim of making Europe climate neutral in 2050 ¹⁷ . The European Green Deal provides an action plan to boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy, and restore biodiversity and cut pollution.	Climate neutral Resource efficiency (clean, circular economy) Restore biodiversity Cut pollution
Green Recovery is a widely adopted name for a proposed package of environmental, regulatory and fiscal reforms to recover prosperity after the COVID-19 pandemic ¹⁸	... environmental, regulatory and fiscal reforms



UNEP, Nairobi, 2009: "Green is the new big deal"

When check an UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ¹⁹ and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Targets, for world "green" the outcome is:

- | |
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| 11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, <i>green and public spaces</i> , in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities |
| 13.a.... <i>Green Climate Fund</i> |
| 15.4.2 <i>Mountain Green Cover Index</i> |

Challenge 1 is to accelerate work towards clearly defined term "green" when use for climate risk/environment/sustainable development.

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_New_Deal

¹⁷

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Green_Deal#:~:text=%20European%20Green%20Deal%20%201%20Aims.%20The,also.%20%205%20External%20links.%20%20More%20;

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_recovery

¹⁹ United Nations (2015) Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)

Challenge 2 is the issue of greenwashing (i.e. green vs greenwashing), often in practice. Greenwashing is the process of conveying a false impression or providing misleading information about how a processes/product are more environmentally sound (i.e. "green")²⁰, whether that means, for example, they are more natural, healthier, free of chemicals, recyclable, or less wasteful of natural resources. Products are greenwashed through a process of renaming, rebranding, or repackaging them. An awareness of greenwashing has increased in recent years, due to the rising demand for environmentally sustainable products and much-needed transparency that goes hand in hand with ethical consumption²¹. With a rise in environmental-consciousness comes a rise in greenwashing.

Concluded remarks

This snapshot analysis show that it is not common approved/ acknowledged meaning of green/greening, and consequently defined tools in fighting greenwashing.

These challenges have (expected/initiated) to be role of UN Environment Program (@UNEP at 50+), having relatively strong scientific track record and being a forum of international system for environmental (and climate change) information and assessment, and designed almost 50 years ago as an international information-based advocacy organization.

²⁰ adapted from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/greenwashing.asp>

²¹ <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/transport-travel/what-greenwashing>