



Trees, Trees, Trees

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Table of Contents

Letter from your Chair	2
Introduction and Role of This Committee	2
<i>Statement of the Issue</i>	3
Historical Background	4
Current Situation	6
Goals for Discussion	7

Background Guide text copyright ©2021 by ClarkMUN. All text is original and may not be duplicated without permission. Images presented herein are presented for educational purposes and the creator has been cited appropriately. This background guide may not be used for any purposes other than preparation for ClarkMUN XI without express written permission from ClarkMUN.

Letter from your Chair

Hello delegates!

My name is Sadie Murray and I'm a senior at Clark University, double majoring in biology and geography with a concentration in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). I've spent the majority of my summer modeling land use change in Madagascar and working with Conservation International on the international metrics that are and should be used when verifying different land use modeling programs. I want to apply the technical skills of GIS to the field of biology, to protect the most vulnerable members of the global population from the worst impacts of climate change. So you could say I care about trees a little bit.

In my spare time, I love to read, and this committee is definitely inspired by a couple of books you can check out: *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *The Overstory*. It is my third time chairing ClarkMUN -- previously, I ran a science fiction joint crisis committee and a historical committee. This will be my first GA and my first present day committee! This will be my fourth and final year on the ClarkMUN team and I'm really looking forward to seeing what incredible solutions, insightful debates, and bold arguments you are all able to come up with! If the human race wants to make it another generation or two, we're going to need to get to space or radically reimagine the way we use space and inhabit the earth and it'll probably be up to us to determine which one it is!

If you have any questions on committee structures, goals, the topics, or even career questions, feel free to reach out! MUN and trees are two of my favorite things to talk about!

Best,

Sadie Murray

Chair, UNEP

sadmurray@clarku.edu

Introduction and Role of This Committee

In 2006, The Billion Tree Campaign was launched, inspired by an environmental movement started in Africa in 1977 called The Green Belt Movement. Now, fourteen years later, delegates will be encouraged to look back and evaluate the success of this environmental program and many others. The rising need to stop climate change has sparked considerable environmental movements (and considerable backlash). Delegates should come prepared to discuss how the UN should be trying to shape the future of the environmental movement, considering the ethical and practical ramifications of past solutions and UN actions.

Statement of the Issue

The role of this committee is primarily to evaluate the success of current environmental policies and then recommend either changes or the creation of new policies. By looking at case studies of successful and unsuccessful UNEP programs as well as the current state of climate change in the world, delegates will forge a new path forward for this body. This body will operate as the policy and program division, meaning that it will have a say in coordinating the actions of the other seven divisions of the UNEP (Science Division, Ecosystems Division, Economy Division, Governance Affairs Office, Law Division, Communication Division and Corporate Services Division).

Delegates will have to address key questions, such as the power or lack of power that the UNEP involves in the enforcement mechanisms, whether the UNEP should distance itself from the UN, and whether the UNEP should use a more regular funding source or how much they should engage with stakeholders. These are the broader questions around the purpose of the UNEP. Hopefully, addressing what are the most pressing environmental concerns facing countries present and the most taxing global environmental failures will guide delegates to compromise and debate around the role of the UNEP.

Historical Background

The UNEP was first created in 1972 by Maurice Strong after the UN Conference on the Human Environment from the Declaration on the Human Environment or Stockholm Declaration. The UNEP was created to cover a variety of environmental areas, including. Its mission 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 program” and it has a mandate that covers a wide variety of areas from the atmosphere to the marine ecosystems on green developmental, economic and trade policies. The UNEP produced more than 200 technical guidelines for the environment in the first decade of its existence.

The UNEP over the years has seen some successes and some failures. From the initial 109 items included on the action plan when the organization was first created, the UNEP has begun or completed projects on most of these 109 items. However, current climate trends make it clear that the UNEP is not currently doing nearly enough to stop climate change from occurring. Many critics have pointed to the UNEP’s unrealized potential and the urgent global need to see action taking place. The UNEP stands on a thin balance between cementing their reputation as a coordinating body capable of respecting and understanding state sovereignty and a body that is incapable of taking the necessary steps to genuinely impact the climate crisis.

One of the biggest case studies of a successful UNEP program is the Earthwatch program. It is composed of things such as the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) and the International Referral System for Sources of Environmental Information (Infoterra). These programs contribute to making Earthwatch one of the most comprehensive programs for identifying environmental problems.

Another important example of a successful UNEP program is their Mediterranean Seas Program -- nestled under their Regional Seas Program. This Mediterranean Seas Program set out

to deal with shared environmental problems in shared bodies of water in the Mediterranean Regional. It was a multinational regional collaboration intended to utilize long term planning. The program pulled in international scientists, technicians and other relevant bodies and States. The agreement, initially created in 1976, is to this day still considered to be, for marine ecosystems, one of the most comprehensive regional agreements. As a result, today, there is still a regional network encompassing more than eighty labs and research institutions actively working on shared marine pollution issues and reporting to the UNEP. Other programs through the UNEP have tried to replicate this success, in other regions of the world, such as the West and Central African Coast Seas Conference in 1981 or the regional agreements in regions in Europe, South America or the Caribbean. However, the success of those programs on reducing pollution levels has been harder to gauge.

One of the greatest strengths of the UNEP has been its potentially global scope. This scope has made it possible for the UNEP to respond to interrelated problems or to modern, multinational ones. It also allows the organization to bring several countries in a region to similar standards or help negotiate between countries with competing interests or goals.

However, there are many key issues or splits in policy debate that still remain unresolved by countries within the UNEP, which complicates the role of the UNEP. One of these issues is the concept of a global carbon market -- despite taking a central stage in debates at the UN Climate Conference in years past, remains an unresolved point of disagreement. This is due to countries' competing financial and domestic policy interests.

The UNEP itself has been heavily invested in education. This has been somewhat of an uphill climb due to public ignorance of climate change or political indifference and lack of understanding of the urgency of the global climate crisis. However, the UNEP has still seen success with their education program, mostly measured in the increase of official environmental agencies in governments around the world.

Current Situation

Global efforts to stop climate change are currently not enough. If the system does not change, the international community will fail to stop climate change. According to the UNEP's most recent report, annual emissions would need to be 12% and that the rapid growth of developing countries in the past decade have resulted in 60% of contributions to global emissions coming from developing countries. However, these so-called developing countries are some of the biggest UNEP supporters right.

One of the UNEP's least tangible but powerful accomplishments has been in bringing together experts, governments and international organizations to provide guidance and a comprehensive approach. The low, important and unobtrusive style of the UNEP have helped with States' concerns of interference in their domestic affairs, so any increase to the purview or power of the UNEP must be done with careful consideration.

One of the biggest criticisms of the UNEP is based around its mandate. The UNEP was formed at the Stockholm conference with the Stockholm Declaration. This document, which was based on the human environment, centered the UNEP's ideology in protecting the environment for the benefit of others. However, moving forward it has been proposed that the UNEP should take a second look at their driving ideology and to center the environment itself in their environmental actions. Arguing that the planet should only be protected in so much as it can benefit man has resulted in a weaker international organization. In fact, the UNEP has served less of an active body and more of a central governing council for environmental programs that mostly promotes or coordinates other agencies. Unfortunately, things like tropical deforestation that require urgent action are not adequately addressed through the UNEP body as it stands now.

Another problem with the UNEP is overall lack of specificity in mandate and mission. The Mediterranean Sea Agreement, for example, though successful only committed States to

creating compliance and compensation, instead of creating these themselves. In the UNEP's less successful programs, the lack of tough enforcement mechanisms or vagueness in the implementation, funding or even goals have not just made the programs failures but which have made critical evaluation nearly impossible.

At the end of the day, despite an impressive amount of success against incredibly large obstacles, the UNEP has failed to produce quantifiable environmental protections. This is the fundamental failure of the organization. Not only is more substantial action needed, but it is important to be able to evaluate those actions.

However, it is important to note the obstacles in the way of the UNEP. First, international norms are slow to adopt or gain acceptance. Secondly, oftentimes, States can make decisions without considering or consulting other neighboring States about the potential environmental consequences. Certain States have explained that greater financial support or even structural support measures from the UNEP would be necessary to implement the recommendations of the body. Some states find the scientific and technical base of the UNEP difficult to take practical action on, especially struggling States. The lack of international or domestic political will to address the issues of climate change has also been one of the biggest obstacles since the start.

Questions to Consider

1. Should the UN continue supporting the idea of a global carbon market?
2. How should acts of ecoterrorism be treated under the international law?
3. What programs have had positive impacts on the environment? Which programs have had negative or no impact on the environment?
4. What makes a UNEP environmental policy successful and why?
5. How effective are private-public partnerships? What potential drawbacks to such partnerships have?

References

Chandler, M., Rullman, S., Cousins, J., Esmail, N., Begin, E., Venicx, G., ... & Studer, M. (2017). Contributions to

publications and management plans from 7 years of citizen science: use of a novel evaluation tool on Earthwatch-supported projects. *Biological Conservation*, 208, 163-173.

Gray, M. (1990). THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME: AN ASSESSMENT. *Environmental*

Law, 20(2), 291-319. Retrieved January 17, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43265919>

King, Ed. "UNEP: Efforts to Slow Global Warming Are Failing." *Climate Home News*, Climate Home, 5 Nov. 2013,

www.climatechangenews.com/2013/11/05/unep-global-efforts-to-slow-global-warming-are-failing/.

"Partnering with Member States." *UNEP - UN Environment Programme*, UNEP, [www.unenvironment.org/about-un-](http://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/funding-and-partnerships/partnering-member-states)

[environment/funding-and-partnerships/partnering-member-states](http://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/funding-and-partnerships/partnering-member-states).

Sjors Witjes, Rodrigo Lozano, "Towards a more Circular Economy: Proposing a framework linking sustainable

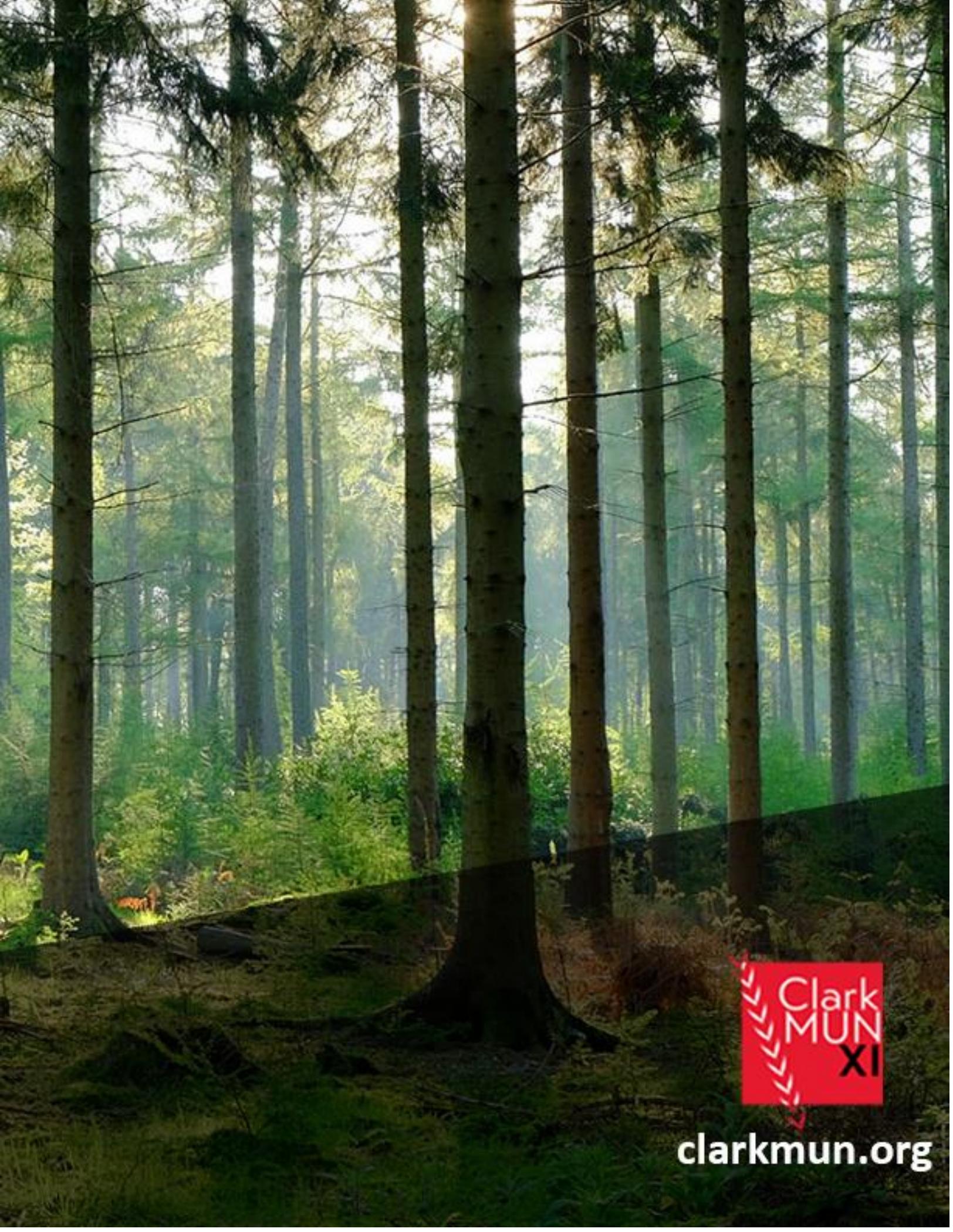
public procurement and sustainable business models" Volume 112, 2016, Pages 37-44,

(<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921344916300994>)

"Homepage." *Earthwatch*, earthwatch.org/.

Johnson, S. (2012). *UNEP the first 40 years*. UNEP.

Skjærseth, J. B. (2001). The effectiveness of the Mediterranean action plan. *See Ref*, 42, 311-30.



clarkmun.org