MESSAGE
IN A BOTTLE

April - May 2020

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Introduction

This weekly update aims to highlight recent news on climate change, migration, and the Pacific Island Countries and Territories.
Prepared as a part of the CLI_M_CO2 project, undertaken at the World Trade Institute, University of Bern, Switzerland.

01-15 April 2020

Organisations update

UNFCCC

UN Climate Chief Patricia Espinosa delivered a keynote address by video at the High-Level Opening of the virtual Placencia Ambition Forum taking place from 20-21 April in Belize, in which she underlined the need to continue to drive ambition and ensure that countries' national climate action plans, known as NDCs, are as robust as possible.

Organized by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the virtual forum has brought together major actors in the climate change negotiations around the central theme of increasing ambition and safeguarding the goals of the Paris Agreement. The forum, vital to maintain momentum for climate action, is showcasing big ideas to scale up ambition and is featuring local communities, indigenous people, governments and other stakeholders.

https://unfccc.int/news/work-on-national-climate-plans-is-not-on-hold-un-climate-chief

UNHCR, IOM, WHO, OHCHR

In a joint statement, UNHCR, IOM, OHCHR and the WHO stressed that refugees, migrants and displaced persons are at heightened risk of contracting the new coronavirus disease.

"Three quarters of the world's refugees and many migrants are hosted in developing regions where health systems are already overwhelmed and under-capacitated," the statement reads. It notes that many of them live in overcrowded camps, settlements, makeshift shelters or reception centres, where they lack adequate access to health services, clean water and sanitation.

https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061062

The statement is available at: https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/31-03-2020-ohchr-iom-unhcr-and-who-joint-press-release-the-rights-and-health-of-refugees-migrants-and-stateless-must-be-protected-in-covid-19-response

UNEP

Fiscal stimulus packages in Europe to "build back better" after the coronavirus pandemic provide an opportunity for initiating a transformational and green recovery with the creation of green jobs. One such investment opportunity is in sector coupling.

Sector coupling is the electrification of more areas of the economy—such as transport, buildings and industry—by plugging them directly into the power grid or switching to green hydrogen produced from renewables (indirect electrification).

Were such a radical change to happen in Europe, substantial progress could be made towards the continent becoming climate-neutral by 2050, according to a new study coordinated by Bloomberg.

The electrification of transport, buildings and industry could enable these sectors to shift away from dependence on fossil fuels in line with Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate action).

"Sector coupling across these sectors in Europe is possible, and could significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2050," says Niklas Hagelberg, a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) climate change specialist.

https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/towards-greener-economy-europe-through-sector-coupling

UN75 Initiative

In January 2020, the UN75 initiative launched a global conversation, inviting people around the world to discuss their priorities for the future, obstacles to achieving them, and the role of global cooperation in overcoming these challenges.

As of March 2020, over 13 million people in nearly all UN Member States had taken part in the initiative, with more than 40,000 completing the one-minute survey, and more than 330 dialogues held in 87 countries.

Respondents placed great emphasis on climate change and the environment, with protection of the environment one of the top three priorities. Climate and the environment were also identified as one of the top three global trends, and widely discussed in the dialogues. The vast majority of respondents agreed on the need for closer international cooperation to make progress in these and other areas.

COVID-19 has revealed the vulnerability of global systems to protect the environment, health and economy. There is an increasing recognition of how multiple economic, social and institutional drivers exacerbate environment risks, impacting on human health and increasing the burden on health services.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as the authoritative voice on the environment within the UN system, is well placed to help its member countries rise to the challenge of delivering a better future. UNEP will celebrate its own anniversary in 2022, having been at the heart of the environmental movement since the Stockholm Conference in 1972.

https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/global-public-tells-united-nations-take-action-climate-change-and

To read more about the initiative: https://www.un.org/en/un75/faq

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

PIFS

Pacific Islands Forum Leaders have invoked the Biketawa Declaration, to collectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as a major crisis to The Blue Pacific – its peoples, wellbeing and economies.
As an immediate priority, Forum Foreign Ministers met virtually yesterday to establish a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19, following two weeks of consultation with senior officials, regional agencies and development agencies through the Forum.
The Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C), under the Biketawa Declaration is the Region's mechanism that will provide the enabling political environment and commitment to expedite assistance and cooperation between member countries in preparing for and responding to COVID-19, by enabling the provision of medical and humanitarian assistance from regional, international and development partners in a timely, safe, effective and equitable manner.
"The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health emergency of unprecedented scale. It poses a real and extreme danger to the health and security of the Pacific peoples. Never before has the full Forum Membership simultaneously been in crisis," said the Honourable Kausea Natano, Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum and Prime Minister of Tuvalu.

https://www.forumsec.org/2020/04/08/pacific-islands-forum-foreign-ministers-agree-to-establish-a-pacific-humanitarian-pathway-on-covid-19/

Pacific - UN

In an interview for UN News, UNICEF Pacific Representative, Sheldon Yett, painted a grim picture of parents and caregivers losing their jobs, compounding the problem of shuttered classrooms.

Speaking to Julia Dean from the UN's Australia office, Mr. Yett highlighted the importance of focussing on how the pandemic is impacting children, and vulnerable families who rely on social services.

The interview is available at: https://news.un.org/en/audio/2020/04/1060792

16-30 April 2020

Organisations update

UNFCCC

The UNFCCC's Adaptation Committee (AC) hosted its first-ever virtual meeting, thereby showing its determination to continue delivering timely and high-quality products in the face of the pandemic.

Youssef Nassef, Director of the UNFCCC Adaptation Division, said: "The COVID-19 challenge is giving us the opportunity to rethink our perception of a lot of things including vulnerability, early action, rapid response and what timescales mean when confronted with a crisis. I'm hopeful that the AC will itself be an engine for the world to understand these lessons even after the crisis ends."

Key issues discussed at the virtual meeting were:

- How to most effectively recognize the adaptation efforts of developing countries through the lens of its synthesis paper on *How developing countries are addressing hazards*.
- Considering approaches to reviewing the overall progress made in achieving the global goal on adaptation of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience, and reducing vulnerability to climate change.
- Reviewing an initial draft outline for supplementary guidance for voluntary use by governments as they prepare their adaptation communication and discussing how to ensure that this guidance does not create an additional burden on developing countries.
- Finalizing the development—in partnership with the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG), partner organizations of the Nairobi work programme, and other stakeholders—of an inventory of methodologies for assessing adaptation needs related to action, finance, capacity-building, technological support and other areas. Members brainstormed ways to ensure the inventory is user-friendly, accessible, and tailored to the needs of the practitioners who will use it on the ground.
- Launching a discussion on the synthesis report the AC will prepare as an input into the global stocktake - a periodical assessment of progress towards achieving the purpose of the Paris Agreement and its long-term goals.
- Members also discussed the AC's draft technical paper on data for adaptation and reflected on how the paper can highlight opportunities for international cooperation to improve data availability, use and quality.

For more information, please visit: https://unfccc.int/news/unfccc-work-on-adaptation-continues

ILO

On 29 April 2020, Albania deposited its instrument of acceptance of the 1986 Instrument of Amendment to the ILO Constitution. To date, the 1986 Amendment has been ratified or accepted by 112 member States, including two Members of chief industrial importance (India and Italy). To enter into force, a further 13 ratifications or acceptances are required including at least three ratifications

from Members of chief industrial importance (from among Brazil, China, France, Germany, Japan, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, and United States).

https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/departments-and-offices/jur/news/WCMS_743200/lang--en/index.htm

For more information, please see: https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/departments-and-offices/jur/legal-instruments/WCMS_448693/lang--en/index.htm#q1

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga

Severe Tropical Cyclone Harold struck the Pacific Island countries of Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and Tonga in April 2020, causing the most significant damage in Vanuatu and Fiji.
In Vanuatu, Tropical Cyclone Harold impacted an estimated 176 161 people (65 percent of the total population), destroyed crops and cut many communities off from support due to flooding and destruction of roads.
Extensive damage to staple crops across Vanuatu has been reported in a recent assessment, demonstrating that food security is a major concern for all affected provinces.
FAO is collaborating with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) to lead the regional Pacific Food Security Cluster to assess the food security and nutrition situation and share information, building a coherent and coordinated response to the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Harold and restrictions put in place, including border closures, in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.
FAO urgently requires USD 3 million to assist 159 817 people to rapidly respond to the impacts of the Cyclone in Vanuatu by supplying agricultural inputs (seeds and tools) and building the capacity of crop and livestock subsistence farmers and fisherfolk to protect and restore food availability and livelihoods. Facilitating replanting before the dry season begins is essential as missing this time critical window will create unsurmountable barriers to farming households to meet their food needs or restore their livelihoods and maintain their dignity and self-reliance, ultimately prolonging the need for expensive and unsustainable humanitarian assistance.

http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/1274007/

01-15 May 2020

Organisations update

UNICEF

According to the "Lost at Home" report of UNICEF, there were 12 million new displacements of children in 2019: around 3.8 million of them caused by conflict and violence, and 8.2 million, due to disasters linked mostly to weather-related events.

The COVID-19 pandemic is only making a critical situation worse, the agency says. Camps or informal settlements are often overcrowded, and lack adequate hygiene and health services. Physical distancing is often not possible, creating conditions that are highly conducive to the spread of disease.

"When new crises emerge, like the COVID-19 pandemic, these children are especially vulnerable," said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore. "It is essential that Governments and humanitarian partners work together to keep them safe, healthy, learning and protected."

https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063162

The report is available at: https://www.unicef.org/media/70131/file/Lost-at-home-risks-and-challenges-for-IDP-children-2020.pdf

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Pacific Islands and COVID-19

Papua New Guinea: The country's national executive council this week announced a K600million (AU$270m) stimulus package, K100m ($45m) more than it originally planned. The government of China has delivered another 11 tonnes of medical equipment and supplies to combat Covid-19. The prime minister, James Marape, hopes to end the current state of emergency by June.

Bougainville: With the completion of a new isolation and treatment facility, Buka airport has finally been allowed to reopen. The autonomous region continues to provide Covid-19 training to its health workers.

West Papua: The pro-independence Morning Star Media has accused the government of Indonesia of using the Covid-19 epidemic as a pretext to militarise the provinces. It quotes independence leader Benny Wenda, who claims the continued detention of political prisoners in Indonesia's unsanitary and crowded jails is "political assassination by other means".

Fiji: The government of Fiji has announced its own CARE Fiji contact tracing app. The software was developed with assistance from Singapore. Use of the app will be voluntary.

Solomon Islands: Concerns have been raised that the government of Solomon Islands may be using its state of emergency in an unconstitutional manner, and that this overreach may be politically

motivated. The government, meanwhile, has just announced the nation's first repatriation flights. The first will depart Brisbane on 26 May.

Vanuatu: Testing can now be done in-country, although test kit volumes are limited due to a global shortage. Schools in areas not affected by cyclone Harold will reopen for full-time classes next week.
Samoa: In what is sure to be a welcome announcement for the rugby-mad nation, the government is preparing to lift all restrictions on sporting events. Non-contact sports were the first to resume. The prime minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, has threatened stiff fines if repatriated people do not honour strict quarantine rules following their return. Others, however, remain confused about the prerequisites to travel.

Tonga: The nation remains virus-free, but the government has nonetheless extended the state of emergency for another month. Some social and commercial gatherings are allowed, but only with strict limits. Borders remain closed.
New Caledonia: Opposition figures insist that France is running roughshod over the territory's sovereignty by imposing border controls, an area they insist is the sole purview of the New Caledonian government. MPs threatened to resign if no action was taken on the matter.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/20/coronavirus-in-the-pacific-weekly-briefing

16-31 May 2020

Organisations update

UNEP and FAO

Urgent action is needed to safeguard the biodiversity of the world's forests amid alarming rates of deforestation and degradation, according to the latest edition of The State of the World's Forests released today.

Published on the International Day for Biological Diversity (22 May), the report shows that the conservation of the world's biodiversity is utterly dependent on the way in which we interact with and use the world's forests.

The report was produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in partnership, for the first time, with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and technical input from the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

It highlights that some 420 million hectares of forest have been lost through conversion to other land uses since 1990, although the rate of deforestation has decreased over the past three decades.

Protecting forests is key to this, as they harbour most of the Earth's terrestrial biodiversity. This report shows that forests contain 60,000 different tree species, 80 percent of amphibian species, 75 percent of bird species, and 68 percent of the Earth's mammal species.

FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020, noted in the report, found that despite a slowing of the rate of deforestation in the last decade, some 10 million hectares are still being lost each year through conversion to agriculture and other land uses.

"Deforestation and forest degradation continue to take place at alarming rates, which contributes significantly to the ongoing loss of biodiversity," FAO Director-General, QU Dongyu, and the Executive Director of UNEP, Inger Andersen, said in the foreword.

The report presents a comprehensive overview of forest biodiversity, including world maps revealing where forests still hold rich communities of fauna and flora, such as the northern Andes and parts of the Congo Basin, and where they have been lost.

https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/un-report-worlds-forests-continue-shrink-urgent-action-needed

The report is available at: https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/state-worlds-forests-forests-biodiversity-and-people

IOM

To tackle this aspect of the crisis, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is issuing a practical guidance on producing responsive, factual communication campaigns during the pandemic and other migration contexts.

Available online, the toolkit aids in getting rapid and accurate information to those most in need, as well as to ensure balanced viewpoints. Data and solid research stand as the best defence against unfounded inflammatory content that cause harmful and discriminatory behaviour towards migrants and the communities, they share wherever they are. community," said IOM DG Vitorino.

The report is available at: https://publications.iom.int/books/iom-public-communication-campaign-toolkit

UN Migration Network

Statement by the United Nations Network on Migration:

"The United Nations Network on Migration is concerned by reports of States in many regions using forced return of migrants as a measure in response to COVID-19. The Network calls on States to suspend forced returns during the pandemic, in order to protect the health of migrants and communities, and uphold the human rights of all migrants, regardless of status. Successfully tackling the pandemic cannot be achieved without upholding human rights.

When temporary border closures and movement restrictions are deemed necessary to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, they must be implemented in a way that is non-discriminatory and proportionate to achieving the public health aim pursued. Such closures should incorporate health protocols and processes to guarantee fundamental rights at all times.

Keeping everyone safe means ensuring that no-one faces the risk of refoulement by being returned to places where their life, safety or human rights are threatened. It means that collective expulsions, such as arbitrary pushbacks of migrants and asylum-seekers at borders, must be halted; that protection needs must be individually assessed; and that the rule of law and due process must be observed. It also means prioritizing protection, including every child's best interests. These are obligations in international law that can never be put on hold and are vital to any successful approach to combatting COVID-19 for the benefit of all.

Forced returns can intensify serious public health risks for everyone – migrants, public officials, health workers, social workers and both host and origin communities. Forced returns place additional strain on countries of return. Many health systems are already stretched and lack capacity to protect returnees and their communities, including through testing upon arrival and quarantine and self-isolation measures that preserve family unity and ensure the best interests of children. Returnees may face additional risks during transfer and upon return, such as lack of access to adequate health care, poor water and sanitation systems, halted ground transportation, additional restrictions on

movement and violent discrimination and stigma in communities of return. In some contexts, returned migrants and asylum-seekers may also be at risk of experiencing protracted displacement, trafficking in persons, and extreme financial hardship with increases to already high levels of unemployment due to COVID-19.

The United Nations Network on Migration recalls the commitments made by States in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to uphold the human rights of all migrants, regardless of migratory status, and to improve migration governance, including by cooperating to save lives and to keep migrants out of harm's way. Using this framework for collective action to guide immigration practices during the pandemic, the Network urges States to advance Objective 21 of the Global Compact for Migration by guaranteeing due process and upholding the prohibition of collective expulsion and of returning migrants when there are foreseeable risks to their human rights.

The Network reiterates the Secretary-General's recent call to alleviate situations of vulnerability for individuals living outside their country of origin in the context of COVID-19, including by granting temporary residence to migrants and imposing a moratorium on deportations and other forced returns.

Many governments have set positive examples to ensure that migrants are included as part of their comprehensive response to COVID-19. These include temporarily suspending forced returns and providing visa and work permit extensions, temporary residence or other forms of regular status; as well as releasing people from immigration detention and finding safe, non-custodial alternative accommodations for them in the community rather than seeking their deportation.

The United Nations Network on Migration stands ready to support States in replicating, adapting and expanding these good practices – in line with the commitments set out in the Global Compact for Migration – that will contribute toward the realization of the rights of all migrants, regardless of status, while protecting everyone's health.

The United Nations Network on Migration was established to ensure effective, timely and coordinated system-wide support to Member States in their implementation, follow up and review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. While the Network's mandate is focused on migration and provides the context in which this statement has been written, the Network calls on States to also implement these recommendations where they apply to refugees and asylum-seekers and to protect the human rights and health of everyone equally, regardless of migration status."

https://www.iom.int/news/forced-returns-migrants-must-be-suspended-times-covid-19

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Asia and Pacific

In a resolution adopted on Thursday, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) declared "profound solidarity" with the countries and people affected by the disease and resolved "to pursue coordinated and decisive actions, to contain, mitigate and defeat the pandemic through reinforced regional and global cooperation."

"[The Commission] reiterates the importance of multilateralism and international cooperation, and encourages action by all members … to promote measures that may reinforce global solidarity in responding to the outbreak of COVID-19", read the resolution, which was tabled by the Chair and co-sponsored by several of the Commission member States.

International and regional cooperation was also highlighted as a means to strengthen the resilience of the region's countries, with regard to the socioeconomic effects of pandemics and other related crises.

Recovering from COVID-19 provides an opportunity to "build back better" in the region, added the text, "including by building more equal, inclusive and sustainable institutions, economies and societies that respect human rights and are more resilient in the face of any future pandemic, and other related crises faced by the region, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1064692