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578

Environment

UNECE finishes first Environmental Performance Review of Morocco

The first Environmental Performance Review (EPR) of Morocco, undertaken by UNECE in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), was launched on 21 May in Rabat. The review reveals both progress in Morocco's policy framework related to environment and sustainable development, as well as major challenges with regard to wastewater treatment, waste management and soil degradation.

The Review states that, since 2003, Morocco has been putting in place foundations for enhancing its environmental policy. To accelerate progress on preventing pollution and restoring environmental conditions, the Government has established a number of national programmes. The 2011 Constitution, which stipulates that sustainable development is the right of every citizen, also helped to give a new impetus to Morocco's sustainable development goals. In addition, the National Charter for Environment and Sustainable Development, adopted in 2011, has allowed Morocco to redouble its efforts to preserve the environment and strengthen sustainable development.

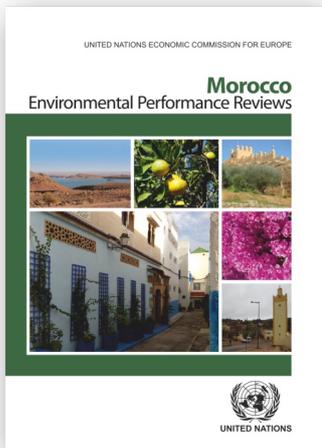
Despite this legal and policy progress, however, Morocco faces a number of challenges, in particular, with regard to waste management. The current level of sanitation systems, is inadequate in many parts of Morocco, with impacts on public health and ecosystems. Although by late 2012 the wastewater treatment level had increased to around 37 per cent, up from 8 per cent in 2005, the rate is still unacceptably low and reflects the shortage of municipal wastewater treatment plants. Past and current deficiencies in waste management are also having negative effects on the environment, including the pollution of surface water and groundwater, the proliferation of rodents, the release of nauseating odours and toxic fumes, the deterioration of landscapes and urban and peri-urban spaces, soil contamination and the risk of fires and explosions. Waste incineration (tyres, used oil and treated wood) in kilns and bathhouses is a major source of air pollution. Also, a large portion of waste is still disposed of in illegal dumpsites — often sources of methane and other gas pollutants — and are frequently located in or along streams or riverbeds and areas where water resources are vulnerable, which causes water pollution.

Another key area for concern are the excessive rates of soil degradation in Morocco, especially in the regions of the north and north-west where they exceed 2,000 tons per square kilometre annually. Water stress amplifies pressures on soils and aridity is a major cause of soil erosion. Some 93 per cent of soils are subject to significant aridity, with more than 23 million hectares affected by erosion, and the silting-up of dams aggravates the situation. These issues are compounded in turn by desertification and deforestation, with some 30,000 hectares invaded by the desert each year and hundreds of oases disappearing, threatening biodiversity and the lives of 2 million inhabitants.

The Review concludes with a set of 60 recommendations to help Morocco to improve its environmental management, to better integrate the goals of sustainable development into sectoral policies, to promote greater accountability to the public and to strengthen cooperation with the international community. The recommendations were approved by the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy.

The efficiency and effectiveness of the EPR methodology have attracted the attention of countries outside of the region, leading to requests for a transfer of know-how from UNECE to other United Nations regional commissions. □

The Review and its highlights are available online from: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=35483>
For more information on the EPR Programme, please visit: <http://www.unece.org/env/epr>
or contact: info.epr@unece.org.



Environment

UNECE is leading the way towards a regular environmental assessment: befriend SEIS!

Timely, reliable, high quality and easily accessible environmental information is essential both to underpin policy-making and to inform citizens about the quality of their environment. At the same time, organizing a vast array of environmental data and information and making it available in a comprehensible and targeted manner to decision makers and the public, as well as using it for reporting on the state-of-the-environment nationally and internationally is a challenging task.

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In the UNECE region, ministers of environment decided in 2011 to establish a regular process of environmental assessment and to develop the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) across the region in order to keep the pan-European environment under review. These two developments should serve multiple policy processes, including the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), and include the building of capacity in countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to monitor and assess their environment. Ministers will consider in 2016 the progress achieved.

Countries should develop SEIS based on their national needs and international commitments, e.g. under the MEAs and other environmental policies, as well as taking into account the SEIS principles. The Committee on Environmental Policy assessed in 2013 the development of SEIS in the region, and found the progress to be rather limited. In spite of an increasing number of SEIS and regular reporting activities, the landscape remains fragmented and a lack of coordination between these activities still persists. Understanding SEIS and its benefits for enabling a regular assessment and reporting, as well as for increasing the level of environmental awareness and education, continue to be a top priority and a key challenge, at the same time.



Friends of SEIS met in Geneva on 12 May 2014 and developed targets and performance indicators for assessing progress in establishing SEIS. The targets and milestones of establishing SEIS support each country to measure progress in the development of its national SEIS, designed to meet the national needs as well as to comply with international commitments made by the country, including under the MEAs.

The three building blocks of SEIS comprise content, institutional cooperation and infrastructure. A key feature of SEIS is its "common content", which should enable the preparation of regular state-of-the-environment and thematic reports, based on, but not limited to, a core set of common indicators agreed internationally.

The Group of Friends of SEIS includes: Austria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Turkey, Uzbekistan, the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy, the Bureau of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, the Working Group of Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, the UNECE Water Convention, the Water and Health Protocol, the European Commission, the European Environment Agency, UNECE, UNEP, WHO/Europe, OECD, the Regional Environmental Centres (CAREC, REC-Caucasus, REC-Moldova, REC-Russia), the European ECO Forum, ZOI Environment Network, and EU-funded MONECA project. □

For more information please visit:

<http://www.unece.org/env/cep/friendsofseis2014sessionmay.html>

Off the Press

Protecting your environment: The power is in your hands

The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) is a multilateral environmental agreement open for global accession. To promote the Convention to the general public in the UNECE region and beyond, a new brochure — Protecting your environment: The power is in your hands — has been published by UNECE and will be made available in the six official United Nations languages.

This Quick Guide introduces the reader to:

- The Convention's key principles and mechanisms (such as transparency, non-discrimination and the duty to future generations).
- The three rights under the Convention (access to information, participation in decision-making and effective access to justice in environmental matters).
- How implementation and compliance are being ensured by involving different players in the life of the Convention, such as Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.
- The relevance of the Convention today and how it is keeping pace with environmental developments. □

The Quick Guide is available at:

http://www.unece.org/env/pp/publications/the_power_is_in_your_hands.html

For more information on the brochure and to inquire about the availability of print copies, please contact Manja Vidic at: manja.vidic@unece.org.

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