

**Houston Area  
Model United Nations  
Standard Committee**



**UNDP**

**Topic A**

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# UTILIZING RENEWABLE ENERGY TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

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## *Committee Overview:*

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the United Nations' (UN) global development network. As one of the United Nations' operational programs, UNDP is directly involved on the ground in over 170 countries, in order to help implement policies within its three main pillars: sustainable development, democratic governance and peacebuilding, and climate and disaster resilience. In this context, UNDP works to promote and advance the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015. Finally, in an effort to enhance coordination between different UN program lines, UNDP also looks for a correct allocation of resources in order to maximize the efficiency of programs related to development in several countries by administering the UN Capital Development Fund. In all of their activities, the UNDP encourages the protection of human rights and the empowerment of women, minorities, and the poorest, and most vulnerable.<sup>1</sup>

The UNDP embodies Article 55 of the Charter of the United Nations (1945), which outlines the organization's responsibility to promote "higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development" as prerequisites to peace. Originally, development activities of the United Nations consisted largely of providing technical advice through the UN Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) and support for pre-investment projects through the UN Special Fund, created in 1949 and 1958 respectively, for the benefit of less developed countries.<sup>2</sup> To streamline these assistance programs, General Assembly resolution 2029 (XX) of 22 November 1965 consolidated the EPTA and the UN Special Fund to establish UNDP as of 1 January 1966.<sup>3</sup> Today, as the leader of the UN's "global development network," UNDP assists countries with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015).<sup>4</sup> As of 1 January 2015, UNDP adopted mandatory Social and Environmental Standards for all of its projects and programmes. These standards will strengthen UNDP's efforts for increased quality in its programmes and ensure social and environmental benefits for the people we serve.

UNDP obtains funding from governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector, and other sources. Donors contribute approximately \$5 billion to UNDP annually. The Executive

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/about-us.html>

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly *Expanded programme of technical assistance for economic development of underdeveloped countries (A/RES/304 (IV))*, 1949; UN General Assembly, *Establishment of the Special Fund (A/RES/1240 (XIII))*, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly, *Consolidation of the Special Fund and the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance in a United Nations Development Programme (A/RES/2029 (XX))*, 1965.

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015; UNDG, *The Sustainable Development Goals Are Coming to Life*, 2016.

Board decides on budgets and financial plans. Additional funding for individual projects and activities may be provided directly by organizations and governments, although UNDP remains the primary source of funding. With projects in over 170 countries, UNDP tracks allocation of its budget according to theme: for example, 28.6% of expenses have been allotted to inclusive and sustainable growth, 24.9% to basic services, 17.3% to early recovery, 10.9% to democratic governance, 5.4% to risk reduction, 2.8% to thought leadership, and 1% to gender equality. Depending on the project, UNDP works with state governments, political entities on a national and community level, and non-governmental organizations to ensure accountability, efficiency, and trust.<sup>5</sup>

As an assistance program, UNDP is “designed to support and supplement the national efforts of developing countries in solving the most important problems of their economic development, including industrial development.” Importantly, as emphasized by General Assembly resolution 59/250, national governments retain “primary responsibility” for development within their countries. UNDP’s work is carried out through its country offices, which are focused on helping countries develop policies, institutional abilities, leadership skills, and resilience to achieve poverty eradication and the reduction of inequalities. To assist in these efforts, UNDP also administers and utilizes the UN Volunteers program and the UN Capital Development Fund. To function effectively across the globe, UNDP works to strengthen partnerships, build capacity, and coordinate the UN’s development activities.<sup>6</sup>

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### *Topic Background:*

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#### **Sustainable Development Goals**

In 2015, the UN adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as new global commitments to be achieved by 2030.<sup>7</sup> Many targets are linked to hazardous waste disposal, three of which are particularly related to the responsible disposal of hazardous and electronic waste.<sup>8</sup> SDG 3 aims to reduce the number of deaths and illnesses caused by hazardous waste contamination of the air, water, and soil by 2030.<sup>9</sup> SDG 8 addresses labor rights, safety, and development of working environments, including formalizing dangerous sectors and increasing access to financial resources.<sup>10</sup> Finally, SDG 12 aims to encourage prevention and repurposing techniques to tackle excess waste creation, and to adopt a

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<sup>5</sup> UNDP, *Our funding: UNDP’s funding channels*, 2018; Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, *Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, of the United Nations Population Fund and of the United Nations Office for Project Services (DP/2011/18)*, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> UN General Assembly, *Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/RES/59/250)*, 2005, p. 3; UNDP, *About us: Overview*, 2018; *United Nations Handbook 2018-19*, 2018, p. 249.

<sup>7</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

life-cycle view of hazardous waste to minimize their overall effect on humans and the environment by 2020.<sup>11</sup> Overall, sound chemical management through inter organizational cooperation is a key aspect of sustainable development.

The current methods of producing, refining and utilizing energy have negative impacts on the environment. Not only does the burning of fossil fuels damage the environment, but it can also cause serious health problems for people. Coal is often burned in order to produce electricity. Gases are released when coal is burned and enters the atmosphere as air pollution, which can affect people's health by causing respiratory issues such as asthma. Renewable energy is a sustainable alternative source of energy compared to fossil fuels. Renewable energy sources do not contribute to the negative impact on the environment. Renewable energy can be used immediately and do not run out. The world relies heavily on fossil fuels to power automobiles, heat homes, and power other utilities. However, the earth's supply of fossil fuels is rapidly diminishing as demand continues to increase. Possible alternatives to fossil fuels are solar power, hydropower, tidal power, wind power, geothermal energy, and even nuclear energy, though it is a controversial form of power. These types of renewable energies are non-polluting and replenishable making them a better option than fossil fuels.

Currently, the burning of fossil fuels generates 66% of the world's electricity and contributes to approximately 60% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Renewable energies such as wind, solar, and hydropower produce little to no air pollution and provide economic benefits such as employing over 9.8 million people worldwide. 113 countries have adopted national targets for generating renewable energy. Energy efficiency policies have also been adopted in 137 countries. Both renewable energy and energy efficiency are critical components to transforming energy systems across the world and reduce GHG emissions from traditional sources of energy generation.<sup>12</sup>

Global primary energy grew by 2.9% in 2018 – the fastest growth seen since 2010, moving even further away from the accelerated transition envisaged by the Paris climate goals. This occurred despite a backdrop of modest GDP growth and strengthening energy prices. At the same time, carbon emissions from energy use grew by 2.0%, again the fastest expansion for many years, with emissions increasing by around 0.6 gigatonnes. That's roughly equivalent to the carbon emissions associated with increasing the number of passenger cars on the planet by a third. This growth was largely driven by China, US and India which together accounted for around two thirds of the growth. Relative to recent historical averages, the most striking growth was in the US, where energy consumption increased by a whopping 3.5%, the fastest growth seen for 30 years and in sharp contrast to the trend decline seen over the previous 10 years.<sup>13</sup>

Renewable power grew by 14.5%, slightly below its historical average, although its increase in energy terms (71 mtoe) was close to the record-breaking increase of 2017. Solar generation grew by 30 mtoe, just below the increase in wind (32 mtoe) and provided more than 40% of renewables

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> UN Environment, *Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency in Developing Countries: Contributions to Reducing Global Emissions*, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-full-report.pdf>

growth. By country, China was again the largest contributor to renewables growth (32 mtoe), surpassing growth in the entire OECD (26 mtoe). Hydroelectric generation increased by an above average 3.1%, with European generation rebounding by 9.8% (12.9 mtoe), almost offsetting its steep decline in the previous year. Nuclear generation rose by 2.4%, its fastest growth since 2010. China (10 mtoe) contributed almost three quarters of global growth, with Japan (5 mtoe) the second largest increase.<sup>14</sup>

One of the things to keep in mind is that although it is nice to discuss moving towards renewables instead of fossil fuel energy sources, there are many barriers obstructing this realization. One of the most basic of these is technological capability as most renewable energy sources are intermittent, meaning that they cannot generate energy 24/7 (such as wind and solar) without expensive large-scale energy storage options. Another major consideration is the importance of fossil fuel resources to the economies of many nations. Energy is the largest tradable commodity at present and will maintain its great political and economic significance for most countries, including both consumer and producer nations.

Renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies still compete with highly subsidized carbon-intensive energy generation.<sup>15</sup> In order to overcome these barriers, UN Environment encourages Member States to adopt policies that promote renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies, raises awareness about successful energy policies, dispels myths about renewable technologies, and encourages investment. Corporate sourcing of renewable energy through power-purchase agreements, utility green procurement programs, or unbundled energy attribute certificates has the potential to increase private-sector investment in renewable electricity generation.<sup>16</sup> In 2017, only 3.5% of electricity demand in the commercial and industrial sector was generated by renewable energies globally. One of the challenges is that renewable energy has high starting capital costs; therefore, access to financing can be a major barrier to private developers of renewable energy projects, especially in developing economies. Policies aimed at reducing financial risk, which could open up private investment, and incentivizing investment can improve developers' access to capital and potentially increase private investment in new projects.

The world is on an unsustainable path: the longer carbon emissions continue to rise, the harder and more costly will be the eventual adjustment to net-zero carbon emissions. Yet another year of growing carbon emissions underscores the urgency for the world to change.

### Past UN Action

The United Nations outlined the importance of access and implementation of renewable energy when it drafted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Goal 7 in particular deals with ensuring Environmental Sustainability. The MDG goal 7 wished to integrate principles of sustainable development into government policies in order to reverse the loss of important environmental resources, such as forests and biological diversity.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> UN Environment, *Renewable energy*.

<sup>16</sup> IRENA, *Corporate Sourcing of Renewable Energy: Market and Industry Trends*, 2018.

## Conclusion

Nuclear and geothermal power plants are two ways to generate energy (specifically electricity) which leave a very low carbon footprint while still generating power at continuously. Out of the two, nuclear is arguably the most environmentally friendly (with a few caveats such as waste removal) while geothermal is safer and can be used to heat homes as well as provide electricity. Furthermore, delegates should remember that energy and electricity is not necessarily the same thing. When it comes to oil and gas consumption, transportation is an industry with a huge environmental footprint. Delegates may also want to look into promoting less carbon intensive transportation options such as electrical or hybrid vehicles.

Reducing air pollution is important to meet SDGs for improving global health and mitigating climate change. Indoor and outdoor air pollution contribute to millions of premature deaths and reducing and preventing air pollution will require access to sustainable fuels, clean energy, and sustainable urban development plans. Increasing the mix of renewable sources of energy in the generation of electricity can reduce emissions of pollutants from the energy sector. Furthermore, transforming the transportation sector through incentivizing non-motorized transportation can have positive impacts on urban air quality.