

Press Release

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Rising demand for sand calls for resource governance

- New report explores sustainability challenges in sand extraction and consumption
- The Fourth UN Environment Assembly adopted a resolution on mineral resource governance
- Report aims to initiate a productive global conversation on sand extraction

Geneva, 07 May 2019 – With the global demand for sand and gravel standing at 40 to 50 billion tonnes per year, a new report by UN Environment reveals that aggregate extraction in rivers has led to pollution, flooding, lowering of water aquifers and worsening drought occurrence.

The report *Sand and sustainability: Finding new solutions for environmental governance of global sand resources* presents how shifting consumption patterns, growing populations, increasing urbanization and infrastructure development have increased demand for sand three-fold over the last two decades. Further to this, damming and extraction have reduced sediment delivery from rivers to many coastal areas, leading to reduced deposits in river deltas and accelerated beach erosion.

“We are spending our sand ‘budget’ faster than we can produce it responsibly. By improving the governance of global sand resources, we can better manage this critical resource sustainably and truly demonstrate that infrastructure and nature can go hand in hand,” said Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director of UN Environment.

According to the report, sand and gravel resources are the second-largest resource extracted and traded by volume after water. With sand extraction regulated differently around the world, important regions for biodiversity and ecosystems are made more vulnerable by challenges in the local implementation of these regulations. A growing trend of unsustainable and illegal extraction in marine, coastal and freshwater ecosystems makes this a sustainability challenge with a display of the various extraction impacts on terrestrial, riverine and marine environments.

Sand extraction is fast becoming a transboundary issue due to sand extraction bans, international sourcing of sand for land reclamation projects and impacts of uncontrolled sand extraction beyond national borders. International trade in sand and gravel is growing due to high demand in regions without local sand and gravel resources and is forecast to rise 5.5 per cent a year with urbanization and infrastructure development trends.

Unsustainable sand extraction does not only impact the environment but can also have far-reaching social implications. Sand removal from beaches can jeopardize the development of the local tourism industry, while removing sand from rivers and mangrove forests leads to a decrease of crab populations—negatively affecting women whose livelihood depends on the collection of crabs.

The report further alerts that to meet demand in a world of 10 billion people without harming the environment, effective policy, planning, regulation and management will be needed. Currently, sand extraction and use is defined by its local geography and governance context and does not have the same rules, practices and ethics worldwide. The report aims to be a starting point from which a productive global conversation on sand extraction can begin.

To curb irresponsible and illegal extraction, the report suggests a customization of existing standards and best practices to national circumstances. It also points towards investing in sand production and consumption measurement, monitoring and planning, and further suggests establishing dialogue between key players and stakeholders in the sand value chain based on transparency and accountability.

This report was presented to policymakers at the United Nations Environment Assembly where a new Mineral Resource Governance Resolution was adopted, including call for actions on sustainable sand management.

It was financed by Switzerland and in collaboration with the University of Geneva.
The report can be accessed at <http://unepgrid.ch/sand>

NOTES TO EDITORS

Download the report here : <https://tinyurl.com/sand-sustainability> **(Under embargo until 7th May 2019)**

About UN Environment

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