

## UNEP / Rio+20 Consultation

### Major Group Input Takes Shape

In the interest of increasing engagement by Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS) in preparations for the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) convened a consultation at the Federal German Ministry for Environment and Nuclear Safety in Bonn, Germany. Participants used this opportune moment, exactly two months until the deadline for contributions to Rio+20's "zero draft" Outcome Document,<sup>1</sup> to deliberate "The Role of Civil Society in Shaping the Sustainable Development Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". Tomoko Nishimoto, Director of UNEP's Division of Regional Cooperation, welcomed attendees and introduced an ambitious agenda; while Sascha Gabizon, Co-Chair of the UNEP Major Groups Facilitating Committee, emphasised the leading role that UNEP was playing in preparations for Rio+20 and the need for focused efforts to fully integrate the environmental and social pillars into the concept of sustainable development. This report presents the main points of Angela Cropper's keynote address (A. Cropper is Senior Advisor to the Executive Director of UNEP), and provides a brief description of some of the outcomes and discussions during the remainder of the meeting.

Angela Cropper's address confronted widespread scepticism, and the belief that Rio+20 may not result in



Angela Cropper

Courtesy: IISD

worthwhile outcomes. She maintained that the conference would happen and that the international community must use this unprecedented opportunity to address "green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication" and "the institutional framework for sustainable development [IFSD]". Although much else

has changed since 1992, society remains at nearly the same point in terms of development processes, pathways and prospects. She said that 2012 could result in a realignment of the current paradigm with Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development<sup>2</sup> and suggested this change would be at the heart of future decisions. Furthermore, the overarching success of the products of Rio+20 would depend on the form of the conference. If it followed the lines of Rio 1992, there was a chance of reaching a higher plane; however, if it was more like the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg 2002, targets or invitations developed in isolation and in an *ad hoc* manner may not result in a comprehensive package. She noted that, over the past 20 years, sustainable development continues to be equated almost exclusively with the environment. The idea that three pillars (economic, social and environmental) are mutually interrelated, maintains a sense of rigidity instead of reflecting the need for an integrative and adaptable process. In addition, since Rio, the constituency of engagement in these processes has tended to be more environment-focused, despite the fact that the impending challenge for all stakeholders is to place economic and social dimensions within the environment.

Rio+20 could be an historic event, although the outcome depends on the preparatory process and using the opportunity for new orientation and momentum. This was especially important when looking to the second theme of the conference concerning IFSD, since sustainable development has yet to be approached in an integrated way. There is thus a need for new measures of development apart from GDP. Rio+20 could generate a sense of political commitment to measure development in an entirely new way.<sup>3</sup> The preparatory process could also emphasise equity and participation, not only inter-generational but intra-generational, as fundamental to wellbeing and sustainable development.

Angela Cropper stressed that more emphasis on public participation was necessary: "Unless sustainable development is a widely-based community process and preoccupation, we will not get very far". This highlights the need for enhanced investment at the national and local level to promote mechanisms for public involvement, as coherence and integration can only be achieved where the electorate is given legitimacy. Such budgetary allocations should also increase the involvement of youth, which has yet to receive affirmative attention; a political commitment to provide the next generation with the necessary training and education is needed.

Business and industry play central roles in achieving sustainable development. The "economy pillar" has led for the last 20 years and A. Cropper now asks how it can operate at the heart of social and environmental goals. The needs for ideas, innovation and investment are well

understood but the economy must also operate within the parameters of serving sustainable development, thus requiring greater oversight. Least developed countries have not made great progress, but Rio+20 could provide a policy framework to assist capacities and thus make lasting achievements. If developing countries are to leap-frog some of the more uncomfortable experiences of development, Type 2 relationships (as discussed at WSSD) can be very beneficial in promoting cooperation with business and industry. Nevertheless, the results of past experiences must be examined and the best practices communicated.

Angela Cropper identified three issues as the most complex and requiring swift integration into sustainable development efforts:

- 1) Regarding marine commons as a truly global concern, the science is clear, the trends established and the policy needs explicit, but decision making is lagging and not commensurate with present knowledge and recommendations. The time has come for commitments in the interest of livelihoods, economies and biodiversity.
- 2) National food security issues are no longer separable from other international pressures. The question is how to orchestrate programmes in the face of challenges such as land management, land tenure, desertification, and climate change.
- 3) Reflecting both economic and social issues, the issue of energy security necessitates consideration of access, efficiency and all options for renewable sources.

These issues require recognition of our common interests and a critical examination of how global partnerships can be enhanced, and she noted that no country in the world can be described as being on track for sustainable development.

Regarding the role of stakeholders and community interests in Rio+20, Angela Cropper pointed out the need to go beyond the interests of one group, while asking if contemporary issues could be addressed locally or must first be considered at the international level. She emphasised that national governance arrangements were the key to advancing efforts and that there needed to be a societal movement to distinguish between government and community ownership of the process. Currently, incoherence at the national level was reflected at the international level. In order to achieve the much-desired integrated approach to policy, attendees should engage all ministries to avoid the misconception that environmental constituencies are the only stakeholders in sustainable development. She also emphasised the need to build a system that promotes systematic participation, to ensure an integrated approach and continuity even when government administrations change.

Regarding preparation for Rio+20, Angela Cropper recognised that there were many issues competing for attention, and advised participants to maintain unity of purpose, to link initiatives, and to use such platforms to defend national interests instead of propping up collective efforts. Finally, she appealed for participants to maintain an

overarching loyalty to mankind as a whole and to chart a new civilization for equity and sustainable development.

There followed a short question-and-answer session considering a wide range of topics, including, *inter alia*, the following:

- Emphasis that Rio+20 is not a final destination, but an agenda for the future;
- Increased calls for political commitment to ensure implementation;
- The current lack of government presence in the preparatory process;
- The current slow rate of engagement of civil society;
- An unclear definition of “green economy” and the need for a less anthropocentric vision;
- “Sufficiency” as a missing link within green economy discussions;
- An appeal for the involvement of line ministries of government to participate in and take responsibility for all three dimensions of sustainable development;
- Calls for the establishment of cross-sectoral committees or portfolios within executive branch cabinets to assess the harmony of policies;
- A proposal for IFSD to address the benefits of establishing a ministerial threshold with the systematic involvement of civil society;
- The opportunity offered for national economic and social councils to integrate environment into their mandates;
- Reform of UN/ECOSOC to integrate environment within its mandate;
- UNEP reaching beyond conventional partners and offering new tools for promoting measurement and participation;
- Necessary tools to move away from GDP and to place greater emphasis on the ecosystem, rights-based and cultural approaches to governance;
- The prospect for binding agreements on Corporate Social Responsibility.

Participants worked in parallel working group sessions, presenting at meeting’s end the following outcomes: “Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development”;<sup>4</sup> “Green Economy in the Context of Poverty Eradication”;<sup>5</sup> and “Foresight Process”.<sup>6</sup>

Working Group 1 looked especially at gaps in the international ministerial processes on International Environmental Governance (IEG) and how this affects the regional and national levels of governance. With regard to institutional arrangements, the question remains if more leverage is to be had within the environment pillar or sustainable development as a whole. As to compliance and enforcement, the working group acknowledged the importance of a holistic view of State commitments, the need for peer review and/or an ombudsman, and the role of the judiciary. It was agreed that national responsibilities needed to be clearly defined, for form to follow function, and increased access to information would ensure the fulfilment of mandates. When addressing IFSD in the Rio+20 process, MGS should continue to play the role of mediator and collaborator while making clear and specific

proposals. Generally, there is an opportunity to advocate links between environment and/or sustainable development and human rights; increase stakeholder involvement in sustainable development committees; empower the local level; foster a more holistic approach to and integration of the three pillars of sustainable development; create a registry of sustainable development commitments; and craft legal frameworks addressing commons beyond national sovereignty.

Felix Dodds, Executive Director of the Stakeholder Forum, emphasised that MGS had been offered an unprecedented role to affect the outcomes of Rio+20. Considering that Major Groups are referred to in eight of the 29 paragraphs of UN/GA Resolution 64/236, it is imperative to maintain a unity of purpose and use the remaining preparatory period to fine-tune agendas and ensure that decisions at the global level are translated to the local level. Similarly, at the close of the meeting, Stephan Contius, of the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) and head of its division responsible for the United Nations and Cooperation with Developing and Newly Industrialized Countries, presented concluding remarks related to the Rio+20 process. He began with the importance of not ending up with an outcome similar to 2009<sup>7</sup> and expressed the hope that the conference could usher in a new style of joining forces between governments, civil society and business. He noted that this was a window of opportunity to be taken seriously and that practical results were needed. In this connection, he assured the audience that this did not necessarily mean starting a new environmental organisation, but upgrading UNEP and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)<sup>8</sup> to allow for greater flexibility, authority and accountability to achieve sustainable development. (ATL)

## Notes

1 In light of paragraph 20(e) of UN/GA Resolution 64/236 stating: "It is important that there be efficient and effective preparations at the local, national, regional and international levels by Governments and the United Nations system so as to ensure high-quality inputs without placing undue strain on Member States", and in response to the invitation from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Preparatory Committee, the "Co-Chairs" [of the UNCSDBureau] Guidance Note" was transmitted to Member States and other stakeholders to guide their inputs and contributions in writing by 1 November, 2011, for inclusion in a compilation document to serve as basis for the preparation of a zero draft of the outcome document. Three principles underlying the guidance note are as follows: "First, it is meant to facilitate the preparation of inputs, and is not intended to be binding in any way; Member States, Major Groups and UN system organizations are invited to use this guidance note as appropriate. Second, all submissions will be posted in full as submitted on the UNCSDBureau website (<http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/>). Third, the guidance provided here pertains exclusively to the provision of inputs for the compilation document, and should not be construed in any way as prejudging the structure or content of the zero draft of the outcome document" (see: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/documents/guidancenote.pdf>).

2 "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature". Annex I, Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992).

3 Angela Cropper also mentioned the possibility of adopting an environmental index – a series of measurements such as the Human Development Index or the synchronising of national accounting systems.

4 Decision 26/1 regarding "International environmental governance" adopted by the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the Governing Council of UNEP: "Invites the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, in its consideration of the institutional framework for sustainable development, to consider the options for broader institutional reform identified in the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome as a contribution to strengthening the institutional framework for

sustainable development by improving international environmental governance"; and "Also invites the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at its second session to initiate a full analysis of the financial, structural and legal implications and comparative advantages of the options identified in the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome, using the expertise of relevant United Nations system entities, including the United Nations Environment Programme and relevant stakeholders and major groups eligible to participate in the Preparatory Committee".

According to the minutes of the 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the UNCSDBureau, the Governing Council's decision was discussed and a two-track approach agreed on to seek the views of the Bureau Members' constituencies, as well as those of the Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs Plus (EC-ESA Plus) on the feasibility and costs of such an analysis. A suggestion was also made to consider a process similar to the one followed for conducting the study on "The Transition to a Green Economy: Benefits, Challenges and Risks from a Sustainable Development Perspective", but no decision was made.

During the 15<sup>th</sup> Bureau Meeting, Members reviewed progress related to the EC-ESA Plus's conclusion that it would be feasible to undertake this study; and it could be undertaken by engaging a team of consultants costing around US\$ 30,000–40,000. Additionally, the Bureau was informed that the EC-ESA Plus membership decided to undertake a broader study on the governance of all three pillars of sustainable development.

Minutes of the 16<sup>th</sup> Bureau Meeting state, "The Secretariat in close collaboration with EC-ESA Plus is undertaking a study on IFSD. This study should be viewed as a living document since it will be subject to revision based on the comments received from different stakeholders. The study will also encompass an analysis of the options requested by the UNEP Governing Council. The Secretariat has drafted and shared the Terms of Reference for the study with members of EC-ESA Plus to seek their inputs and comments. A preliminary draft of the report will be ready by end July 2011 and the study is expected to be completed by end of September 2011".

In a note of the Bureau's Dialogue with the Principals/Representatives of EC-ESA Plus on 7 July, Conference Secretary-General, Sha Zukang, briefed the participants on the status of preparation of the study on IFSD. It was slated to be ready in September to serve as an important source of information for the deliberations of Member States and other Stakeholders.

At the time of submitting this article, the minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> Bureau Meeting on 12 September had not yet been released. Any outputs will be available at: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=13&nr=315&menu=28>.

5 Through its Issue Management Group (IMG) on green economy, the Environmental Management Group (EMG) is currently concluding its work on the report "Investing in a Green and Inclusive Economy", which provides a multi-sectoral perspective on the issue from across some 35 agencies. The target timeline for finalisation is the second inter-sessional meeting of UNCSDBureau in December 2011.

6 The Foresight Process, under the purview of a Panel of High-Level Experts appointed by UNEP, is to inform the UN system and the greater policy community about global environmental issues requiring increased attention in the future. The 21 issues highlighted through this process on emerging issues are as follows: 1. Aligning Governance to the Challenges of Global Sustainability; 2. Transforming Human Capabilities for the 21st Century: Meeting Global Environmental Challenges and Moving Towards a Green Economy; 3. New Challenges for Ensuring Food Safety and Food Security for 9 Billion; 4. Broken Bridges: Reconnecting Science and Policy; 5. Social Tipping Points? Catalyzing Rapid and Transformative Change in Human Behaviour for the Environment; 6. New Insights on Water-Land Interactions: Shift in the Management Paradigm; 7. Beyond Conservation: Integrating Biodiversity Across the Ecological and Economic Agendas; 8. New Challenges for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: Managing the Unintended Consequences; 9. Accelerating the Implementation of Environmentally-Friendly Renewable Energy Systems; 10. Greater Risk than Necessary? The Need for New Approaches to Minimizing Risks of Novel Technologies and Chemicals; 11. Boosting Urban Sustainability and Resilience; 12. The New Rush for Land: Responding to New National and International Pressures; 13. Potential Collapse of Oceanic Systems Requires Integrated Ocean Governance; 14. Changing the Face of Waste: Solving the Impending Scarcity of Strategic Minerals and Avoiding Electronic Waste; 15. Shortcutting the Degradation of Inland Waters in Developing Countries; 16. Acting on the Signal of Climate Change in the Changing Frequency of Extreme Weather Events; 17. The Decommissioning of Nuclear Reactors and their Environmental Consequences; 18. New Concepts for Coping with Creeping Changes and Imminent Thresholds; 19. Adaptive Governance for Addressing Increasing Pressures on Coastal Ecosystems; 20. Coping with Migration Caused by New Aspects of Environmental Change; 21. Consequences of Glacier Retreat: Economic and Social Impacts.

7 See EPL 40(1): 11–25 and EPL 40(4): 134–135.

8 For insight into proposals see "Legal Questions and Answers on IEG Reforms: WEO and UNEO?" Issues Brief #4: *The Environmental Dimension of IFSD*. Available online at: <http://www.unep.org/environmentalgovernance/Portals/8/InstitutionalFrameworkforSustainabledevPAPER4.pdf>.