

# ENHANCING MAJOR GROUPS ENGAGEMENT IN THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME: DRAFT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Following Agenda 21 (1992), various declarations (Rio in 1992, Nairobi in 1995; Malmö in 2000, 55/2 United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000) and Governing Council Decisions (18/4 in 1995 on the role of non-governmental organizations in the UNEP in 1995; 21/19 in 2001 on the role of civil society), decision SS.VII/5 of the 7th special session of the GC/GMEF in 2002, requested the Executive Director “to further develop, and review and revise as necessary the strategy for engaging civil society in the programme of activities of the United Nations Environment Programme, in consultation with Governments and civil society”. It added that the strategy “should provide clear direction to the secretariat to ensure that all programmes take into account opportunities for multi-stakeholder participation in design, implementation, monitoring of activities, and dissemination of outputs”.

In this context, the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch identified three major spheres of action:

1. Civil society<sup>1</sup> input at governance level,
2. Civil society engagement in policy and programme design and implementation, and
3. Strengthening institutional relations through information management and a decentralized approach.

Over the last years, a number of activities were foreseen or initiated by the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch (MGSB) in relation to these three spheres of action. Building on past experiences, the MGSB performed in 2006 a series of analyses<sup>2</sup> with a view to assess the progress made in relation to the three spheres of action and to make recommendations for improvement. Some key findings are summarized in Annex 2.

Beyond the activities performed by the MGSB or in close collaboration with the branch, civil society (CS) is involved with UNEP in a wide variety of ways and at numerous levels. 180 civil society organizations (CSOs) are currently accredited to UNEP Governing Council. According to an internal survey (2004) and the divisions’ websites (2006), UNEP is involved with more than 650 CSOs. The number and the type of CSOs vary largely from one division to the other: among the 650 CSOs identified, 578 (89%) work with one of the UNEP divisions only. In this context, the relationship with CS raises a number of questions:

- What are our objectives in CS engagement?
- How to make the engagement more effective in supporting UNEP’s mission and objectives?
- What can we offer and gain from CS?
- How to engage leading CSOs in a long-term strategic partnership with UNEP?
- How to engage CSOs at policy and programmatic levels and with various UNEP divisions and offices?

The present document reviews the three spheres of action, identifies areas of achievement and, areas for improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> The term civil society encompasses in this paper the nine major groups as defined by Agenda 21 (scientific and technological community, business and industry, indigenous peoples and their communities, workers and trade unions, local authorities, farmers, women, children and youth and NGOs).

<sup>2</sup> The assessments include the following : Status of accredited International CSOs (January 2006); Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch Retreat outcomes (March 2006); Quantitative assessment of participation in the GCSF (2000-2006) (April 2006) ; Evaluation of the 7<sup>th</sup> GCSF (April 2006); Evaluation of the Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment (April 2006); Briefing note on indigenous peoples (April 2006); Planning of the implementation of GC23/11 (2005-2006); Mapping of UNEP interaction with CS (June 2006).

## 2. CIVIL SOCIETY INPUT AT GOVERNANCE LEVEL

Member countries of UNEP while debating and adopting Governing Council decisions or discussing major environmental policies, often pay homage to the contributions of CSOs and how much they (the governments) benefit in ensuring sound environmental governance. Likewise UNEP too benefits from the diversity of perspectives that CSOs bring to the table, valuable research and advocacy functions they perform and in helping foster long-term, broad-based support for UNEP.

### Improving the Global Civil Society Forum cycle

Improvements in the process of the Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF) cycle have been made, including through the regional consultation meetings and the set up of a Global Steering Committee. However, there remain challenges in enhancing the impact of the GCSF cycle, through a more continuous engagement with CS, and a more targeted approach to participation, related to expertise, accreditation status, and major groups and gender balance. To this end, the MGSB has suggested a series of new modalities for the preparation and organization of the regional consultation meetings and the GCSF (Memo Ref. DPD/L/KR/SDC dated 9 June 2006). These include collaborating with external facilitators from CS, working closer to a Global Steering Committee and a chair elected for one year, ensuring the participation of all major groups, developing more capacity building sessions, improving the outreach and promoting regular evaluations and a continuous learning process.

A crucial partner for the success of the CS engagement at governance level is the Secretariat of Governing Bodies, an important vehicle in the relationship between Governments and CSOs, particularly the accredited ones when preparing and during the GC/GMEF.

In regards to the relationship between Governments and CSOs, the CPR has a critical role to play as it complies with Governing Council Decision 22/18 of 7 February 2003 according to which *“the Committee of Permanent Representatives should continue its work as mandated by decision SS.VII/5 on enhancing the engagement of civil society in the work of the United Nations Environment Programme in considering the amendment of rule 69 of the Rules of Procedure and any consequential amendments of the Rules of Procedure, taking into account the evolving relationship between civil society and the United Nations system and the ongoing United Nations reform process”*.

In light of the above new ways of fostering interactions between governments and CS, such as mixed delegations or roundtables, should be promoted. This could be done during the regional consultation meetings, the CPR meetings, the GCSF and the GC/GMEF, as well as during other CS events. In this context, reforming the Global Ministerial Environmental Forum is a path to be investigated.

### Leveraging accreditation

As of November 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, 180 CSOs are accredited to UNEP Governing Council, with an important growth in 2005 (+59 CSOs).

Major group or stakeholder	Total
ENGOS	115
Business and Industry	15
Scientific and research community	13
Children and Youth	11
Faith based groups	7
Women's groups	6
Workers and Trade Unions	5
Indigenous peoples and their communities	3
Farmers' groups	3
Local authorities	2

The MGSB is working on increasing the number of major groups permanently engaged with UNEP, including local authorities, indigenous peoples and their communities, business and industry, umbrella institutions and large NGO networks.

The MGSB also sees accreditation as a gateway for broader engagement at the programmatic level and to create synergies between policy and programmatic levels (See sphere 2). Accredited CSOs may indeed provide capacity and expertise valuable for the programme implementation. On the other hand, the knowledge and field experience of international CSOs engaged in the programme of work may bring interesting perspectives into the policy debate.

### **Liaising with the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR)**

Other areas of improvements include CS liaison with the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR). In order to improve the visibility of the comments submitted and in order to increase their impact, the SGB might put in place procedures to: send the comments electronically to all CPR members, and not only in hard copy during the meetings themselves; provide additional information on the accreditation of CSOs at UNEP to the CPR members, through the cover note and a short oral statement (Memo Ref. DPDL/NS/SDC dated 18 May 2006). Meetings with the CPR and civil society on specific topics might also be organized on a regular basis.

### **Strengthening governance at various levels**

Since 2003, UNEP participate to the Sub-regional Environmental Policy Dialogue (SEPD) in Asia and the Pacific, whose membership comprises 5 Ministers of Environment and 5 eminent civil society leaders (one from each sub-region). Similar dialogues should be encouraged by UNEP at various levels.

## **3. CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY AND PROGRAMME DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION**

CSOs can help implement UNEP's work programme far beyond UNEP's capabilities. They can adapt the global UNEP work programme to national or local realities, and liaise between UNEP and local communities. Civil society provides scientific, policy and law expertise necessary for design and implementation. CS can also act as watchdogs or through advocacy, to foster accountability.

### **Improving coordination and developing synergies**

As stated in Decision SS.GC.VII/5 (2002), incorporating civil society (CS) in policy and programme development is mandatory. Examples of engagement of CS with UNEP at policy and programmatic levels are numerous: GEO process, partnerships with the private sector, TUNZA programme, consultation through projects, MEAs, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), etc.

Although the engagement of CS in the programme remains the responsibility of the various divisions and offices, the MGSB has a key facilitative role to play for CS participation and in the identification of CS expertise for UNEP. However as stated earlier, UNEP relationship with CS currently appears relatively fragmented.

Efforts have to be made to make the engagement with CS more effective in supporting UNEP's mission, through synergies between various UNEP divisions and offices. Proper coordination should be ensured within UNEP while capitalizing on the numerous relationships UNEP has developed with CS at multiple levels. In this context, the MGSB is planning to revitalize the inter-divisional CS task group.

MGSB also recommends in the long term to create CS posts in each (out posted) office, with reporting mechanisms to DRC. This would build upon recent successful experience in North America, where RONA houses a half-time special advisor focused on civil society engagement efforts. Financial implications for the various offices and divisions and possible cost-sharing mechanisms should be investigated.

### **Developing various forms of consultation**

The engagement between UNEP and CSOs can be strengthened in many ways. UNEP's Global Women's Assembly on Environment organized in 2004 and the recent Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment (2006), which established long term commitments, are good examples of successful initiatives. Other major groups should be engaged further and other forms of consultation around key issues developed.

*Ad hoc* roundtables on specific subjects, bringing together CS and UNEP experts and management, should be organized on a regular basis at the regional and divisional levels, in order to foster CS engagement in programme design and implementation, through experience and knowledge sharing and the identification of possible areas of collaboration.

Multi-stakeholder dialogues – including between different major groups should also be promoted. UNEP has for example taken part to several important Global Policy Networks (GPN) such as the World Commission on Dams and the Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (REN 21). The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) also represents a best practice in terms of environmental policy development. Building on these experiences, UNEP should consider engaging further in GPN and take a leading role in setting up GPN on environmental issues, capitalizing on its unique position in the environmental arena and its relations with various major groups and stakeholders.

The MGSB also encourages the creation of a Civil Society Advisory Group to the Executive Director. The Civil Society Advisory Group would provide qualitative input to policy and programme strategy formulation and ongoing advice to the Executive Director and the Senior Management Team. The members of the Civil Society Advisory Group would be selected for a period of time on the basis of their experience and expertise in environmental and sustainable development issues, building on existing UNEP CS partners.

### **Integrating CS expertise in policies and programmes : towards an integrated approach**

Systematic integration of CS views and expertise when drafting technical and policy background documents for the CPR and UNEP strategies would also be a major step in engaging CS in UNEP's work. The support and commitment of all UNEP divisions is needed to achieve this goal.

The substantive work of UNEP on specific thematic areas should be complemented by a cross-sectoral approach (i.e. knowledge of the major groups' views, needs, dynamics, etc.), to improve the quality of the policies and programmes developed. To this end, consultations and multi-stakeholder dialogues are critical. In the medium-term, the MGSB also needs to build in-house capacity to contribute - with a major groups and socio-economical angle - to the development of UNEP policies and programmes. This objective can be achieved through external training, on-the-job training and by working with major groups partners.

In the same state of mind, the MGSB is developing a series of programme focusing on specific major groups such as workers and trade unions, indigenous peoples and their communities.

## **4. STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS THROUGH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

Civil society is well-placed to raise public awareness and engage the general public in an informative and educative manner, creating a multiplier effect. Many civil society organizations are closely tied to channels of media and can disseminate relevant information effectively. Civil society can also educate the public, through schools, universities, scientific institutions, or through targeted campaigns, to raise the awareness of new generations to their roles and duties so that they become responsible citizens.

## **Building a communication strategy**

The MGSB has an important role to play, together with DCPI, in the exchange of information between UNEP and CS.

Our website has increasingly provided relevant information to CS, mainly in regards to UNEP's activities with CS. New pages have been created for specific major groups, such as women's groups, workers and trade unions, as well as on accreditation. Special events like WAVE and the Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment and the yearly GCSF cycle rely on increasing outreach efforts. However, no communication strategy for UNEP (and CS) has ever been formally developed. New paths should be investigated.

Communication tools such as an on-line discussion forum and newsletters should be investigated and the current e-mail engagement with accredited CSOs should be reinforced in a continuous manner. The multiplication of databases developed by different parts of UNEP, including in the context of the Bali Strategic Plan, raise questions of lack of coordination within UNEP. The directory of CSOs developed by the MGSB in 2004 is being upgraded to facilitate maintenance and improve accuracy. CSOs, as well as UNEP divisions and offices will be able to update themselves the data and search on-line profiles of organizations, including information on the areas of expertise as foreseen in the Bali Strategic Plan.

## **Widening the publications portfolio**

The MGSB has worked on a series of publications, "Cultural Diversity and Biodiversity for Sustainable Development" (2003), "Natural Allies – UNEP and Civil Society" (2004), "Women and the environment" (2004) and "Labour and the environment" (2006). The development of a broadbased publications portfolio that complements the substantive work of UNEP on specific sectors, such as energy or water, by taking into account major groups' dynamics or needs (E.g. Youth and mobility, Indigenous peoples and biodiversity) might offer interesting insights to policy makers and CSOs.

In light of the above, the MGSB recommends creating a communications specialist post, working on communication with CS.

## **5. STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS THROUGH A DECENTRALIZED AND PARTNERSHIP APPROACH**

Per decision SS.VII/5, every programme is requested to "*take into account opportunities for multi-stakeholder participation in design, implementation, monitoring of activities, and dissemination of outputs*".

Every UNEP division, regional and out-posted office is at the front line of civil society engagement. The MGSB in isolation cannot achieve the mainstreaming of CSO engagement and true integration will require a focused effort by all parts of UNEP.

A task group of CS focal points was established in March 2002. The task group was created to examine possibilities for a more coordinated approach to working with the various major groups. However, the task group is not active anymore, the approach is still very much uncoordinated and the task group needs to be re-launched. New ways of ensuring the commitment of the task group members, such as the e-pas, and a continuous flow of information and experience sharing must be envisaged.

As part of this effort, the new structure and format of the directory of CSOs managed by the MGSB will allow divisions, regional and out-posted offices to enter on-line the profiles of their CS partners, which will facilitate exchange of contacts and information in regards to CS.

CS focal points, in particular from the regional offices, are also expected to help in identifying and engaging with umbrella organizations and large CSO networks

## 6. HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESSOURCES

Funding the work with CS is an important concern. Mandatory activities such as the GCSF are only partially funded by the environment fund and extra-budgetary resources have decreased over the last few years. The GCSF should be funded totally with environment fund resources. As incorporating CS in the policy and programmatic levels is mandatory according to the Governing Council's decision, divisions and regional offices should all allocate resources for that purpose in their budgets, including adequate staffing

In terms of human resources, in three years, the number of professional staff in the MGSB has increased by one and half only (one s/m in Nairobi and one part time s/m in Washington). The branch recommends investing in human resources to meet its work plan, in particular as new major groups are engaged with and in regards to communication and information management. In the long term, the MGSB recommends to create CS posts in each regional office and division, with reporting mechanisms to DPDL.

## 7. WAY FORWARD

Over the last several years, significant improvements have been made in engaging civil society in UNEP's work, but much more can be done both at the policy and programmatic levels and through information management and the current decentralized approach.

The annex 1 presents a plan of implementation over the short, medium and long terms. Top priorities include:

- Improve relevance of engagement between UNEP and civil society at governance level and the amendment to rule 69 of the rules of procedure of the Governing Council - per Governing Council Decision 22/18 of 7 February 2003
- Reform the GMEF
- Improve the GCSF cycle (quality) including regional consultation meetings (E.g. involvement of UNEP experts and policy makers)
- Develop new forms of consultation (GPN, civil society advisory group to the Executive Office, *ad hoc* roundtables)
- Complement the substantive work of UNEP on specific sectors (E.g. water, energy) with a major groups and socio-economical angle (i.e major groups' angle, views, needs, dynamics, behaviours etc.), to improve the quality of the policies and programmes designed (integrated approach)
- Engage further with specific major groups and in particular develop an indigenous peoples' programme, promoting full and effective participation of indigenous peoples at the policy and programmatic levels in compliance with the Programme of Action for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

Efforts have to be made to make the engagement with civil society more effective in supporting UNEP's mission, through synergies between the policy and programmatic levels and between various UNEP divisions and offices. Proper coordination should be ensured within UNEP while capitalizing on the numerous relationships UNEP has developed with civil society at multiple levels.

Towards this end, we need a strong commitment from all divisions, regional offices and from UNEP's Senior Management Group to work together on this effort, and to underpin it with adequate human and financial resources.