

Guidelines for Improving the Global Civil Society Forum cycle

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

1.2. Background

6. Recalling that after nearly 20 years of encouraging UNEP's collaboration with civil society through outreach and liaison services, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development ("Earth Summit") declared that the involvement of nine Major Groups was necessary to achieve sustainable development. The nine Major Groups recognized by the Earth Summit agreements are: farmers, women, the scientific and technological community, children and youth, indigenous peoples and their communities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, non-governmental organizations, and local authorities. For the purposes of this paper, the term civil society is used as an umbrella term covering all 9 Major Groups.

¹ Natural Allies: UNEP and Civil Society, 2004, available on the web at:
<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=468&ArticleID=4622&l=en>.

7. Recalling both Governing Council Decision 21/19, adopted in 2001, calling on UNEP to submit a “draft strategy for the active engagement of the civil society, private sector and other major groups in the work of UNEP”; and Governing Council Decision SSVII.5, adopted in 2002, where Governments endorsed the Global Civil Society Forum and requested that the “Executive Director continue the current practice of convening a civil society forum that is regionally balanced and representative in conjunction with the meetings of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in close consultation with civil society.” It is the latter portion of this statement that this document seeks to implement by providing the Executive Director with recommendations on how to encourage greater regional balance and representation among the nine major groups through their membership to the UNEP Major Groups Facilitating Committee (MGFC), previously called the Global Civil Society Steering Committee.

1.3. Expectations

9. This section briefly addresses civil society and UNEP’s expectations for engaging in UNEP processes and with delegates during the Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

1.3.1. Major Groups Expectations from UNEP

10. Civil society can be an asset to the UNEP process on a variety of levels including, but not limited to being, providers of substantive knowledge, drafters and implementers of creative solutions, and advocates for specific issues. There are also opportunities for partnerships that can increase the impact or profile of projects to meet shared goals. It is in these roles that civil society stands to have a significant impact—as an outside voice working with UNEP to help strengthen the role of the environment within the United Nations system. Civil society also has greater capacity to draw on expertise from within the Major Groups delineations to provide representative perspectives potentially leading to a fuller contribution to international processes.

11. The initial expectations of the Major Groups are to see a continuation of the progress made at the 8th Global Civil Society Forum and the 24th GC/GMEF held in Nairobi (2007). For the first time direct access to key decision makers on policy and substantive issues was provided. Three methods of engaging with UNEP and delegates were introduced or strengthened:

- a. An open exchange of information and viewpoints with UNEP's Executive Director;
- b. A dialogue with UNEP policy staff which served as an opportunity for civil society to meet the authors of key UNEP proposals and share concerns; and
- c. Designation of twelve seats at the 24th Governing Council Ministerial Roundtables for civil society representatives as participants, not observers, providing them direct access to ministers.

12. This was also the pilot year for the Global Civil Society Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the six UNEP regions to facilitate civil society engagement with UNEP. Forum participants were supportive of the concept for such a Committee, noting that the primary role for such a Committee is to be a facilitator between UNEP and the Global Civil Society Forum participating at the GC/GMEF sessions. However, participants stressed the need to improve the Global Civil Society cycle, especially requesting a more balanced composition of this Committee. This Committee was also seen as a useful contact point for civil society organizations wanting to learn more about engaging in UNEP processes, particularly because this year civil society participants had access to the floor in the plenary sessions during both the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF) and the Committee of the Whole.

13. It is therefore expected that these levels of engagement continue and that further adjustments be made to the composition, definition, and role of the Global Civil Society Steering Committee.

14. Similarly, it is also expected that in addition to dialogue with UNEP policy staff responsible for drafting various policy frameworks, this process will include civil society in policy implementation (and drafting) on a particular theme. Enhanced ability to allow civil society to interact with UNEP policy formulation, speaking as Major Groups, would be useful as civil society tries to organize themselves and their key messages.

15. As previously mentioned, civil society has the capacity to draw on expertise from within the Major Groups, but without a focus from UNEP on a narrower set of issues and clarity on what UNEP's priority areas are several months prior to each Governing Council/ GMEF, it becomes more difficult for civil society to mobilize the right level of expertise in time to assist UNEP's endeavours.

16. It is therefore expected that notice of the themes for each Governing Council/GMEF will be available sufficiently in advance, allowing civil society timely and increased interaction with UNEP policy staff responsible for drafting and implementing specific policy themes and frameworks.

1.3.2. UNEP Expectations from Major Groups

17. This section attempts to answer the question, "what is UNEP's interest in strengthened civil society participation in the UNEP policy process?"

18. Both UNEP and civil society organizations share an interest in stronger and better international environmental policies, and are thus natural allies in working together to strengthen the environmental pillar of the United Nations. In addition to substantial political clout, civil society organizations possess information, technical expertise, and practical experience that governments can benefit from in their deliberations and decision making at the UNEP Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) and in other policy forums. The decisions that result from these processes will enjoy greater support from civil society and the public if civil society views are taken into account from the beginning. Furthermore, open processes of political decision-making enhance transparency, foster coordination among diverse actors, and strengthen accountability for implementation and results.

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19. To maximize these important benefits of civil society participation in international environmental governance, UNEP's interest is that civil society organizations must dedicate skilled and knowledgeable experts to participate in the UNEP policy processes based on the particular issues under discussion at any given time. To the extent possible, civil society should also organize its participation in the GC/GMEF to be as representative as possible, taking into account expertise, geographical origin, gender and other relevant criteria.

CHAPTER 2: RECOMMENDATIONS

20. This section recommends new guidelines for improving the Global Civil Society Forum cycle.

2.1. The Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF): Engaging with the Governing

21. Preamble: “Recalling Governing Council Decision 21/19, adopted in 2001 and Governing Council Decision SSVII.5, adopted in 2002, the vision of the following guidelines should be to work for an integrated approach between UNEP and civil society where both can play significant roles in shaping modern environmental policy. This approach should be regionally and gender balanced, based on an interactive democracy and to work to get the best-qualified organisations to participate actively in the policy processes at UNEP; to bring the goals and visions of UNEP out to the general public’s awareness and understanding; to enhance proficiency, the scientific base and promote capacity building; to solicit a wider public participation in the development and adoption of appropriate strategies for civil society in the work for the environment in all its aspects. In accordance with the understanding of the Governing Council decisions, civil society should be understood as an umbrella term covering all 9 Major Groups as defined by Chapter 23 in Agenda 21. ”

22. The purpose of the Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF), is to inform Major Groups (MGs) and relevant civil society stakeholders about the UNEP procedures and arrangements of the upcoming GC, to provide information about the latest developments on substance, allow the different MGs the opportunity to have an exchange of views, and to explore/facilitate possible common positions of the Major Groups related to the topics discussed at the GC/GMEF

2.2. The UNEP Major Groups Facilitating Committee (MGFC)

2.2.1. Background

24. Effective preparation for and management of the GCSF requires the dedicated work of a committee composed of representatives of the 9 Major Groups and the 6 UNEP Regions. A number of fundamental principles of engagement shared between civil society organizations and UNEP must be at the basis of the work of this committee. These are:

- Democratic values – the selection of civil society representatives will be founded on shared democratic values as expressed by the United Nations Charter;
- Freedom of expression – while the MGFC will (wherever possible) strive for consensus, individual Major Groups organizations reserve the right to express their own positions and issue their own statements;

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- Freedom of engagement – while the MGFC and UNEP will (wherever possible) strive for collaborative approaches for civil society engagement, individual Major Group organizations and UNEP reserve the right of bilateral engagement;
- Balance – to the extent feasible, all efforts will be made to ensure regional, gender, and major groups balance in the composition of the MGFC.

2.2.2. Composition

26. TO BE REWORDED

Scenario 2: Nine + Twelve

30. This scenario calls on each of the Major Groups to organize an internal selection process based on a system appropriate to that group, in order to nominate an individual (and his alternate) to represent that major group on the MGFC (for a total of nine Major Group representatives to the MGFC).

31 To this end, each of the accredited organisation to UNEP is called to inform the UNEP Major Groups Facilitating Unit (MGFU) of its representation.

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32. In accordance with paragraph 24 and its expressed principles, each of the 9 Major Group will be responsible for organizing an internal selection process to nominate an individual to represent that Major Group on the MGFC.

33. This individual would be expected to facilitate engagement of organizations within that Major Group in the GCSF, and other UNEP fora as appropriate.

34. Regional civil society meetings would also be held, where those present elect two regional representatives to the MGFC. To the extent possible, these representatives should be knowledgeable about forthcoming GC/GMEF themes.

35. Advantages:

- Strikes a balance between regional and major group representation;
- Allows major groups to identify individuals best able to represent the views/positions of that group;
- Selection of the nine major group representatives will respect the democratic principle of self-organization.

36. Disadvantages:

- Assumes that all major groups have sufficient internal cohesion at both global and regional levels to undertake an internal selection process;

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2.2.3. Major Groups Facilitation Committee (MGFC): Terms of Reference at Global Level

41. Having established 9 MGFU in accordance with paragraphs 30 to 33, it is recommended that commitment to the process must be made over a certain period to ensure consistency. Consistent with paragraph 33, this entails having at least one focal point (and alternate) for this work within constituency securing the resources for this ahead of time.

42. It must be understood that the work of the 9 persons responsible for the 9 MGFU within each of the Major groups will fall under the following main categories:

1. Provide and develop logistics and process understanding so the Major Groups will be able to maximise its presence under the aegis of the rules of engagement and procedure that the UN and UNEP have set up.
2. Provide guidance and find expertise to develop policy positions representing the best from the major group constituencies relevant to the agenda points of the UNEP GC and GMEF.
3. It must also be understood, that as UNEP GC and GMEF are policy meetings, and that the work of the Major Groups in this context is of that nature, the agendas of all the meetings, regional and central, will be that of the UNEP GC or GMEF.
4. Any civil society organisation accredited to UNEP regardless of where it is headquartered can make a bid for hosting the secretariat of the facilitating body provided they meet the following formal requirements, on an overarching level:
 - Governance and multi-stakeholder processes;
 - Issues development, policy work, capacity building and lobbying;
 - Information dissemination;
 - Implementation and follow up; and
 - Preparation, participation, timing, travel and related logistical concerns.

44. **The major tasks of the Major Groups representatives on this committee may include:**

- Maximise participation of representatives of its Major Group worldwide in the UNEP GC and its related meetings;
- Use his best endeavours to secure participation of the Major Group at the regional meeting, and that the participants have received the necessary information relating to the agenda beforehand.
- Facilitate and see that Major Group's members with specific issue knowledge³ are brought into the focus of UNEP related work, both in the local, national and regional contexts as well as at UNEP GC and the UNEP GMEF;
- Foster balanced representation on the basis of gender, focus and region.
- Mobilize knowledgeable representatives of the Major Groups to participate in the UNEP GC and/ or UNEP GMEF;

³ UNEP is no stranger to these ideas. UNEP some years ago started an initiative, based on several Governing Council decisions, aimed at "strengthening the scientific base of UNEP". ICSU (International Council for Science) was invited to advise UNEP on this initiative. The GC decision read: "Further consideration should be given to strengthening UNEP's scientific base by improving further its ability to monitor and assess global environmental change i.a. through the establishment of an intergovernmental panel on environmental change." (UNEP/GCSSVII/Appendix 1, para 11 (h) – See <http://science/unep.org> for more information).

- Assist participating Major Group members in having access to information related to the agenda points for the UNEP meetings and are able to participate fully in the UNEP GC and UNEP GMEF and its related meetings,.
- Provide general information, training and capacity building on UNEP process in line with the expressed visions, goals and targets as found in the Bali Plan of Action;
- Foster access to issue-based information from relevant civil society groups focussing on these issues, to others not directly involved in those issue-networks.

2.2.4. Major Groups Facilitation Committee (MGFC): Terms of Reference at Regional Level

46. The Major Group Facilitation Committee should coordinate their activities with the regional level in cooperation with their regional networks and with UNEP's secretariat. This may include:

- Fostering the participation of regional representatives of their major group at the 6 regional meetings (which should be the primary remit of regional MGFCs)
- In regions where their major group is under-represented, help identifying, developing further and involving emerging or newly-established major groups organizations in the regional meetings
- Promoting inter-regional exchange and coordination of inputs within their major group
- Facilitating the integration of regional concerns into the major group's global policy statements

47. The regional particularities will be further taken care of by the input of the 12 Regional representatives.

2.2.5. Development of Policy Statements

49. Communicating their perspectives on agenda points and key policy positions is of paramount interest and importance to the various Major Groups and relevant civil society stakeholders. When developing positions, Major Groups representatives should take into account perspectives from all relevant geographical levels, in line with decisions taken throughout the UN system. Concerns should be brought to the GC or GMEF in a succinct and representative form.⁴

⁴ Each of the 9 Major Groups are allowed to produce a 8000 word document on the review session at CSD, and a 1000 word action oriented policy statement the following year during the policy session. These documents are all translated into all the official UN documents, and sent delegates as part of the official documents. As such there are 9 review session papers, and 9 policy session papers.

