



## Chapter 5: UNEP in the Regions

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### UNEP's Regionalization Efforts

**G**lobal environmental policy development and implementation can be effective only if full account is taken of regional priorities. Environmental problems are often local, regional, or sub-regional in scale, and they require regionally based solutions that take into consideration geography, specific environmental conditions, cultural heritage, traditions, and practices.

A strong focus on local and regional levels is crucial to the ownership and successful development of sustainable livelihood strategies. It also fosters local capacity development and provides an enabling environment for local initiatives oriented towards combating poverty and reducing environmental degradation.

Governments have taken a number of decisions to strengthen UNEP's regional presence. In February 2003, they adopted decision GC22/21, which requests UNEP to: "establish and strengthen partnership at the regional and sub regional levels with other United Nations bodies, development banks and other institutions, including major groups, with a view to enhance the effectiveness of the development and delivery of the programme of work of the United Nations Environment Programme in the regions." In addition, the Medium-Term Strategy states that: "UNEP will move towards a strategic presence model, involving a significant strengthening of the UNEP regional offices. This model is based on UNEP engaging its staff and resources more effectively to respond to regional and country needs in line with the Bali Strategic Plan and Governing Council decisions on strengthening the Regional Offices of UNEP."

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UNEP's Division of Regional Cooperation (DRC) is composed of a coordinating office based at the headquarters in Nairobi, and of the following six Regional Offices.

- Regional Office for Africa (ROA)
- Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP)
- Regional Office for Europe (ROE)
- Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC)
- Regional Office for North America (RONA)
- Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA)

Regional offices play a leading role in the delivery of UNEP's vision and mandate. The main activities of DRC are:

- To undertake relevant information and data-gathering to bring regional perspectives to the development of UNEP policies and programmes;
- To present UNEP global policies in the regions and enlist support for them at all levels;
- To implement and complement relevant parts of UNEP's global programmes through initiating, co-ordinating, and catalysing regional and sub-regional co-operation and action in response to environmental problems and emergencies;
- To assist in the development of policies and programmes on global and regional environmental issues between and within governments in the regions;
- To provide advisory services to help governments translate global commitments into national action for the protection and enhancement of the environment;
- To raise public awareness of environmental problems and create a constituency for environmental action;
- To promote co-operation between UNEP and NGOs and the private sector; and
- To broaden the constituency of UNEP.

### Civil Society Engagement in the Regions

As the primary contact points for local, national, and regional CSOs, the regional offices are at the "front line" of civil society engagement. In this context, the regional offices play a proactive role in engaging civil society in governmental decision-making (Chapter 2) and in all aspects of the implementation of UNEP's work programme (Chapter 3), including: scientific assessment; development of policies and law; implementation of environment policies and law; communication; and engaging business and industry. Additionally, each regional office focuses on specific actions according to each regional context. Below is a summary of the main activities targeted at civil society within the different regions.

## Africa

Located at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, UNEP's Regional Office for Africa (ROA) provides a wide range of advisory services through an umbrella project known as Regional Advisory Services (RAS).

ROA's work focuses on ensuring that environmental considerations are the engine driving Africa along the road to recovery, stability, and sustainable development. ROA plays a central and holistic role of co-ordinating UNEP's activities in the African region. ROA acts as the link between the various Divisions and Centres of UNEP and the countries in the region, and promotes collaboration and partnerships with organisations active in sustainable development in Africa. The office collaborates closely with many partners to put Africa on the global map where critical environmental issues are discussed and addressed. The office provides substantive and organisational support to intergovernmental processes such as the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN), which is the main vehicle for reviewing African environmental issues and identifying priorities; the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW); and the Forum of Energy Ministers in Africa (FEMA).

ROA supports the strengthening of the strategic partnerships with Major Groups in the region and facilitates their active participation in UNEP-sponsored forums. ROA further supports activities aimed at enabling Major Groups, including youth networks, to better facilitate learning about conservation of natural resources, entrench sustainable consumption and production lifestyles in young people, and promote programmes using proven environmental education and training models. Efforts are also directed at strengthening the Africa Youth Environment Network.

ROA also works with the African Network for Environmental Journalists, established to strengthen partnership and strategic alliance with the media, in support of UNEP's public awareness programme in Africa. The network is instrumental in facilitating environmental information dissemination and knowledge-sharing in the region. ROA is equally working with schools and universities through collaboration with the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), established in 1981 to raise awareness of environmental issues and effect change through education. Working with FEE, ROA is partnering African educational institutions with others in Europe.

At the sectoral level, ROA is focusing its attention on some of the major African environmental challenges, including climate change, freshwater resources, reversal of land degradation, diminishing biodiversity, and coastal and marine resources.

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### Asia and the Pacific

UNEP's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) is located in Bangkok, Thailand. It covers nearly 50 countries, and includes five distinct sub-regions: Central Asia, South Asian, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and the South Pacific. The strategic directions for ROAP include promoting regional and sub-regional co-operation, strengthening the environmental community, identifying and addressing emerging environmental issues, and the implementation of pilot projects for leadership by demonstration.

ROAP involves civil society in an annual high level Sub-regional Environmental Policy Dialogue (SEPD). Initiated in 2003, this dialogue seeks to strengthen regional policy formulation through an annual meeting of the chairs of five sub-regional governmental processes and five eminent civil society leaders. Additionally, UNEP plans to establish sub-regional civil society forums in five ROAP sub-regions that aim to identify priority emerging issues and implement programmes based on *State of the Environment Assessments* and WSSD/Millennium Development Goals imperatives. Representatives are drawn from each country within the sub-region and from the nine civil society groups defined in *Agenda 21*.

In 2006, a new centre to strengthen civil society networks in Asia-Pacific and to enhance leadership skills for environmental conservation and restoration was launched in Seoul, Republic of Korea. This new centre, the UNEP Eco-Peace Leadership Centre (EPLC), serves as a regional hub for civil society networking and capacity building. It also hosts the annual Asia Pacific regional civil society consultations, prior to the Global Civil Society Forum.

ROAP supports sub-regional networking, capacity building, and knowledge management. It focuses its work on young people, parliamentarians, media, and the private sector. With regard to youth, in addition to active implementation of the Tunza strategy, ROAP established five sub-regional youth networks that have created membership criteria, network hosting arrangements, print and electronic communications, meeting schedules, and annual programme activities. Youth representatives from the five sub-regional youth networks participate in the annual regional civil society forum.

To promote environmental education and capacity building in the region, ROAP has developed a strategic partnership with Tongji University through the joint UNEP-Tongji Institute of Environment

for Sustainable Development (IESD). Located in Shanghai, IESD provides annual Leadership Programmes on Environment for Sustainable Development that bring together participants representing the various Major Groups.

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## Europe

Europe is home to some of the largest and most powerful CSOs. The governments of this region also maintain a long tradition of involving civil society in their work programmes. Consequently, UNEP's Regional Office for Europe (ROE) has been able to establish and strengthen partnerships with a wide and diversified spectrum of major civil society groups and constituencies at the regional, sub-regional, and national levels.

Through continued dialogue and exchange of information, ROE significantly supports effective networking of NGOs amongst each other and with other groups, as well as their capacity to raise awareness and draw attention to national, regional, and global environmental problems and concerns. ROE enlists the support of Major Groups in transforming UNEP's global policy and programmes into regional and local perspectives.

ROE has been in the forefront of engaging CSOs in a range of projects and programmes it manages and supports. It supports civil society in key environmental policy areas, including: the promotion of public participation in the implementation and decision-making process of the Carpathian and Caspian Conventions, the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, and the Environment and Security Initiative; and the promotion of national actions on sustainable consumption. ROE also supports the implementation of concrete action focusing on energy, consumption and production patterns, water quality, and air pollution. It works with youth and the aging population, two groups with increased purchasing power, to educate and encourage alternatives to the current "consumerism."

ROE also supports the active participation of civil society in other regional and sub-regional processes with links and potential implication for UNEP's work. This includes: the implementation of the Aarhus Convention; the "Environment for Europe" Ministerial process; the European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health overall process, opportunities and challenges for NGOs; and the implementation of the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) agenda.

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Considering the strategic presence of several UNEP programmes, branches, and Conventions in Geneva, ROE continues to play a central role in facilitating and creating opportunities for its civil society network to partner with the Geneva-based UNEP Offices. This also extends to the creation of new partnerships and information exchange with a number of sister UN agencies and other international organisations headquartered in Geneva.

ROE is particularly active in the outreach field. It assists in the production of outreach materials, including youth publications, and supports the involvement of young people in decision-making mechanisms not only within the UNEP Tunza Europe network but also with other sister UN agencies. ROE continues to be a valuable contributor to youth participation in environment and health decision-making processes under the European Environment and Health process.

ROE has also increased and strengthened its partnership with women's groups in Europe and taken the lead in regionalizing the Women as the Voices for the Environment conference in Europe.

ROE developed and maintains an extensive network of UNEP national committees, which support implementation of UNEP's work programme and outreach activities at the national level (organising special events, public information campaigns, meetings, seminars, and workshops on various environmental issues). ROE supports the Geneva Environment Network, a network of international environmental organisations with NGO involvement, which publishes directories of green organisations and newsletters and develops websites.

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### Latin America and the Caribbean

UNEP's Regional Office for Latin American and the Caribbean (ROLAC) is located in Panama. Academic Centers and NGOs play a major role in ROLAC's work, which focuses its actions on the Latin American "Forum of Ministers of the Environment." The Forum identifies regional environmental priorities through periodical meetings and develops a Regional Action Plan that lists the required activities in making regional co-operation more effective and congruent. One of the main challenges of the Forum is to address the growing levels of poverty and inequality, as well as integrating environmental and social concerns into development policy in all sectors.

ROLAC involves civil society in policy debates during the Ministerial Forum where CSOs can

organise and participate in parallel meetings. ROLAC is particularly active in the implementation of Principle 10 and the presentation of cultural diversity in environmental protection. ROLAC implements a partnership with civil society through "Global Environmental Citizenship," a GEF Project executed in coordination with six NGOs to improve citizenship engagement in the areas of climate change, biodiversity, international waters, and the ozone layer.

In raising public awareness, ROLAC works with youth networks to develop national and regional youth GEO reports. It works closely with the media through the "Tierramerica Project," a joint UNEP-UNDP and International Press Service project with 29 regional newspapers, more than 800 radio stations, and a website—reaching more than 15 million people each week. ROLAC also contributed to the creation of two networks of environmental journalists for Central and South America. The collaboration with the media and other communication organisations has led to a dissemination network through 34 TV Channels in the region, with programmes developed jointly with the Albatros Foundation.

ROLAC has also created the "Environmental Training Network for Latin America and the Caribbean," reaching universities and academic communities and focusing its work on thematic issues, including the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. ROLAC is actively involved with a wide range of civil society actors, including: Academia Mexicana de Derecho Ecologico (AMDA); The Ford Foundation; Caribbean Law Association (CLA); Caribbean Law Institute Center-Barbados (CLIC); Energy through Enterprise, Brazil (ECO); Environmental Law Centre, Fondo de las Américas, Chile; Lawyers for a Green Planet Institute, Brazil (LGPI); the Institute for Tropical Studies, Rare Center for Tropical Conservation (RARE); IUCN; and universities and educational institutions.

ROLAC is the operative Secretariat of the Parlatino Environment Commission, which prepares parliamentarians on emerging environmental issues.

The Latin America Civil Society Forum has been strengthened and amplified including a larger number of members involved, from indigenous and rural communities, women's groups, and the industrial sector.

The TUNZA regional network, organised in four sub-regions, has had active and important participation, in particular in relation to International Youth and Children's Conferences.

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### North America

The Regional Office for North America (RONA) is located in Washington, D.C. It provides the United States and Canadian governments with information about UNEP's activities and develops and maintains partnerships with these governments as well as with a wide range of other stakeholders, including academic institutions, environmental research organisations, the media, NGOs, the private sector, the scientific community, and youth organisations. For example:

- RONA is working in partnership with Washington, D.C.-based U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG) to showcase UNEP's activities, including an annual awards ceremony for the regional winner of the Children's Painting competition on Earth Day, a poster exhibit on Sustainability to be displayed from May to October 2008, and an exhibit promoting the Billion Tree Campaign in conjunction with national and local tree planting organisations.
- RONA is collaborating with the Discovery Networks, parent company of the Discovery and Animal Planet television channels. The network has invited UNEP's Executive Director to sit on the Board of Advisors of its new channel Planet Green, whose mission is to educate, enable and inspire individuals to live greener lives. This partnership provides an opportunity for UNEP to influence the programme content of this major media initiative by providing technical experts, by assisting with the development of educational programmes for youth, and through information sharing.
- Bayer U.S. is providing financial resources and in-kind support for a youth component to the North American World Environment Day (WED) festivities, including the announcement of a joint UNEP/Bayer annual community grant to a local school to work on a hands-on environmental project. The students will work on a project to address "kicking the carbon habit" over the coming year, and will report on their progress at WED 2009.

RONA also actively solicits civil society views on UNEP policy matters, such as those being considered by the annual Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF). Towards this end, it organises an annual North American Regional Civil Society Consultation. RONA hosts policy workshops and conferences in support of UNEP's global work as well as in support of North American initiatives, such as the Fall 2009 North American workshop on sustainable consumption and production.

The office also organises periodic meetings and roundtable discussions between civil society representatives and visiting senior UNEP management and staff to discuss issues relevant to UNEP's mission and programme, including climate change, environmental governance, and international chemicals policy.

UNEP's New York Office (NYO) is based at UN headquarters. With the role and influence of civil society greatly expanding within the international community, the NYO develops and maintains a proactive relationship with UN-affiliated NGOs, foundations, private sector corporations, academic institutions, and others, particularly those active in the UN Commission on Sustainable Development process. Through various outreach initiatives and products, it builds support among such groups for the work of the UN in the international environmental field and the role of UNEP as the environmental conscience of the UN system.

The New York Office also facilitates the transmittal of civil society views and information to other substantive units within UNEP. In particular, the Office has developed fruitful co-operation with the religious and faith communities as well as groups working in the area of children's environmental health. The office also provides briefings on international environmental issues and UNEP activities to a wide variety of visiting groups from the academic community and civil society, either directly or through the UN Department of Public Information.

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## West Asia

The Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA) is located in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The office serves 12 countries in West Asia: six Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates) and six Mashreq Countries (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen).

The regional office ensures that the environmental priorities in the West Asia region get adequate representation in the global work programmes carried out by UNEP, and that global focus areas are reflected in the environmental work carried out in the countries of the region.

Towards this end, ROWA has formed close links with the principal ministerial body in the Arab region, the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), especially in its Steering Committee on Environmental Education, Information and Public Awareness.

To further its regional coordination efforts, ROWA has also formed linkages with the Regional Organisation for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden (PERSGA) and the Regional Organisation for the Protection of Marine Environment (ROPME). ROWA also elaborates on environmental strategies in collaboration with the Joint Committee of Environment & Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR) and the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA).

These linkages are designed to enable the consolidation of available resources, establishing and organising regional activities, and ensuring that the environmental activities that are undertaken are in line with the priorities identified by ministerial councils and UNEP global programmes.

The focus of ROWA reflects the focus of the region environmentally, including: the need for scientific assessment; freshwater and marine ecosystems; land use; industrial pollution; and biodiversity.

In the policy debate, ROWA supports numerous consultations at the regional level, including ensuring the participation of civil society and parliamentarians. At the project implementation level, ROWA has focused on coral reefs (with the International Coral Reef Action Network), the phase-out of leaded fuel/petrol, water, environmental law (with the Arab Regional Centre for Environmental Law), and clean production and environmental management systems. UNEP ROWA is also embarking on a major project in the region, funded by the UN Development Programme, on capacity building and the promotion of public participation in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). The project involves working with major groups and stakeholders in highlighting the mechanisms of EIAs, the role of public participation in the process, and also building the capacity of the stakeholders in terms of the effectiveness of their participation.

In the area of raising public awareness, ROWA is developing a media knowledge centre and is supporting the Arab media towards achieving sustainable development. UNEP also works with youth and youth organisations, taking advantage of its network established when producing a Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) report for youth. ROWA seeks to strengthen its scientific base, and its partners such as the Arabian Gulf University, while taking into account the spiritual component of environmental education in coordination with ministries of religious affairs and other civil society groups.

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