

**GC Decisions on INFOTERRA**

1972 – Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment

*Recommendation 101*

*It is recommended* that the Secretary-General take the appropriate steps, including the convening of an expert meeting, to organize an International Referral Service for sources of environmental information, taking into account the model described in paragraphs 129 to 136 of the report on educational, informational, social and cultural aspects of environmental issues (A/CONF.48/9), in order to assist in the successful implementation of all the recommendations made in respect of those aspects of environmental issues and of most of the recommendations envisaged in the other substantive subject areas covered in the Conference agenda.

1973 GC.1

Decisions of the Governing Council of the  
United Nations Environment Programme at  
its first session

1 (I) Action Plan for the Human Environment: programme development  
and priorities  
(agenda item 6)

The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme

I. GENERAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

1. Reiterates that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972 and the Action Plan of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, the general policy objectives of the United Nations Environment Programme shall be:

.....

To assist all countries, especially developing countries, to deal with their environmental problems and to help mobilize additional financial resources for the purpose of providing the required technical assistance, education, training and free flow of information and exchange of experience, with a view to promoting the full participation of developing countries in the national and international efforts for the preservation and enhancement of the environment;

II. PARTICULAR POLICY OBJECTIVES

2. Notes, as guidelines for the United Nations Environment Programme, the following detailed objectives, which, however, have not been fully discussed, and are not exhaustive:

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(n) To help Governments increase public awareness through better education and knowledge of environmental concerns and facilities wide participation in and support for environmental action:

III. PROGRAMME PRIORITIES FOR ACTION BY THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

3. Decides that the major functional tasks of the Programme consists of the identification and assessment of the major environmental problems for which "Earthwatch" will be one of the important instruments, environmental management activities and supporting measures, the most important of which are:

- (a) The provision of technical assistance to Governments in evaluating their environmental needs and in planning and carrying out measures to meet them;

.....

- (d) The provision of information and related material in support of national programmes of public information and education in the environmental field and the provision of assistance to governmental or non-governmental efforts aiming at increased availability of environmental information related to development;

Taking into account the need:

To give special consideration to activities which will particularly benefit developing countries

Further requests the Executive Director to perform the following tasks

(c) Education, training, assistance and information

- (i) To support and encourage the development of effective mechanisms for collecting, analysing and disseminating information bearing on environmental problems available in scientific, technical and legal literature and in various research institutions, keeping in mind the special needs of developing countries;
- (ii) To support and encourage the training of experts in various environmental fields, especially in developing countries to help in development of local expertise;
- (iii) To encourage environmental education and information at all levels in order to help increase consciousness and appreciation of environmental matters among the masses;
- (iv) To support and encourage the development of relevant research capabilities in developing countries on environmental problems;
- (v) To continue further development of the scope, structure and capacity of the International Referral System with special consideration for timely and appropriate access by the developing countries, free of charge, to this facility;
- (vi) To promote and support the organization of national, regional and international symposia, seminars and workshops for techniques of environmental education and research;

VII. EARTHWATCH

- (1) Monitoring

.....

(2) International Referral System

30. Authorizes the Executive Director to initiate the pilot phase of the International Referral System drawing upon the expertise of both developed and developing countries and of international organizations concerned, and requests him to report the preliminary results to the second session of the Governing Council to permit further consideration by the Council prior to any final decision on this matter.

3 (I) Review and approval of the Fund Programme for 1973-1974  
(agenda item 7(b))

The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme

3. Authorizes the Executive Director to adjust the apportionment of funds among the budget lines in the following table, to an extent not exceeding 20 per cent in any one line, should it become necessary to do so to preserve the integrity of the Programme:

(million dollars)

Earthwatch

A. Monitoring	0.3
B. International Referral System	0.2

1975 GC.3

29(III) Programme and fund programme activities

The Governing Council

6. Authorizes the Executive Director to establish the proposed clearing house for technical assistance in co-operation with Governments, the United Nations Development Programme and the regional commissions, and to gather the related information in a manner which is in harmony with the common environmental data base and the International Referral System;
9. Requests the Executive Director:
- (h) To give high priority to the consolidated development and improvement of Earthwatch, which consists of research, evaluation, monitoring and information exchange activities, to treat all these components both functionally, in terms of an integrated system, and programmatically, at levels Two and Three, as part of each priority subject area which they serve, and to produce a detailed progress report in time for a thorough review at the fourth session of the Governing Council;
- (i) To accelerate the development of the International Referral System and the Global Environmental monitoring System by promoting the establishment of International Referral System focal points, particularly in developing countries, and by convening small groups of governmental experts to work in close harmony with the relevant United Nations bodies in designing and implementing the first stage of the Global Environmental Monitoring System, taking into account the views expressed by the Governing Council at its third session, and to report on the results of these efforts to the Council at its fourth session;
14. Invites all countries to co-operate with the Executive Director, at his request, by supplying, in an agreed fashion, environmentally relevant information for the maintenance of all information systems of the United Nations Environment Programme for global, regional and national use, especially in developing countries.

47 (IV) Programme policy and implementation

The Governing Council,

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11. Considers that certain activities depend mainly for their proper functioning on full co-operation between Governments and the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme, and accordingly invites Governments to respond promptly and fully to the requests of the Executive Director for co-operation in undertaking activities endorsed by the Governing Council, for example with respect to sources of information for the International Referral System and the functioning of the technical assistance clearing-house, and requests the secretariat to be as precise as possible in formulating its requests for information and assistance;

.....

IV

4. Considers that the information gained from environmental assessment can be successfully applied in environmental and, since environmental management involves inserting a new – environmental – dimension into every stage of the decision-making process, urges Governments to ensure that environmental considerations are borne in mind in all their activities;

84 (V). Environmental assessment

Earthwatch

The Governing Council,

Recalling its decision 29 (III) of 2 May 1975, in which it requested the Executive Director to give high priority to the consolidated development and improvement of Earthwatch and to treat all components both functionally, in terms of an integrated system, and programmatically,

Realizing that monitoring, information exchange, research and evaluation are essential to enable Earthwatch to provide environmental assessments as the basis for sound environmental management,

Recognizing that increasing evidence of the adverse effects of man's activities on the environment demonstrates an immediate need for assessments of the short-term and long-term impacts of these effects,

Noting that the interdisciplinary nature of Earthwatch components makes close co-ordination necessary,

Calls upon the Executive Director to establish, as soon as possible, effective working links among the components of Earthwatch as an integrated system, in order to discharge the Earthwatch programme's assessment responsibilities.

GC6/3/1978

Environmental assessment: Earthwatch

A. International Referral System

The Governing Council,

4. Reiterates its invitation to all Governments, United Nations organizations, other intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations to undertake activities aimed at further developing and strengthening their capabilities for participating fully in the development, operation and evaluation of the **International Referral System Network**;
5. Requests the ED to provide, on the basis of close consultation with governments and other partners in the system, adequate technical assistance and training within the resources available to the ED in order to ensure full participation of developing countries in the system;
6. Requests the ED to undertake studies of the information needs of users in each region, and to involve the regional offices of the programme fully in this effort;
7. Further requests the ED to investigate means of strengthening the capabilities of the system to facilitate the delivery of information specially relevant to the needs of developing countries, and to report on this issue to the GC at its seventh session;
8. Urges governments and all focal points to promote awareness of the role and importance of information in environmental decision-making, and in particular of the services provided by the system, with a view to promoting its use;
9. Stresses the importance of strengthening those features of the System most relevant to its role in the development process, and to improving linkages with development-oriented information systems and services such as those dealing with technical co-operation among developing countries and science and technology;

GC6/6/1978

Programme and policy considerations

A. The Governing Council,

10. Urges the ED to use the proposed network on environmentally sound and appropriate technologies, including human settlements technologies, the **International Referral System**, and other activities within the programme, in order to participate in the search for and dissemination of information about environmentally sound and appropriate technologies, and to increase the opportunities available to inventors and innovative technicians to develop and disseminate their inventions;

GC6/15/1978

Material remnants of wars, particularly mines, and effects on environment

The Governing Council,

2. Requests the ED to:
  - a. Urge all governments in possession of the appropriate technology for dealing with environmental hazards caused by remnants of wars to register relevant sources with the **International Referral System** for sources of environmental information;

GC7/4/1979

Earthwatch

c. **International Referral System**

The Governing Council,

Bearing in mind the development priorities of States and the need to make governmental decision-making bodies aware of environmental problems,

Recognizing the role of information in environmental management

Recalling the conclusions of the study of the needs of users,

Having considered the difficulties encountered by States in establishing their national focal points for the International Referral System,

**Bearing in mind the human and material resources required for the operation of the national focal points,**

**1. Invites Governments of States Members of the International Referral System:**

- a) To strengthen their support for their national focal points;
  - b) To intensify their efforts to promote the use of the System through co-ordination at the national level;
2. Urges the ED, within the resources available to the Environment Fund:
- a) To continue the programme of periodic regional and international meetings of national focal points;
  - b) To strengthen the programme of national seminars designed to make decision-making bodies and planners aware of environmental problems, with the cooperation of UNEP/**International Referral System** experts or consultants, with a view to increasing the use of the System;
  - c) To provide national focal points, at their request, with effective assistance to enable them to fulfil their role effectively.

GC 9/10/1981

Programme Matters

**D. International Referral System (INFOTERRA)**

The Governing Council,

1. **Notes with satisfaction the conclusion of the report of the evaluation of the International Referral System (INFOTERRA) co-sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization that INFOTERRA has fulfilled the mandate given to it by the Governing Council;**
2. Endorses the recommendations of the evaluation report, particularly those which call on national focal points to provide services beyond referral, where appropriate, to speed up the query-response process, and to continue to promote the use of the system;
3. Requests governments to make resources available to their national focal points to enable them to extend their activities as recommended by the evaluation report;
4. **Requests the ED, subject to the availability of resources, to implement those recommendations of the evaluation report, which will facilitate the phased expansion of INFOTERRA as envisaged in the evaluation report.**

GC10/16/1982

## International Programme on Chemical Safety

Noting with appreciation the progress achieved by the International Programme on Chemical Safety,

Requests the ED, within existing resources, to continue to render all relevant activities of UNEP, such as those carried out by the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals and the **International Referral System** for sources of environmental information, as well as the health-related monitoring activities conducted within the framework of the Global Environment Monitoring System, increasing supportive of the needs of the International Programme on Chemical Safety.

GC14/18/1987

The International Environmental Information System (INFOTERRA)

The Governing Council,

Taking note with appreciation of the progress made in recent years in INFOTERRA,

Keeping in mind the important role that environmental information can play in promotion of sustainable development

1. Calls upon Governments to make full use of the services provided by INFOTERRA;
2. Calls also upon Governments to strengthen their INFOTERRA national focal points, as appropriate, so that they might play a more effective part in the international exchange of environmental information;
3. Requests the Executive Director to ensure that the important role of environmental information systems be fully utilized in the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme, including those pertaining to sustainable development;
4. Further requests the Executive Director to consider possibilities for further strengthening INFOTERRA, taking account if the recommendations of the third meeting of the INFOTEERA Advisory Committee, held at Canberra in April 1987.

GC15/40/1989

INFOTERRA: the International Environmental Information System

The Governing Council

1. Takes note of the report of the Executive Director on the World Conference on Environmental Information Exchange in the 1990s (INFOTERRA 3) and progress made by INFOTERRA; 85/
2. Calls upon Governments to make full use of the services provided by INFOTERRA and to strengthen their INFOTERRA national focal points, as appropriate;
3. Requests the Executive Director to consider possibilities of strengthening INFOTERRA, taking into account the recommendations of the World Conference on Environmental Information Exchange in the 1990s (INFOTERRA 3) referred to in the above-mentioned report of the Executive Director; 86/
4. Requests the Executive Director to provide technical and operational assistance to developing countries, within available resources, to afford them more effective participation in the international exchange of environmental information and experience.