

UNEP European MGS Regional Consultation Meeting (RCM) in preparations for preparations for the 15th UNEP Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF-15) and the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP (UNEA) 4-5 November 2013, Istanbul, Turkey

Introduction:

The European Regional Consultation meeting is one of the main opportunities for major groups and stakeholders to be informed about and involved in the policy development and implementation of a range of environmental governance issues linked to UNEP, including the Programme of Work (PoW) of UNEP and preparations for the UNEA. It is also a platform to link up the activities and contributions of different MGS associated with relevant regional meetings/events/foras/processes.

The European RCM is traditionally held at the Regional Office for Europe (RoE) of UNEP in Geneva. However, following the UN Regional Consultation on the Post-2015 Development Agenda for Europe and Central Asia on the Post-2015 Development Agenda that took place in Istanbul, Turkey, RoE strategically decided to organize the consultation on 4 -5 November, in order for it to coincide with the UN Regional Consultation on the Post-2015 held on 6-8 November 2013.

In this context, the RCM managed to cover different thematic areas under the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) process, as well as other regional environmental challenges and opportunities.

The meeting attracted UNEP accredited major groups and stakeholders in Europe, UNEP ROE's NGO partners involved in the Environment for Europe (EfE) process, the Caspian Convention, the Carpathian Convention, the Poverty and Environment Initiative, the Environment Security Initiative, the Black Sea Commission, and the European Environment and Health Processes (EEHP).

The present paper is the outcome document of the 1.5 day consultation meeting held with major groups and stakeholders representatives.

Agenda:

The 2013 Regional consultation extensively discussed and explored the opportunities and options available to European major groups and stakeholders to contribute to a number of environmental sustainability themes high on the political agenda since the Rio+20 outcome and to ongoing work on Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The main topics included: new mechanisms for the engagement of Major Groups and Stakeholders in UNEA; UNEP's role in the Post-2015 development agenda and SDGs; the state of preparations for the 1st session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to UNEP (UNEA1); the implementation of the 10 Years Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP) to accelerate the shift towards SCP; regional delivery (implementation) of UNEP Programme and Priority Issues (Chemicals, Water, Environment and Health, Environment Security, Poverty and Environment, etc); and other emerging issues.

Joint messages from the Regional Consultation meeting:

As this was the first RCM being held since the first Universal Session of UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (February 2013), an introductory presentation was made regarding decision 27/2 on institutional arrangements, which called for a new governance structure for UNEP, including changing the designation of the 58-member Governing Council to “United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP” (UNEA) - reflecting the full and future participation of all 193 UN member states in UNEP's governing body.

Participants to the meeting were also informed about the ongoing preparations for the first UNEA that will take place from 23-27 June 2014 in Nairobi. The UNEA is expected to: take strategic decisions and provide political guidance on setting the global environmental agenda; provide overarching policy guidance and define policy responses to address emerging environmental challenges; undertake policy review, dialogue and exchange of experiences; set strategic guidance on the future direction of UNEP; organize a multi-stakeholder dialogue; and foster partnerships for achieving environmental goals.

New mechanisms of stakeholder participation, at regional and global level

An extensive overview of the development of new mechanisms for stakeholder engagement at UNEP, including the main proposed elements of the new stakeholder engagement policy was presented at the meeting. The participants welcomed the policy's new elements and asked for more opportunities to bring the regional MGS perspective into UNEP's work and requested more involvement in the implementation of projects. Pursuant to the presentation, the participants further discussed the new mechanisms; the outcome of their discussion is reflected below:

1 – General:

A discussion on several key issues relevant to stakeholder engagement in UNEP focused on the following identified and agreed areas, which informed the discussion on the overall theme: Defining stakeholders, Roles of stakeholders, Mechanism and tools for engagement, UNEP messages, Outreach, Accountability and responsibility, Providing platform and support, and Ensuring input.

Stakeholder contributions to UNEP should be based, *inter alia*, on local, national and regional experiences, practices and knowledge. Hence, special attention should be given to creating an enabling environment for the engagement of local, national and regional stakeholders. Global environmental issues should be contextualized within the regional, national and local realities in order to ensure effective and efficient engagement of stakeholders at all levels and all stages of adequate implementation of environmental agreements.

Stakeholder engagement strengthens intergovernmental processes in general and meaningful participation by major groups and relevant stakeholders – as enumerated, *inter alia*, in paragraph 43 of the Rio Outcome Document (66/288: The future we want) - will strengthen the work of UNEP at all levels, local, national, regional and global, and in all contexts, normative, policy and implementation.

We support the principle of participation, meaningful engagement and access to intergovernmental processes for the afore mentioned stakeholders, as expressed in the United Nations General Assembly

(UNGA), resolution 67/290 of July 9, 2013 establishing the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), and further expressed in the Human Rights Covenants, the Aarhus Convention and in similar documents of equal formal standing.

We would like to exemplify these principles of participation by referencing the following paragraphs of the UN GA Resolution (67/290) on the HLPF:

- Paragraph 15 – while retaining the intergovernmental character of the forum, major groups and other relevant stakeholders will be allowed to: attend all official meetings of the forum; have access to all official information and documents; intervene in official meetings; submit documents and present written and oral contributions; make recommendations; and organize side events and round tables in cooperation with member states and the Secretariat of the United Nations;
- Paragraph 8 - **inviting Major Groups to be involved in the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC when the forum will conduct regular reviews**
- Paragraph 13 - directing the Regional Commissions **to involve the major groups**
- Paragraph 16 - **guaranteeing the right to Major Groups to self-organize**
- Paragraph 24 - stating that countries should, *inter alia*, help **fund major groups without prioritising stakeholders from any specific region or group of countries**
- Paragraph 22 - inviting major groups in the agenda setting process

2 - Major groups and other stakeholders:

We further support the construct of the major groups by the UN at UNCED in 1992 through Agenda 21 and as recognised and further resolved by the Rio 2012 Summit. We would like to emphasise the usefulness of the major groups system as an effective tool to access the UN system. To further strengthen the position of the major groups and other stakeholders, the criteria for stakeholder organizations must be developed, using those enumerated in the 1996 ECOSOC resolution 1996/31 on Consultative Relationship between the United Nations and Non-Governmental Organizations (see annex 1 for details).

3 - Other major groups:

UNEP's mandate, as expanded and re-articulated by the Nairobi Declaration adopted in 1997, is to serve as "the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, that promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimensions of sustainable development within the United Nations system and that serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment".

Within the current 'nine major groups' configuration, environmental NGOs function today as a sub-set of the NGO major group. NGOs with a specific environmental profile and expertise represent additional knowledge and experience that would be important for UNEP to harness. In the future, UNEP should work towards and seek ways to accommodate this special expertise provided by environmental NGOs in terms of accreditation, representation and participation. This will fulfil the role UNEP was given (through the Rio Outcome Document) to provide an environmental dimension in sustainable development within the UN family.

Some of the participants further proposed that UNEP recognize environmental NGOs as an additional and distinct major group with a guaranteed seat and voice in UNEP processes. They also suggested that in the case that opportunities to speak at UNEP meetings are limited for a

veracity of reasons such as space or time, priority should be given to the NGO representative speaking on behalf of the environment itself.

4 - Regional activities, major groups and other stakeholders:

UNEP is the only UN body organized globally in six regions. As awareness of environmental issues is growing, the importance of regional participation may increase in the future. The six UNEP regions may provide opportunities for outreach and feed-back on environmental matters and engage civil society in this way. **UNEP has devised a way to have major group regional representations in the Governing Council. The terms of reference (TOR) for regional representatives was elaborated in the “UNEP Guidelines” for major groups and stakeholder participation.** The basic idea was to find two representatives with expert knowledge on regional issues with relevance to the thematic issues on the agenda of the Governing Council.

The function of the regional representatives was not always understood, and their mandate not properly formulated. In view of the ‘new UNEP’ as expressed in the Rio Outcome Document, the mandate for regional representatives, their modalities, functions and roles need to be further adjusted and elaborated, and relevant modalities to function as conveners of regional environmental networks and their activities with the representatives of major groups should be developed with the assistance of UNEP.

5 - Engaging stakeholders in relevant UNEP activities:

UNEP has developed several programmes and activities that actively seek the involvement of major groups and other stakeholders. A few years back a study showed that major groups and their constituencies stood for 70% of the implementation of UNEP’s programmes in the field.

Implementing all short-term and long-term as well as inspirational goals expressed in the Rio Outcome Document would not be possible without the contribution from civil society. This also includes the over 700 voluntary commitments made, in paragraph 283 of the Rio Outcome Document, by different stakeholders and their networks to implement concrete policies, plans, programmes, projects and actions to promote sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The extensive engagement of major groups in the future programmes of UNEP should be explored and developed. Scientist and their institutions are already involved in developing the many scientific studies and documents published by UNEP. In addition to this, stakeholders may also be given additional opportunities to contribute to the content of UNEP annual reports, the GEO reports and the Foresight Processes, to mention some concrete examples of such engagement. Major groups and stakeholders are well placed to analyse, design, implement and monitor environmental issues that matter to people on a local and national level. As such, stakeholder organizations accredited to UNEP may provide information that governments entities and official monitoring institutions may detect. This last element should be considered an important contribution to identify ‘emerging issues’.

Quality work performed and carried out by major groups and other stakeholders is already under way in the SAICM context. Under the Chemical Conventions, work is also carried out by a robust input from civil society and those civil society organizations working with the MEAs are doing invaluable work in research, advocacy and outreach. Such work must be strengthened.

In line with the development of the Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs, the UN has started to focus its attention on National Sustainable Development Strategies – the NSDS. Traditionally the NSDS system has been monitored by national councils. It looks like these elements will be rejuvenated and the NSDS processes revisited and brought back to life in order to answer the monitoring demands embedded in the HLPF, especially as it is anticipated that this institution will be the home to the SDGs.

Major groups and other stakeholders should have a place in the national councils and UNEP with relevant UN entities, such as UNDESA and UNDP, may encourage the development of democratic structures within these national councils.

UNEP may also help develop templates for accurate and environmentally relevant reporting carried out by environment NGOs to be used, for instance, in shadow reporting on environmental issues. Such work is successfully carried out by civil society in the context of the Human Rights Council, and relevant experiences may be sought from this UN institution.

6 – Funding:

Reference to the scarce funds available for major groups and civil society to work was made throughout the deliberations. Funds are needed for participation in regional and global meetings and to work and function as information disseminators and outreach ambassadors for UNEP. To fulfil the obligations outlined in the existing UNEP Guidelines (to be revised, but obligations are not expected to be changed) and be active organizing partners of the major groups on an annual basis, funds need to be available. Without a minimum funding available, quality input from major groups and other stakeholders, in terms of process as well as thematic work will not reach the level of quality needed to promote continued and credible engagement in UNEP-related issues. Reference in this regard was made to the HLPF resolution, paragraph 24 stating that countries should, *inter alia*, help fund major groups without prioritising stakeholders from any specific region or group of countries.

7 – Accreditation:

In line with practice developed at the first UN Summit in 1992, UNCED, and further elaborated and streamlined for the 2002 Johannesburg Summit, and qualitatively strengthened through two decades with CSD, as well as through practice employed by other UN relevant conferences (UNFCCC, UN CBD, UNAIDS and so on), accreditation should be given to all interested stakeholder organization that can prove they comply with basic standards and criteria for organizations developed and utilised by the UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholder Office in Nairobi.

8 - CPR and major groups:

Major groups and other stakeholders **should always be given access to** the UNEA of UNEP and its subsidiary bodies including the Open Ended CPR (**Committee of Permanent Representatives**) as well as other CPR meetings as appropriate and when needed. Given the frequency of the CPR meetings, a process could be developed whereby the CPR addresses the coordinating body of the major groups at regular intervals. To help safeguard the environmental dimension in sustainable development, major groups and other stakeholders should also be given access to all UNEP meetings dealing with content that was outlined in the HLPF resolution and that will have relevance to all future policy integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

10 Year Framework Sustainable Consumption and Production

Based on paragraph 226 of Rio Outcome Document, the participants were presented with UNEP's ongoing work linked to the 10 Years Framework of Programmes on SCP (10YFP) to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns. 10YFP is a global framework of action whose purpose is to enhance international cooperation to accelerate the shift towards SCP in both developed and developing countries by supporting regional and national policies and initiatives and to increase resource efficiency and decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, creating

decent job and economic opportunities, contributing to poverty eradication and shared prosperity. The discussion pursuant to the presentation resulted in the following:

The promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns is not a new theme. It was a central piece of Agenda 21 in Rio 1992, again at the Johannesburg in 2002 and now reinforced at Rio+20 with the adoption of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production. It is now time to Act on a number of frontiers.

In that context, we echo the message of Rio+20 and recognize that fundamental changes in the way societies consume and produce are indispensable for achieving global sustainable development.

The 10YFP will only succeed if the international context is appropriate for its implementation. Therefore, we think that the SCP agenda cannot be isolated from other global trade and market policies. As indicated in paragraph 225 of the Rio+20 outcome document harmful and inefficient consumption and production policies and incentives have adverse impacts on the environment and communities at large, and undermine efforts to make sustainable choices and achieve sustainable development.

Therefore, we strongly recommend an accelerated phase out of the unsustainable and harmful subsidies and investments in the energy, agriculture and other sectors.

We strongly recommend that the 10YFP focus on changing and transforming the unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, and going beyond promoting green consumption and production.

We would underline the importance of clearly identifying and directly addressing some of the fundamental obstacles to achieving SCP. These include a debt-based economy, which leads to GDP growth obsession and overconsumption of resources; financial, monetary and economic systems that are not appropriate to implementing SCP; and the existing “consumer blindness”, leading to unrealistic consumption growth, without awareness and realization of its environmental and social consequences.

We therefore stress that technical and market based solutions will never be enough to tackle the environmental and social challenges posed by unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. We need to focus on fundamental changes in lifestyles, as well as transformation of corporate value from maximizing profit to meeting social and environmental standards and responsibilities as a fundamental and legal objective.

We also caution that the SCP agenda is not only about the environment, but also about social improvements such as labour conditions and health and gender equality.

We recognize the high energy and resource-intensive production patterns in many sectors that contribute to the continued deterioration of the environment through emissions of waste, toxic materials, pollutants, and depletion of scarce resources. 10YFP should be effectively used to promote policies, incentives and actions to create sustainable production and energy patterns.

We are in favour of national and local strategies on SCP, including active stakeholder involvement, to guarantee implementation in the field. An international framework is nevertheless important, to harmonise the policies and regulations and create a level playing field. Capacity building work is also vital, especially for countries that are not very familiar with SCP policies.

We would like to see education and raising awareness on SCP mainstreamed in all programmes (including in school curricula).

The discussion on sustainable consumption and production should be at the center of the post-2015 development agenda discussion and should also be considered as a stand-alone SDG.

Post 2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In the context of the Post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an extensive presentation was made focusing on two areas. First, the UNEP Discussion Paper on Embedding the Environment in SDGs which provides the latest scientific advice and guidance on how environmental sustainability can be integrated in SDGs and secondly, the UN Europe and Central Asia inter-agency advocacy paper entitled “Building more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous societies in Europe and Central Asia: a common UN vision for the post-2015 development agenda”.

On the basis of these two papers, the participants were presented with a range of practical ideas to integrate the environment into the SDGs based on the potential areas for SDGs emerging from the consultations conducted in the European region, as well as making comparisons in terms of specificities and commonalities with those emerging from other regions. While basing the discussion on the two important papers and paragraph 246 of the Rio Outcome Document on sustainable development goals (SDGs), the participants proposed the following:

The Post 2015 development agenda should tackle social, economic and environmental issues and concerns in an integrated manner. It should address the structural causes of poverty and inequality and must be a development agenda that ensures prosperity for all, both in developing and developed countries, and within the limits of planetary resources and boundaries.

SDGs should not only aim at eradicating poverty, inequality and improving human well-being, but must also facilitate and promote the sustainable long term use of planetary resources.

The SDGs must not only speak to and inspire governments and aid agencies, but also corporations, the private sector, financial institutions, investors, and the public at large.

The Post-2015 development agenda must have a focus on the critical global environmental challenges, especially over the next decade, as choices made within this time frame will be crucial for preventing catastrophic climate change, saving our oceans, and protecting remaining natural forests – all of which

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