Stakeholder Forum

Enhancing the role of Major Groups and Stakeholders in the implementation of UNEP's Programme of Work 2010-11

A paper by Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future
Commissioned by UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch

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Acknowledgements

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I am writing the foreword to this paper on how to enhance the role of Major Groups and Stakeholders in UNEP's Programme of Work for 2010-11. Stakeholder Forum as an organisation is committed to enhancing the role of stakeholders in both policy development and implementation, under the conviction that stakeholder engagement at a strategic and project level creates bigger and better outcomes for people and the planet.

Stakeholder Forum has been working on issues of sustainable development and international environmental governance for the past two decades, and has been fortunate enough to work collaboratively with the United Nations Environment Programme at many stages during that time. It is heartening to have seen the evolution of UNEP's engagement with civil society over the years, and we are very happy to be able to contribute to the ongoing debate as to how to enhance the role of Major Groups and Stakeholders in implementation and delivery, and help to create a more effective 'feedback loop' between those stakeholders learning lessons on the ground, and those pushing for change at a higher level.

I hope UNEP staff and Major Groups representatives alike find the recommendations outlined in this paper useful as part of an ongoing process of mainstreaming Major Groups and Stakeholders into the work of UNEP.

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Executive Summary

The key findings and recommendations of this paper are summarised below:

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

For implementation with partners to be relevant and have lasting impact, UNEP must prioritize and invest in internal knowledge management systems that allow for communication, lesson-learning and exchange of best practice among staff and between Divisions. This will enhance the coherence of working with partners across UNEP.

WORKING WITH MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS FOR EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION OF UNEP'S WORK

Major Groups and Stakeholders are well-placed to communicate UNEP's valuable work to wider audiences – too often UNEP produces high-quality and useful work which lacks a concomitant communications strategy to ensure wider impact. Communications strategies should be drawn up and relevant partners identified at the Programmatic Concept stage. Emphasis should be placed on tailoring messages to relevant Major Groups and Stakeholders; establishing partnerships with educational institutions to access Children and Youth; and exploring the role of UNEP National Committees in disseminating information.

FORMING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Strategic Partnerships should be established with Major Groups and Stakeholders at a Sub-Programmatic level, which form the over-arching direction for projects and activities. This will avoid the fragmentation inherent in the establishment of hundreds of uncoordinated partnerships across UNEP, and enhance UNEP's impact through aligning partnerships to a clear vision. Strategic implementing partners should further contribute to policy and governance discussions based on their experience and lessons learned.

ENHANCING MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN PROJECT PREPARATION ON A COUNTRY LEVEL

Strategic Partners, and partners on a country level, should be identified through robust stakeholder mapping exercises that consider the role of each of the Major Groups. Whilst the relevance of Major Groups will necessarily vary according to context, it is important for coherence that a Major Groups 'framework' is mainstreamed into the development of strategic and country-level partnerships. It should be noted that a vast majority of UNEP staff interviewed were either unfamiliar with the concept of Major Groups, or unable to indicate which stakeholders are included under the Major Groups definition.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS WITH A DIVERSE RANGE OF MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS

If a Major Groups approach is to be mainstreamed into UNEP, it is important that there is evidence of engagement of a range of Major Groups in implementation and a certain consistency throughout UNEP in its approach to civil society. Whist there exist examples of all 9 Major Groups being engaged across UNEP[1], the limited data available on partnerships[2], corroborated by observations by interviewees, suggests that Indigenous People, Farmers and Trade Unions are less represented across the board. The situation has much improved in recent years, especially in relation to Trade Unions and Farmers, though across-the-board representation remains a challenge.

MAKING ENGAGEMENT WITH MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS MORE RELEVANT TO PROGRAMMATIC IMPLEMENTATION

The process of engaging Major Groups and Stakeholders as partners should be clearly focused on the strategic objectives of the Programme of Work 2010-11 to avoid fragmentation. UNEP should align its engagement with Major Groups and Stakeholders to correspond more closely to programme implementation – currently there is too often a disconnect between those representatives of Major Groups and Stakeholders who contribute at a policy level, and those who act as implementing partners or who have technical expertise in the area. Narrowing the gap between these two groups will ensure that policy better reflects lessons-learned. Annual meetings with Strategic Partners and technical experts could go some way to ensure this happens.

THE ROLE OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS

UNEP adds significant value where it can play the role of convenor of Multi-stakeholder partnerships. Bringing a range of Major Groups and stakeholders 'around the table' to discuss, exchange knowledge and develop initiatives is critical for the success of the Programme of Work 2010-11, as it raises awareness and disseminates information to a wider audience.

GENERATING OWNERSHIP AND PROVIDING GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH DIFFERENT MAJOR GROUPS

Partnerships with Major Groups and Stakeholders must as far as possible be of equal value to both UNEP and the external partner. UNEP should establish guidelines for working in partnership with Major Groups and Stakeholders. In addition, existing guidelines on working with business should be disseminated more widely. The Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch would be well-placed to co-ordinate the production and dissemination of such guidelines in consultation with UNEP staff.

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[1] See Natural Allies first edition available at: http://www.unep.org/PDF/Natural_Allies_en/Natural_Allies_english_full.pdf

[2] The Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch, in an effort to produce a more comprehensive dataset of Major Groups and Stakeholders involved (or proposed to be involved) in projects relating to the 6 priority thematic areas, asked representatives from the Divisions to fill in spreadsheets with information about planned and proposed activities and the partners involved. Unfortunately the data is incomplete, but the data available shows that Business, Environmental NGOs and the Science and Technological Community are the most involved in implementation.

Introduction and Background

UNEP Governing Council in 2007 requested the Executive Director to prepare, in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, a Medium Term Strategy for 2010-13, with a 'clearly defined vision, objectives, priorities, impact measures and a robust mechanism for review'. The Medium Term Strategy was put together in consultation with UNEP staff and representatives of civil society, including Major Groups. The final document was approved by UNEP's Governing Council in Monaco in February 2008, and constitutes the vision and direction for all UNEP activities for the period 2010-13. This includes the UNEP biennial Programmes of Work for 2010-11 and 2012-13.

One of the most significant changes that it encompasses is a realignment of UNEP activities according to six cross-cutting thematic priorities:

- Climate Change
- Disasters and Conflict
- Ecosystems Management
- Environmental Governance
- Harmful Substances and Hazardous Waste
- Resource Efficiency – Sustainable Production and Consumption

Taking into account this new model of working, which places much emphasis on 'results-based management', it is critical to assess what role Major Groups and Stakeholders might play in implementing the primary objectives of the Medium Term Strategy and in delivering the outputs that have been outlined in the Programme of Work for 2010-11. To this end, the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch has invited Stakeholder Forum to conduct research to identify how the role of Major Groups and Stakeholders can be enhanced in the implementation of the Programme of Work 2010-11.

To give some background on the role of Major Groups and Stakeholders in UNEP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to engaging and working with civil society to develop and implement its work priorities. Governing Council Decisions 21/19 and SSVII.5, adopted in 2001 and 2002 respectively, provided the institutional endorsement for the active participation of civil society in shaping UNEP's priorities. The resulting strategy for enhancing civil society engagement, presented to Governing Council in 2003, was based on three pillars of engaging civil society at a policy level, engaging civil society at a programmatic level, and strengthening institutional management within UNEP to meet these ends.[3]

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[3] For more background see Natural Allies: UNEP and Civil Society, 2004,
http://www.unep.org/PDF/Natural_Allies_en/Natural_Allies_english_full.pdf

Since then, UNEP's understanding of civil society has evolved. It continues to recognize non-governmental organizations as bodies that provide service-delivery, representation, advocacy, capacity building and social functions.[4] However, NGOs constitute just one of 9 Major Groups of civil society, as defined by Chapter 23 of Agenda 21[5], and the Major Groups and Stakeholders branch was established in 2004 to help deliver the strategy of civil society engagement including all the Major Groups. As such, for the purposes of this document, we use the term 'Major Groups and Stakeholders' as UNEP's understanding of what constitutes civil society. As UNEP's strategy calls for the engagement of Major Groups and Stakeholders on both a policy and programmatic level, Stakeholder Forum has undertaken this piece of research to assess how best Major Groups and Stakeholders can help *implement* the Programme of Work 2010-11 (POW 2010-11).[6]

Objectives

The brief overview above of UNEP's relationship with Major Groups and Stakeholders illustrates how the process and nature of engagement has evolved over the years. UNEP is to be congratulated for its efforts to integrate Major Groups and Stakeholders into its operations, and create spaces for consultation, input and discussion. The efforts of Major Groups and Stakeholders over the years to engage with UNEP should also be acknowledged and applauded. However, as UNEP embarks upon a period of strategic change, re-appraises its structure and challenges the operational status quo, it is imperative that deep consideration is also given to how existing modes of engagement with Major Groups and Stakeholders can be enhanced to help to implement and deliver the outputs of the Medium Term Strategy and the biennial Programmes of Work. It was therefore the primary objective of this research to identify strategic and institutional pre-requisites for enhancing the role of Major Groups and Stakeholders in implementing UNEP's Programme of Work 2010-11, and through this identify the kinds of partnerships that would be required for this to happen, promoting innovative approaches and making recommendations for avoiding shortcomings.

At the inception of this project, Stakeholder Forum agreed a number of objectives with the Major Groups