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**Guidelines for Participation of  
Major Groups and Stakeholders  
in  
Policy Design at UNEP.**

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## Preface

Cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Major Groups and Stakeholders spans more than three decades on a wide variety of levels, from technical cooperation through to policy development and governance. UNEP has consistently welcomed an ongoing dialogue and frank exchange of views with Major Groups and Stakeholders – as it has long been recognized that Major Groups and Stakeholders can be substantive contributors to improving our understanding of the environment, and to developing innovative solutions to environmental challenges. These organizations, in turn, have become increasingly mobilized to both influence and collaborate with the UNEP decision-making process.

This document specifically addresses cooperation between UNEP and Major Groups and Stakeholders in governance functions and policy formulation during UNEP policy processes. Interaction between Major Groups and Stakeholders and UNEP became more formalized in 2000, in light of the Malmoe Declaration which emphasized the inherent challenges to UNEP and Major Groups and Stakeholders, and has evolved into an annual process, including 6 regional Major Groups and Stakeholders Meetings and a global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum. These meetings are designed to air views related to key issues on the UNEP Governing Council agenda – and more importantly to develop coherent Major Groups and Stakeholders responses to these issues. To date, Major Groups and Stakeholders representatives accredited to ECOSOC or UNEP through their organizations are invited to participate in Governing Council discussions as well as similar processes.

*Agenda 21*, adopted by the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or “Earth Summit” in 1992, established the concept of the nine “Major Groups”: 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. Several of these constituencies are well organized through representational membership organizations spanning national and global levels. Some Major Groups focus on well defined issues, while others address a much broader array of concerns. The challenge for both Major Groups and Stakeholder organizations and for UNEP is to develop a process that respects and gives voice to the diverse views of Major Group representatives while at the same time structuring Major Group input in such a way that it can effectively inform the inter-governmental process.

The Guidelines described in this document aim to create a balanced and actively facilitated framework for managing Major Groups and Stakeholders’ input to the UNEP governance processes. It is foreseen that the Major Groups Facilitating Committee (MGFC) be composed of two representatives from each Major Group, and be regionally and gender balanced. Organizations formally accredited with UNEP will be requested to tender their interest in facilitating dialogue within their Major Group on substantive Governing Council issues. UNEP staff will work closely with each of the Major Groups to ensure an equitable process of selection, with gender and geographical balance taken into consideration. Each organisation is expected to commit to this process for a period of 2 years.

Facilitating the development of coherent position papers on substantive Governing Council issues as well as helping “coordinating” or “facilitating” Major Group input and work during the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) will be primary tasks for each of the Major Group representatives to the MGFC. It will also be incumbent upon each Major Group representative to the MGFC to ensure a clear link in their final position papers of their Major Group to the outcomes of the regional Major Groups and Stakeholder discussions.

## **Introduction**

1. “Engagement between UNEP and civil society is necessary, both for UNEP and for the protection of the planet’s fragile web of life. In this engagement lies the potential for resurgence of democracy and ecological awareness...”<sup>1</sup> There is indeed an opportunity for Major Groups and Stakeholders to continuously reassess and provide guidance on how to further civil society’s effective participation.
2. With the goal of providing a vision for how all nine Major Groups can collaborate in an effective Major Groups and Stakeholders process with common reference points, this document, “Guidelines for Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in Policy Design at UNEP” is contributing to this collaborative process.
3. 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 Major Groups and Stakeholders where both can play significant roles in shaping modern environmental policy. This approach should be regionally and gender balanced, and based on an interactive democracy. It should work to get the best-qualified organisations to participate actively in the policy processes at UNEP; bring the goals and visions of UNEP out to the general public’s awareness and understanding; enhance proficiency, the scientific base and promote capacity building, and solicit a wider public participation in the development and adoption of appropriate strategies for Major Groups and Stakeholders in the work for the environment in all its aspects. This paper is also aimed at securing a more balanced participation of the nine Major Groups.
4. Major Groups and Stakeholders are also implementers and opportunities exist in UNEP for partnerships that can increase the impact or profile of projects that meet shared goals. More specifically, business as well as other Major Groups have important resources and expertise that can contribute to a wide range of programme, policy and implementation activities across UNEP. These implementation aspects are not addressed in the present document which focuses on Major Groups’ participation at the Governance Level. However, there are important synergies between civil society participation at the governance level and in project implementation, with each having the potential to strengthen the other.
5. This document begins by recalling the existing framework of decisions within which the major groups and stakeholders operate. This discussion is followed by a summary of the expectations for civil society and UNEP on moving forward with enhancing their engagement. The Guidelines outline the role, representation, and regional engagement of the Major Group Facilitating Units (the MGFUs), and the Major Groups Facilitating Committee (the MGFC).
6. The first edition of the Guidelines adopted in February 2008 and approved by UNEP in March 2008, was to be revised after one year. This second edition has been presented to civil society for adoption by email consultation. After approval by the Executive Director of UNEP, the present 2009 Guidelines will be subject to a review after two years.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Vandana Shiva, Founder of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology of India, in *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>.

## **Chapter 1: Background**

7. Recalling that after nearly twenty years of encouraging UNEP's collaboration with Major Groups and Stakeholders through outreach and liaison services, the 1992 "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 nine Major Groups.
8. 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 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 GC/GMEF 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. The name has been changed to underline this greater emphasis on Major Groups representation.
9. The UNEP strategy paper resulting from the initial call for action in 2001 established three principal pillars for engaging with Major Groups and Stakeholders: governance and policy formulation; programme implementation; and an institutional framework. A Draft Implementation Plan to enhance Major Groups' engagement in the work of UNEP was furthermore presented to participants at the 8<sup>th</sup> GCSF. By capitalizing on all three of these pillars, this document seeks to create a common reference document and a set of recommendations for how civil society will continue to strengthen its role within UNEP, at the GC/GMEF, through the Global Major Groups and Stakeholder's Forum (GMGSF) cycle. This document also goes one step further, and provides a vision for seeking greater participation among the nine Major Groups, recognizing that each Major Group has special interests that should be strengthened in a collaborative manner without sacrificing those unique interests within and among the Major Groups.
10. In order to fulfill its role as the lead UN organisation to the global environmental challenges and opportunities, UNEP developed a Medium-Term-Strategy (MTS) which was adopted in early 2008 and will reorient UNEP's Programme of Work in the years 2010-2013 around six thematic issue priorities: Climate Change, Disasters and Conflict, Ecosystems Management, Environmental Governance, Harmful Substances and Hazardous Waste, and Resource Efficiency and Sustainable Consumption and Production. The MTS defines the following roles as central to UNEP's mandate, namely to keep the world environmental situation under review; to catalyze and promote international cooperation and action; to provide policy advice and early warning information based upon sound science and assessments; to facilitate the development, implementation and evolution of norms and standards and to develop coherent interlinkages among international environmental conventions. Equally important is the role of capacity building and technology transfer which was already founded in 2005 through the adoption of the *Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building* (the Bali Strategic Plan). The objective of the Bali Strategic Plan is to strengthen technology support and capacity building, or human capital, in both developing countries and countries in economic transition. It provides a framework for cooperation between UNEP, multilateral environmental agreements, and other bodies engaged in environmental capacity building, including the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Major Groups, and other relevant stakeholders. The MTS also points out that there

is renewed focus on the future evolution of international environmental governance within the United Nations system itself, including calls for greater coherence within the United Nations system and an increased focus on the role of major groups and stakeholders, on being responsive to country level priorities, and on results-based management.

## **1.1. Expectations**

11. This section briefly addresses Major Groups and Stakeholders and UNEP's expectations for engaging in UNEP processes and with delegates during the GC/GMEF.

### **1.1.1. Major Groups Expectations from UNEP**

12. The initial expectations of the Major Groups in 2007 were to see a continuation of the progress made at the 8<sup>th</sup> GCSF and the 24<sup>th</sup> 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 Major Groups and Stakeholders to meet the authors of key UNEP proposals and share concerns; and
  - (c) The designation of twelve seats at the 24<sup>th</sup> Governing Council Ministerial Roundtables for Major Groups and Stakeholders representatives as participants, not observers, providing them direct access to ministers.
13. This was also the pilot year for the Global Civil Society Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the six UNEP regions to facilitate Major Groups and Stakeholders engagement with UNEP. Forum participants were supportive of the concept of such a Committee, noting that the primary role of such a Committee is to be a facilitator between UNEP and Major Groups and Stakeholders, and not to be a decision making body. This Committee was also seen as a useful contact point for Major Groups and stakeholders organizations wanting to learn more about engaging in UNEP processes, particularly because this year major groups and Stakeholders participants had access to the floor in the plenary sessions during both the GMEF and the Committee of the Whole. However, participants stressed the need to improve the GCSF cycle, especially requesting a more balanced composition of this Committee.
14. 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 which was renamed Major Groups Facilitating Committee (MGFC).
15. Similarly, it is also expected that in addition to dialogue with UNEP policy staff responsible for drafting various policy frameworks, this process will include the Major Groups and Stakeholders in policy implementation (and drafting) on specific themes. Enhanced ability to allow the Major Groups and Stakeholders to interact with UNEP policy formulation, speaking as Major Groups, would be useful as the Major Groups and Stakeholders try to organize themselves and their key messages.
16. As previously mentioned, the Major Groups and Stakeholders have the capacity to draw on expertise from within the Major Groups, but it becomes more difficult for the Major Groups and Stakeholders to mobilize the right level of expertise in time to assist UNEP's endeavours 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 GMEF.
17. It is therefore expected that notice of the themes for each GC/GMEF will be available sufficiently in advance of each GC/GMEF, allowing the Major Groups and Stakeholders timely and to

increase interaction with UNEP policy staff responsible for drafting and implementing specific policy themes and frameworks.

18. Since information dissemination by the Major Groups and Stakeholders is also an important asset to UNEP process, enhanced facilitation for the same is duly expected from UNEP
19. UNEP should make every effort to ensure quick translation of relevant documents into UN languages to allow regional balance in views and representation.

### **1.1.2. UNEP Expectations from Major Groups**

20. This section attempts to answer the question, “what is UNEP’s interest in strengthened major groups and stakeholders participation in the UNEP policy process?”
21. Both UNEP and Major Groups and Stakeholders 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, major groups and stakeholder organizations possess information, technical expertise and practical experience that governments can benefit from in their deliberations and decision making at the 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 major groups and stakeholders views are taken into account from the beginning. Furthermore, open processes of political decision making with wider participation enhance transparency, foster coordination among diverse actors and strengthen accountability for implementation and results.
22. Major Groups and Stakeholders can be an asset to the UNEP process on a variety of levels including, but not limited to being, providers of substantive knowledge, drafters of creative solutions, disseminators of information to communities at the grassroots level, and advocates for specific issues. It is in these roles that Major Groups and Stakeholders stand 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. Major Groups and Stakeholders also have 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.
23. To maximize these important benefits of major groups’ and stakeholders’ participation in international environmental governance, major groups and stakeholder organizations must dedicate their most skilled and knowledgeable experts to participate in the UNEP policy processes based on the particular issues under discussion at any given time. Major groups and stakeholders should also organize their participation in the GC/GMEF to be as representative as possible, taking into account expertise, geographical origin, gender and other relevant criteria.

## **Chapter 2: Creating a balanced and actively facilitated framework for managing Major Group input to the UNEP governance process**

### **2.1. The Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF): Engaging with the Governing Council**

24. The purpose of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum which previously was called the “Global Civil Society Forum”, is to increase major groups and stakeholders influence and inputs into decisions adopted by the GC/GMEF by informing the Major Groups (MGs) and relevant stakeholders about UNEP’s procedures and arrangements of the upcoming GC, providing information about the latest developments on substance, allowing the different Major Groups the opportunity to have an exchange of views, and to facilitate the development of possible common positions of the Major Groups related to the topics discussed at the GC/GMEF.

### **2.2. The Regional Consultative Meetings (RCM’s)**

25. The Regional Consultation Meetings constitute the main platform for the Major Groups to engage with the Regional Offices of UNEP on an annual basis. Their purpose is to serve as opportunities for capacity building and networking for the Major Groups in the regions, as well as for the Regional Offices. And yet they have not fully served one of the purposes for which they were meant i.e. providing timely contributions to the GC/GMEF, because they take place when draft decisions are not yet known.

26. To address this problem, the following improvements will be implemented:

- a) The RCMs would be under the responsibility of the Regional Offices and held prior to or in conjunction with relevant major regional meetings, events or fora. They would be dedicated to discussing relevant programme issues and possible cooperative actions, and/or preparing of the Major Groups’ inputs into the relevant major regional meetings/events/fora.
- b) They would also serve as capacity building and networking exercises for the Major Groups in the regions, and constitute platforms for Regional Offices to engage with major groups and stakeholders on an annual basis. More flexibility would be given to the Regional Offices to organize workshops/meeting with a stronger regional focus in coherence with identified needs. This would in particular respond to the need for increasing and making

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