



BRIEFING NOTE

10TH GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM: 14-15 FEBRUARY 2009, NAIROBI, KENYA

The tenth session of the Global Civil Society Forum was held at the United Nations Office in Nairobi, Kenya from 14-15 February 2009. The meeting was organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). An estimated 230 participants attended. The Forum took place immediately prior to the 25th session of UNEP's Governing Council and the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC-25/GMEF). The Global Civil Society Forum's main aims were to prepare for GC-25/GMEF and to refine the key statements of civil society at these events.

The Forum took up several issues, including engagement at GC-25/GMEF, partnerships for implementation of the 2010-2011 programme of work, and the themes of GC-25/GMEF, which are "Globalization and the environment: global crisis: national chaos?" and "International environmental governance: help or hindrance?" Participants at the Forum also considered the chemicals agenda and civil society statements to GC-25/GMEF, and held an interactive discussion with UNEP's Executive Director, Achim Steiner.

This Briefing Note summarizes the discussions that took place at the Forum.

OPENING SESSION

Lucien Royer, Chair the Major Group Facilitating Committee, welcomed participants and explained that the meeting would focus on creating avenues for organizations to become more involved in the implementation of UNEP's programme of work. UNEP Deputy Executive Director Angela Cropper underscored UNEP's "high premium on partnerships" and intention to strengthen the scope and number of partnerships for the implementation of its programme of work.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Participants then adopted the agenda without amendment. On the election of officers, Olivier Deleuze, UNEP, proposed Lucien Royer, International Trade Union Confederation, for the position of Chair, and Mildred Mkandla, Earthcare Africa, for Vice-Chair. Stating that there was a need for more than two rapporteurs due to the importance of representation at other meetings running parallel to the Forum, Deleuze proposed the following individuals as rapporteurs: Sascha Gabizon (Women in Europe for a Common Future); Gordon Bispham, (Caribbean Development Centre); Jan-Gustav Strandenaes (Northern Alliance for Sustainability – ANPED); and Nuha Ma'ayta (General Federation for Jordanian Women). All were elected by acclamation.

ENGAGING AT UNEP GC-25/GMEF

Rapporteur Jan-Gustav Strandenaes presented on the processes, rules and regulations that govern the sessions of the Governing Council, and put GC-25/GMEF into context for the newer members of the Forum. Noting that decisions made by the Governing Council are overarching, he stressed that political will is the only way to transform debate into action. With climate change-related disasters on the rise and fewer choices to be made regarding how to mitigate them, Strandenaes further emphasized that policymakers must be properly informed of the choices to be made and must fully understand the repercussions of these choices. He explained that there were nine major groups identified in this process: 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 (NGOs), and local authorities. He encouraged participants to identify which group they belonged to in order for civil society to have a stronger, more united voice at GC-25/GMEF.

During the ensuing discussion, participants raised questions on the composition of the nine major civil society groups and on disseminating information.

Judith Carreras, Sustainlabour, gave an overview of the agenda for GC-25/GMEF and entry points for civil society organizations.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS FOR IMPLEMENTING UNEP'S PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 2010-2011

Hannah Stoddart, Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, presented key recommendations from a study on enhancing the role of major groups and stakeholders in implementing UNEP's programme of work for 2010-2011. She outlined a recommendation on knowledge management and internal communication to enable major groups to play a role, highlighting a lack of coherence in engaging stakeholders and issues of duplication. To address this, she explained that the study recommends that UNEP develop custodianships and internal and interactive knowledge management systems. Regarding external communication of UNEP's work, she said UNEP research and toolkits remain "on the shelf," and said the study recommends developing partnerships at a programmatic concept stage to achieve improved information dissemination.

Regarding the formation of strategic partnerships, Stoddart highlighted the establishment by UNEP of strategic partnerships with major groups and stakeholders at a sub-programmatic level. On enhancing involvement in project preparation at a country level, she outlined various recommendations that included mainstreaming the major groups approach in country implementation, and stakeholder mapping at a country-level with a major groups focus. She noted that major groups structures in some developing countries are challenging.

Regarding diversity, Stoddart reported the study's findings of under-representation of trade unions, indigenous peoples and farmers, and a recommendation to adopt a major groups approach at a programmatic concept stage and country level to help increase representation. On making engagement with major groups more relevant to programmatic implementation, she mentioned the fragmentation between engagement on policy and implementation, as well as limited opportunities to learn lessons in implementation. She further noted that UNEP adds significant value as "convener" of multi-stakeholder partnerships, but added that UNEP's current MOUs do not accommodate this kind of approach.

Michael Gribble, International Council of Chemical Management, made a brief presentation on behalf of business and industry. Stating that business strongly supports UNEP in its quest to become more results-oriented, he noted that partnerships were one avenue that UNEP could use to achieve its goal. Highlighting that these partnerships would also strengthen major groups, he underscored the importance of partnerships that would encourage sharing information and experiences, awareness raising and capacity building, and wider participation in policy discussions. Gribble used the example of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) to demonstrate a working partnership between a broad range of actors.

Thierry de Oliveira, UNEP, presented an overview of the involvement of civil society stakeholders in integrated environmental assessment and reporting using the Global Environment Outlook (GEO). Stating that GEO has so far released four publications since its inception in 1995, Oliveira stressed stronger partnerships with civil society in order to reach broader networks of people. Highlighting that GEO needs to become more actionable, he observed that there is not yet a strategy at UNEP to use the GEO reports on the ground. Finally, he stressed the need to bridge the gap between science and civil society in order to make the GEO reports relevant to a wider audience.

Lucien Royer, Chair of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, gave a briefing on National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS), a UN indicator-driven process requiring countries to report on sustainable development. He identified a disconnect between the NSDS and UNEP. On promoting partnerships, he noted the need for measuring and evaluating progress, linking up with NSDS and contextualizing the programme of work.

During the ensuing discussion, the difficulty of online access to the GEO 4 was discussed, and participants asked how UNEP would implement the study prepared by Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future.

Sheila Aggarwal-Khan, UNEP, clarified that, subject to the approval of the programme of work, a process would be designed for all UNEP divisions to decide on different sets of activities that add up to a coherent whole, which would enable UNEP to have more impact from the sum of its work. This process will require UNEP to engage more strategically with major groups. The work of Stakeholder Forum would be used to determine how to operationalize UNEP's more strategic engagement with partners.

DIALOGUE WITH UNEP'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UNEP, highlighted five issues which would underpin the success of GC-25/GMEF: finding a way forward on the issue of mercury; developing a clear mandate on whether an IPCC-like body is needed for biodiversity; approving the programme of work and budget; using the concept of the green economy as an opportunity to speak to the current financial crisis and empower the discourse on the global economy; and encouraging a clear articulation from environment ministers on how to move forward on international environmental governance.

On UNEP's relationship with civil society, Steiner asked how a multilateral institution can change the way it does business to be more effective, observing that many NGOs have been an integral part in shaping major decisions. He emphasized the continued identification of transformative agendas to focus on in the GC/GMEF.

In the ensuing discussion, participants expressed concerns about UNEP's implementation of its strategy for indigenous peoples; UNEP's commitment to combating desertification; the opportunities for national committees to engage with UNEP; the way forward on the issue of mercury; UNEP's role in post-conflict rehabilitation; nuclear power; and the need to have young people included in official country delegations.

In response to a question on indigenous peoples, Steiner stressed that UNEP was committed to engaging indigenous peoples in the programme of work, and more specifically in the area of reducing emissions through deforestation. He reiterated UNEP's commitment to combating desertification on a global scale, with land issues becoming an increasingly important consideration. He further underscored the value of national committees and reported that a team at UNEP is looking into creating better linkages between UNEP and the committees.

On the subject of chemicals management, he stressed the need to move forward on the issues under the mercury agenda where consensus already exists and to produce some concrete results by the end of GC-25/GMEF. Regarding UNEP's role in post-conflict scenarios, he highlighted UNEP's work in ecosystem restoration in post-conflict areas, giving the examples of Mali and Haiti.

On the issue of partnerships, he noted the need to have community leaders at such fora, but suggested that the way forward may be to take the issues to the communities themselves. On nuclear energy, Steiner noted that neither UNEP nor ministers for the environment have an articulated position, but stressed the need for more research into the economics of alternative energy sources as a means for policymakers to make informed choices.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

On Sunday morning, 15 February, participants heard three keynote presentations and discussed the major themes of GC-25/GMEF, namely "Globalization and the environment: global crisis: national chaos?" and "International environmental governance: help or hindrance?"

John Scanlon, UNEP, gave a brief overview of the themes of GC-25/GMEF, and UNEP's rationale for selecting them. Highlighting the need for environment ministers to discuss the multiple global crises, he said the dialogue would aim to open the discourse on finding solutions to these problems. He also emphasized UNEP's green economy agenda, stating that in the long term this would be a solution to the global crises.

David Foster, Blue-Green Alliance, discussed the Blue-Green Alliance's efforts to popularize the green economy concept in the US. Stressing that the global crises today are all connected, he underscored the interrelatedness of their solutions. He described the global economic crisis as an opportunity to further the green economy agenda and outlined the principles that drive the Blue-Green Alliance, namely advocacy at the grassroots level to demystify the concept of the green revolution; advocacy for policy legislation that strengthens markets for the products and services the green economy creates; and a focus on green recovery.

Elenita Dano, Third World Network, presented an NGO perspective on globalization and the environment. Pointing out that financing is contingent on the necessary political will, she stressed that the climate crisis leaves no room for a business-as-usual scenario. She highlighted the need for a multi-stakeholder platform to address action that will move the climate change agenda forward at the national and global levels, noting that strategic interventions and investments would help rebuild the environment. Calling for a reform of the current international financial architecture, Dano further stressed the need for a responsive and politically-capable international environmental governance unit to ensure the enforcement of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

In the ensuing discussion, participants sought answers on: the relationship between international environmental governance and environmental democracy; whether the experience of some industries in the US could be shared with developing countries; the creation of an environmental justice unit; tax incentives to support a green economy; a special adaptation fund for African countries; access to the clean development mechanism (CDM); and the distinction between large and small clean energy projects.

In response, John Scanlon noted the need for the UNEP's "governance from a country level" approach. He also mentioned UNEP's efforts to help build the capacity of developing country negotiators. David Foster highlighted the success of tax incentives in promoting the green economy agenda and noted that the capacity already exists in terms of the human resources needed to build green economies. Elenita Dano said effective international environmental governance should be democratic and the solutions to the problems the world is facing would need to be sustainable. Stating that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities needs to be operationalized, she emphasized that funding should be channeled towards the creation of green economies across the world.

THE CHEMICALS AGENDA

Per Bakken, UNEP Chemicals, gave a brief overview of the chemicals agenda, including SAICM, lead and cadmium, and mercury, and outlined UNEP's expectations for GC-25/GMEF. He described SAICM as a multi-stakeholder approach to chemicals management on a global scale. Noting that SAICM is seen as a successful partnership in chemicals management, he said the proposed action for GC-25/GMEF would be to continue and further strengthen its support for SAICM. On lead and cadmium, Bakken highlighted that UNEP has been running a programme aimed at ascertaining the transboundary movement of products containing these heavy metals. The proposed actions for GC-25/GMEF are to allow UNEP to continue filling in the information gaps and engage with countries requiring assistance in this area.

Regarding mercury, Bakken said UNEP had been given the mandate during GC-24/GMEF of assessing the options for mercury in terms of either a legally-binding instrument or voluntary measures. He informed participants that at the second open-ended working group session, two documents had been formulated – a “pros and cons” analysis of the two options and a policy document. However, no consensus had been reached on either voluntary measures or a legally-binding instrument. He added that GC-25/GMEF will consider: the immediate actions to be taken; a possible agreement on establishing an intergovernmental negotiating committee; and the modalities of establishing that committee.

Euripides Euripidou, Zero Mercury Working Group, gave a brief description of Zero Mercury Working Group's activities. Arguing that GC-25/GMEF was obligated to agree on a legally-binding instrument on mercury which would allow the proposed intergovernmental negotiating committee to commence its work immediately, Euripidou stressed that the aim of his group is ultimately to eliminate mercury. He urged participants to lobby their governments to agree to a legally-binding instrument.

In the discussion that followed, participants raised several issues, including the benefits of a legally-binding instrument over voluntary measures, the future of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), and energy-saving light bulbs.

In response to comments on the IFCS, Per Bakken said the role of IFCS has largely been taken over by SAICM, but noted that the future of IFCS was on the agenda for the second session of the International Conference for Chemicals Management (ICCM), scheduled for May 2009. He reiterated that there was not yet any consensus on the way forward on the mercury issue. Euripides Euripidou explained that a legally-binding instrument would enhance a commitment to eliminate mercury. He also noted that while there is some mercury contained in energy-saving light bulbs, the mercury that could potentially be released is negligible.

Finally, the West Asia and North Africa group read a statement on the environmental degradation in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. This was unanimously adopted by participants and will be forwarded to GC-25/GMEF.

REFINING THE KEY STATEMENTS TO GC-25/GMEF

On Sunday afternoon, participants contributed to statements to be forwarded to GC-25/GMEF. A number of major groups made statements. Farmers requested to be included in all multilateral meetings, and small island developing States sought to integrate their concerns into UNEP's programme of work. Youth requested inclusion in national country delegations to international meetings, trade unions expressed support for UNEP's green economy agenda, and the science and technology community asked UNEP to give a higher priority to scientific data in its decision-making processes. Other statements focused on the use of a neutral grid system to map the progress of issues within the GCSF, the strengthening of an experience and information sharing culture at the national and global levels, and the consolidation of the outcomes of GCSF meetings into comprehensive documents.

CLOSING SESSION

Chair Lucien Royer stressed the importance of using the GC-25/GMEF to lobby ministers and their representatives to take into consideration the issues discussed at GCSF 10.

Olivier Deleuze, UNEP, encouraged participants to view the global crises as opportunities for change towards greener economies. Urging participants to work together, he noted that the next Forum would focus on the contribution of major groups and the involvement of participants in the implementation of the programme of work.

Chair Lucien Royer gavelled the meeting to a close at 4:06 pm.