



High-level Forum of the United Nations Environmental Management Group

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First meeting
Geneva, 24 January 2006

Chair's summary and conclusions

I. Premise of the Forum

1. The assessment of the need for, and complexity involved in, environmental coordination formed the backdrop for the original rationale for establishing the United Nations Environmental Management Group in 1999 by General Assembly resolution 53/242. This original rationale set out a number of core functions for the Group and it clearly illustrated that it was envisaged as a mechanism that would first and foremost assist its member organizations in achieving a more rational and cost-effective division of labour with respect to growing and often overlapping environmental functions and objectives. It was hoped that the Group would bring about improved inter-agency policy coherence and collaboration, adopt a problem-solving, results-oriented approach that would enable United Nations bodies, secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and partners, including financial institutions, to share information, consult on proposed new initiatives, contribute to a planning framework and develop agreed priorities and agree on their respective roles in the implementation of those priorities in order to achieve a more rational and cost-effective use of their resources.

2. The period since the establishment of the Environmental Management Group in 1999 has been characterized by a significantly altered international context generating an increased need for system-wide coordination. This need for coordination in the field of the environment continues to be a theme to which Governments attach considerable importance, but it is one that has evolved and become remarkably more complex. This complexity stems in large part from the reality that environmental issues have become more clearly defined and more important in nearly every major sector, and now permeate the work of practically every United Nations organization. Furthermore, as one of the three pillars (social, economic and environmental) of sustainable development, the environmental dimension has been adopted as part of the overarching framework of the United Nations' activities.

3. The 2005 World Summit Outcome¹ specifically accords priority to system-wide coherence and underscores the importance of environmental issues for sustainable development. Significantly, the Outcome specifies the need to ensure "more efficient environmental activities in the United Nations system, with enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance, strengthened scientific knowledge, assessment and cooperation ... and better integration of environmental activities in the broader sustainable development framework at the operational level, including through capacity-building ...".

¹ General Assembly resolution 60/1.

4. In the light of the above, and based on an earlier assessment of the work of the Environmental Management Group to date, the Chairman of the Group decided to convene a high-level forum of the Group's members to ascertain their views and recommendations on reviving and strengthening the Group and more effectively addressing existing and emergent environmental challenges in a coherent and coordinated manner. The Forum was attended by heads, deputy heads, directors and senior officials of more than 30 United Nations entities, with 49 participants taking part in the deliberations.

II. Purpose of the Forum

5. In February 2005, a report on evaluation of the performance of the Environmental Management Group was issued. While acknowledging that some progress had been made, the report recommended specific measures for the strengthening of the Group. New and emerging challenges, particularly those outlined in the 2005 World Summit Outcome and the ongoing deliberation of the recently appointed Secretary-General's Panel on a New Study on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Humanitarian Assistance, the Environment and Development, provide additional compelling reasons for reinvigorating the Group and refocusing its terms of reference.

6. The High-level Forum was convened at a time when the United Nations system is faced with growing demands for coherent and coordinated approaches, coupled with decreasing resources. Against that backdrop, the Forum provided the members of the Environmental Management Group with an opportunity to deliberate collectively on how a revitalized Environmental Management Group could serve the United Nations as an effective mechanism which could enable its members to discuss and agree on common and coordinated approaches to the environmental challenges of the time.

7. In his opening statement, the Chairman of the Environmental Management Group raised the following specific issues for the Forum's deliberations and recommendations.

- (a) The Group's terms of reference;
- (b) The Group's working methods, including:
 - (i) Issue-management groups;
 - (ii) Broader policy coherence;
 - (iii) The need for improvement in the Group's operational links with other relevant United Nations inter-agency and issue-based coordination mechanisms;
- (c) Membership – engendering ownership and delivering returns on investments to members by providing secretariat services;
- (d) Support structure – efficacy and sufficiency of secretariat arrangements;
- (e) United Nations system-wide coherence in the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building;²
- (f) Information exchange system for the Group;
- (g) Communicating common perspectives and shared views;
- (h) The Group's contributions to the ninth Special Session of the United Nations Environment Programme Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum;
- (i) International solidarity and partnerships for promoting system-wide coherence;
- (j) Commitment of the Group's members to delivering results.

² See document UNEP/GC.23/6/Add.1, annex.

III. Conclusions

A. Terms of reference of the Group

8. The Environmental Management Group's terms of reference, which were agreed through a process of inter-agency consultations, may be considered to be broad enough in nature to allow for a strategic reorientation or refocusing on specific elements or functions. The Forum participants recognized that, in a changing international context, it was essential to clarify the specific terms of reference of the Group. Participants were cognizant of the need to take into account the ongoing United Nations reform initiatives and their likely implications for the work of the Group. Participants were also briefed by the Executive Director of the Secretary-General's Panel on a New Study on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Humanitarian Assistance, the Environment and Development.

B. Working methods

1. Issue management

9. The issue-management approach can broadly be considered to have been useful; particularly considering the areas in which the Group has had some success in the past, such as harmonization of biodiversity-related reporting and capacity-building in the field of chemicals management. The Group could build on successful examples of the issue-management approach. Specific criteria for selecting the issues on which to focus should be developed in close consultation with the members.

2. Broader policy coherence

10. The Forum participants recommended that in the future the work of the Group should go beyond the issue-management approach as the sole or even the main functional modality. The Group's members should be able to come together discuss broader environmental policy issues and to reflect on their implications for the work of the Group. That might include contributing to broad environmental policy development in selected thematic areas. The Group's secretariat should, in consultation with the members, develop a strategy for communicating the results of the work of the United Nations in the area of the environment and human settlements on a country-by-country and region-by-region basis.

3. Improving the Group's operational links with other relevant United Nations inter-agency and issue-based coordination mechanisms

11. The Forum participants recognized that in order to enhance its effectiveness, the Environmental Management Group should endeavour to establish appropriate working relationships with other relevant inter-agency mechanisms and draw from and contribute to their work. The most obvious links for the Group are with the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and its High-level Committee on Programmes, the United Nations Development Group and the regional bodies. The Environmental Management Group, in close cooperation with the regional economic commissions, United Nations regional offices and multilateral environmental agreement regional institutions, should provide a platform for promoting system-wide coherence and cooperation.

12. Members of the Group should make better use of the Chief Executives Board, through its High-level Committee on Programmes, for guidance on policy coherence on emerging environmental issues or other issues requiring policy guidance by bringing those issues to the attention of the Board through the High-level Committee. The secretariat of the Environmental Management Group should establish close links with relevant inter-agency mechanisms such as UN-Water, UN-Oceans and UN-Energy.

13. The Group could provide a forum and a mechanism to enhance complementarities between the analytical and normative activities and the operational roles of its members. In that regard, it could explore possibilities for supporting the work of the United Nations Development Group and its working groups.

4. Group membership

Membership

14. The current membership of the Environmental Management Group consists of all the specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations system and all the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements. Representatives of civil society and international non-governmental organization may participate by invitation of the Chair. The Group could also seek the involvement, particularly through issue-management groups, of non-United Nations entities in order to benefit from their views on specific substantive issues.

High-level participation

15. As a clear sign of commitment, members should make every effort to ensure that they are represented at a senior-level in meetings of the Group in order to enhance the Group's profile and effectiveness and to facilitate collective decision-making.

Ownership

16. A sense of ownership among members should be fostered through such methods as discussing and agreeing on the way forward for the Group; allowing for the discussion of important proposals such as to strengthen the Group's interactions with inter-governmental bodies; establishing a clear relation with inter-governmental processes, including a clearly-defined reporting relationship with the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the Commission on Sustainable Development and other forums in the United Nations system. In addition, the Group should establish a vice-chair position that would be filled, on a rotating basis, from the membership.

5. Support structure – efficacy and sufficiency of secretariat arrangements

17. The Forum participants agreed that the pre-conditions for success in the functioning of the Environmental Management Group included:

- (a) Enhancement of the Group's administrative and financial resources;
- (b) Positioning the Group secretariat to enable it to benefit from maximum institutional support and synergies;
- (c) Adequately staffing the secretariat, through, among other things, regular and predictable budgetary allocations and secondment of staff. Members of the Group should consider providing institutional support. Development cooperation partners, inter-governmental bodies such as the European Union, regional and development banks and the World Bank should also consider providing institutional and financial support, including seconded staff;
- (d) Replenishment and maintenance of the Group's trust fund with adequate resources.

6. Implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building

18. United Nations agencies and secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements participated in the consultative process which led to the adoption of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building.³ In the Plan it is stated that it "should support improved inter-agency coordination and cooperation"⁴ and that as part of the approach, "Work must be coordinated, linked with efforts already in progress and integrated with other sustainable development initiatives using existing coordinating mechanisms, such as the Environmental Management Group, the United Nations Development Group and the resident coordinator system".⁵ Consequently, the members of the Group should consult on a coordinated approach to the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan.

³ See document UNEP/GC.23/6/Add.1, annex.

⁴ Ibid., para. 4.

⁵ Ibid., subpara. 5 (d).

7. Information exchange

19. The Forum participants emphasized that an appropriate information exchange system should be developed and instituted to allow the Environmental Management Group's members to share information about their own activities in the areas of environment and human settlements and to ensure that their proposed programmes, projects and activities do not duplicate one another and enable them to explore the potential for joint action and synergy. The Group secretariat could prepare a plan for such a system of information exchange, for review by the Group's members and to promote collective action.

8. Communicating common perspectives and shared views

20. With the aim of gaining broad recognition for the Group's role in improving system-wide coherence and coordination in the area of the environment and human settlements, joint statements expressing common perspectives and views of the Group's members could be issued on an as-needed basis. Such statements could be issued by the members themselves or by the Group Chair in consultation with the members.

9. Contributions to the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum

21. The Forum participants agreed that the Assistant-Director-General for Natural Sciences of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization would convey the essential points of the outcome of the Forum to the ninth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 7–9 February 2006).

10. International solidarity and partnerships for promoting system-wide coherence

22. A partnership forum will be convened during the first half of 2006 to provide a platform for securing firm commitments to support the future work of the Environmental Management Group. United Nations agencies, development cooperation partners, the Group of 77 and China, financial bodies and key institutions will be invited to the forum. The forum will provide an opportunity for highlighting a diverse set of selected ongoing collaborative initiatives which demonstrate efforts being made to promote system-wide coherence and coordination and which should be encouraged by the international community.

11. Contributions to ongoing reform initiatives, including the work of the Secretary-General's Panel on a New Study on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Humanitarian Assistance, the Environment and Development

23. The Forum participants emphasized the importance of the Group's contributing to the relevant United Nations reform initiatives, particularly to the work of the United Nations Secretary-General's Panel on a New Study on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Humanitarian Assistance, the Environment and Development. An appropriate arrangement should be made to facilitate such contributions.

12. Commitment of the Environmental Management Group's members to delivering results

24. The Forum participants concluded that the Environmental Management Group needed to start delivering results, gaining the confidence of its members as a useful tool for enhancing the execution of their environment-related activities, and thus establishing its profile within and outside the United Nations system. It was recalled that the Group was called upon to provide a United Nations response and facilitate joint action in finding solutions to issues in the fields of environment and human settlements; and, second, to promote interlinkages and information exchange, contribute to synergy and complementarity between the activities of its members and add value to existing inter-agency cooperation. It was felt that the Forum provided a good opportunity for members to reflect on how those goals could be achieved collectively.

13. Elements for a short-term work plan

25. The Chairman, in his summation, called on the members to reflect on how the Group could promote problem-solving and results-oriented approaches; enhance the sharing of information; promote collaboration on specific initiatives; provide information on the work of the Group's members in selected sustainable development issues with environmental dimensions; map out for donors information on current system-wide and agency-specific initiatives; promote activities which respond to the needs of member States; undertake advocacy to promote specific issues of interest to its members, such as the life-cycle economy; and provide a platform for developing system-wide perspectives on relevant elements of the ongoing United Nations reform initiatives.

26. The participants in the Forum recognized the need for the Group to develop a short-term work plan. The following are some indicative elements which could be developed over the coming weeks in consultation with members and concerned parties and finalized in due course taking into consideration the conclusions of the Secretary-General's Panel on a New Study on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Humanitarian Assistance:

- (a) Terms of reference: Initiate a review of the terms of reference;
- (b) Working methods: Examine the views expressed at the Forum and present a proposal to the members of the Group;
- (c) Operational links: Consult with the secretariats of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and its High-level Committee on Programmes;
- (d) Membership: Develop a strategy for systematically updating the Group's directory;
- (e) Secretariat arrangements: Develop, in consultation with members, proposals for the Group's support structures;
- (f) Bali Strategic Plan: Establish an Environmental Management Group working group to develop a proposal on system-wide coordination for the implementation of the Plan;
- (g) Information exchange system: Commission a study to develop the system;
- (h) Partnership forum: Initiate consultations on the venue, timing format and programme for the event;
- (i) United Nations Secretary-General's Panel: Initiate consultations with members on the substance and modalities of the Group's contributions to the Panel;
- (j) United Nations regular budget: Initiate consultations on the prospects for securing regular budgetary resources;
- (k) Trust Fund: Consult Group members on modalities for replenishing the Group's Trust Fund;
- (l) Outcomes of the High-level Forum: Chair to report to executive heads of the Group's members;

14. Way forward

27. With the convening of the high-level forum on the future direction of the Environmental Management Group, an important first step has been taken. United Nations agencies, Governments and the international community at large have at their disposal the necessary means to transform the Group into an effective, authoritative, service- and results-oriented mechanism in furtherance of United Nations system-wide coherence and coordination in the areas of environment and human settlements. It is essential for the United Nations to have an effective mechanism for organizations within the system to discuss and agree on a more coordinated, productive and cost-effective way of tackling the environment- and human-settlements-related challenges confronting humanity. The success of that enterprise depends crucially on the sustained support and commitment of all parties.