



# High-level Forum of the United Nations Environment Management Group

Distr.: Restricted  
13 January 2006

Original: English

---

## High-level Forum of the United Nations Environment Management Group

First meeting  
Geneva, 24 January 2006

### Discussion paper by the Chair

#### I. Introduction

1. The need to coordinate effectively the environmental activities undertaken by the United Nations system was identified as early as 1972 by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment,<sup>1</sup> and the task was subsequently entrusted to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in its founding mandate (General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972). This need for coordination in the field of the environment is a theme to which Governments continue to attach considerable importance, but it is one that has evolved and become remarkably more complex as the global conferences of the 1990s and early 2000s have added to an already multi-faceted context. 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 of sustainable development, the environment dimension has been adopted as part of the overarching framework of the United Nations' activities. This reality is reflected prominently in the United Nations Millennium Declaration<sup>2</sup> and most recently in the 2005 World Summit Outcome,<sup>3</sup> which explicitly recognizes "the need for more efficient environmental activities in the United Nations system, with enhanced coordination [and] improved policy advice and guidance . . .".

2. This 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, as indicated in the 1998 report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements.<sup>4</sup> The Task Force, which had been requested to review structures and arrangements through which environmental activities were carried out within the United Nations system, concluded that there were substantial overlaps, unrecognized linkages and gaps. What was needed was

"a problem solving, results-oriented approach that enables United Nations bodies and their partners to share information about their respective plans and activities; to inform and consult one another about proposed new initiatives; to contribute to a planning framework that permits the plans and activities of each participant to be reviewed within the framework of the whole range of activities being carried on by all participants; and to consult with each other with a view to developing an agreed set of priorities and on measures through which each participating organization can best contribute to those

---

1 *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.73.II.A.14 and corrigendum) (A/CONF.48/14 and Corr.1).

2 General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000.

3 General Assembly resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005.

4 A/53/463, annex.

priorities and achieve a more rational and cost-effective use in their respective capacities and resources.”<sup>5</sup>

3. This original rationale sets out a number of core functions and it clearly illustrates that the Environmental Management Group 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. An effective Environmental Management Group would allow the United Nations to function as a more coherent system with regard to the integration and mainstreaming of environmental issues.

4. In a concerted bid to revitalize the Group, a new Director was appointed by UNEP in September 2005. He embarked on a process of consultations with various United Nations agencies and multilateral environmental agreement secretariats to solicit their views on the way forward for the work of the Group. These consultations revealed that while it is recognized that some modest progress has been made in certain programme areas over the last five years, there is a general consensus that the Group has not lived up to expectations. Most United Nations partners feel that the real issues hampering progress have yet to be addressed comprehensively. There is also broad agreement that an effective Environmental Management Group is particularly crucial at this juncture, with Member-States and United Nations reform initiatives squarely focusing attention on inefficiencies arising due to lack of coordination and the value added by enhanced system-wide coherence in the field of environment -- a serious challenge at a time when the United Nations is faced with decreasing resources to expend on such coordinating arrangements.

5. The 2005 World Summit Outcome 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 ...”. It is, therefore, essential that the United Nations have at its disposal an effective mechanism which enables organizations within the system to discuss and agree on a more productive and cost-effective manner, and on common and coordinated approaches, to tackle the environmental challenges of our time.

6. It is against this background that UNEP has convened the High-level Forum of the Environmental Management Group and committed itself to revitalizing the Group. The proposals set forth in this discussion paper are based on the recognition of the challenges that have hampered the Group’s work during its initial years, and the conviction that the Group can only be effective if there are perceived benefits for participating organizations. The Environmental Management Group must therefore, be seen as a United Nations system-wide mechanism, able to deliver meaningful results, build-up a solid and credible reputation of delivering solutions and engender a sense of shared ownership and commitment among its members.

## **II. Background**

7. In considering the way forward for the Environmental Management Group it is useful to reflect on how environmental coordination has been dealt with in the United Nations system in the past, which mechanisms are deemed to have been effective, and how the UNEP mandate for coordination in the field of the environment has evolved. It is also useful to revisit the rationale and objectives of the Group as stipulated by the Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements and the broader context of efforts to improve international environmental governance.

---

5 A/53/463, annex, para. 21.

## A. Brief history of environmental coordination in the United Nations system

8. General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972, created UNEP and established the Environment Coordinating Board under the auspices and within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. The Board was made up of United Nations executive heads and was chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP. Its principal mandate was to ensure cooperation and coordination among all bodies concerned with the implementation of environmental programmes and to report annually to the UNEP Governing Council. The Board was supplemented by environmental focal points within each agency. In 1978, the Administrative Committee on Coordination assumed the functions of the Board, and each agency appointed a designated official on environmental matters. Those officials reviewed the collective environmental work of United Nations bodies and agencies in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.

9. It is also significant to note that during this period before the Conference on Environment and Development, UNEP disbursed approximately 30 per cent of its resources through the environmental programmes of other United Nations system organizations. Furthermore, in the past, agencies joined hands in the preparation of the United Nations system-wide medium-term environment programme,<sup>6</sup> which served as a basis for inter-agency cooperation in the field of environment. It was implemented through the medium-term plan and programme budget document of all cooperating agencies.

10. Agenda 21 reaffirmed the coordinating role of UNEP, stating that “[t]he Governing Council should, within its mandate, continue to play its role with regard to policy guidance and coordination in the field of the environment, taking into account the development perspective”<sup>7</sup>, and should concentrate on “promoting international cooperation in the field of environment and recommending, as appropriate, policies to this end”. This mandate was reaffirmed in the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21,<sup>8</sup> adopted by the General Assembly in 1997. It stated that

“the role of the United Nations Environment Programme, as the principal United Nations body in the field of the environment, should be further enhanced. Taking into account its catalytic role, and in conformity with Agenda 21 and the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of UNEP, adopted on 7 February 1997, the Programme is to be the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.”<sup>9</sup>

11. In order to ensure effective cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system in the implementation of Agenda 21, the Administrative Committee on Coordination established the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development in 1992. The Committee utilized a system of task managers for thematic areas, who took the lead in preparing reports to the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Committee ceased to exist when, following the review of the Administrative Committee on Coordination in 2001, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and its High-level Committee on Programmes was established.

12. In 1995, UNEP established the Inter-Agency Environmental Management Group, which evolved from the Environmental Coordinating Board and the designated officials on environmental management. It was conceived as a mechanism to provide UNEP with an effective and strong coordinating role within the United Nations system on environmental matters. It held only two substantive meetings, however, and in 1998, the Task Force on

6 See the Report of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme on the work of its first special session (A/43/25), paras. 25–27.

7 *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol.I: *Resolutions adopted by the Conference*, resolution 1, annexes I and II (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1, annex II, ch. 38, para. 21).

8 General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex.

9 General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 123.

Environment and Human Settlements recommended that it be replaced by the Environmental Management Group.

13. Additionally, in response to concerns regarding coordination, several United Nations cooperation frameworks exist in specific environment-related areas. They vary greatly in their scope, membership and time-frame. Examples include: UN-Water, UN-Energy and UN-Oceans (which fall loosely within the purview of the High-level Committee on Programmes), the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, the Joint Liaison Group (of the Rio multilateral environmental agreements) and the Ecosystem Conservation Group.

## **B. Environmental Management Group: role and mandate**

14. The Secretary-General, pursuant to his 1997 report entitled “Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform”,<sup>10</sup> established the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements to prepare proposals on reforming and strengthening United Nations activities in the fields of environment and human settlements. The Task Force, chaired by the UNEP Executive Director, was requested to review existing structures and arrangements through which environmental activities were carried out within the United Nations system, and to focus on the distinctive functions of policy, development of norms and standards, programme development and implementation and financing, as well as relationships amongst these functions. The report of the Task Force was presented to the Secretary-General in June 1998. He subsequently issued his report to the General Assembly on Environment and Human Settlements<sup>11</sup>.

15. In his report, the Secretary-General put forward the Task Force’s recommendation for improved inter-agency policy coherence and collaboration through the establishment of an Environmental Management Group. The Secretary-General stated that the Group would adopt a problem solving, results-oriented approach that would enable United Nations bodies and their partners to share information, consult on proposed new initiatives and contribute to a planning framework, develop agreed priorities and determine their respective roles in the implementation of those priorities in order to achieve a more rational and cost-effective use of their resources. The Group would also provide a forum and a mechanism to enhance complementarities between the analytical and normative activities of UNEP with the operational role of the United Nations Development Programme. As such, the Group would follow the “issue-management” approach outlined by the Secretary-General in his reform report. The reports of the Group could be made available to relevant inter-governmental bodies to enhance intergovernmental policy coherence.

16. The Task Force proposed that the most important goals of the Environmental Management Group should be to achieve effective coordination and joint action in key areas of the environment and human settlements concern; assist intergovernmental bodies in the areas of environment and human settlements, in particular the UNEP Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements, to prepare coordinated inputs to intergovernmental forums, notably the Commission on Sustainable Development. It proposed too that the Group should establish time-bound task forces or working groups covering clusters of issues in which representatives of the main institutions involved in a particular issue could work together quickly to solve important problems. Furthermore, it suggested, the Group should include convention secretariats among its participants when needed and should act to ensure that there were appropriate linkages among activities that occurred under conventions and relevant activities elsewhere in the international system.

17. The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/242, expressed support for the establishment of an environmental management group and requested the Secretary-General to develop, in consultation with Member States and the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the mandate, terms of reference, criteria for membership, and flexible and cost-effective working methods for such a group. After a process of consultation within the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development, the terms of reference for the Environmental Management Group were endorsed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination at its first regular session of 2000.

---

10 A/51/950.

11 A/53/463.

18. Key points regarding the mandate, objectives, membership, structure and secretariat of the Group, as contained in the terms of reference, include:

(a) The Group's *mandate* is: first, 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;

(b) The Group's *objectives* are: first, to identify, address and resolve collectively specific problems through securing the collaboration of its members; and, second, to provide a forum for sharing information on new and emerging issues and deciding collectively the most effective approach to deal with them;

(c) The Group's *membership* will consist of all the specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations system and all the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements. Representatives of civil society and international non-governmental organizations may participate by invitation of the Chair;

(d) The Group's *structure* will have a senior-level decision-making body chaired by the UNEP Executive Director, and ad hoc issue-management groups which will be time-bound;

(e) UNEP would act as the Group's *secretariat*.

19. The Environmental Management Group started functioning in January 2001. A small secretariat was established in Geneva in June 2003. The Group held ten meetings between 2001 and 2005. It also established issue-management groups for harmonization of reporting on biodiversity-related conventions, sustainable procurement, environmental aspects of water and sanitation and capacity building in the areas of biodiversity and chemicals.

### C. International environmental governance process

20. Against the backdrop of the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (the Johannesburg Summit), the UNEP Governing Council, through the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives, undertook a comprehensive policy-oriented assessment of existing institutional weaknesses as well as future needs and options for strengthened international environmental governance. Among the main issues addressed was enhanced coordination across the United Nations system - specifically the role of the Environmental Management Group. One of the conclusions was that for the UNEP

“Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum to effectively play its policy role, it requires an instrument at the inter-agency level to enhance policy coordination across the environmental activities of the United Nations system. The Environmental Management Group is such an instrument and should be charged with reporting annually to the Forum ... as well as on specific issues arising from the work of the United Nations system in the environmental area on which the Forum could make recommendations on the work of the Environmental Management Group”.<sup>12</sup>

21. The Plan of Implementation of the Johannesburg Summit, adopted at the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, stressed the need for international institutions both within and outside the United Nations system to enhance, within their mandates, their cooperative efforts to promote effective and collective support to the implementation of Agenda 21 at all levels and enhance the effectiveness and coordination of international institutions to implement Agenda 21, the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit, relevant sustainable development aspects of the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the fourth World Trade Organization ministerial meeting.

22. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation went on to request the Secretary-General, utilizing the Chief Executives Board, including through informal collaborative efforts, to promote further system-wide inter-agency cooperation and coordination on sustainable development, to take appropriate measures to facilitate exchange of information, and to continue

12 UNEP Governing Council decision SS.VII/1, appendix, para. 36 (a).

to keep the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Sustainable Development informed of actions being taken to implement Agenda 21. It also stressed that the strengthening of the international institutional framework for sustainable development was an evolutionary process, and that it was necessary to keep under review relevant arrangements; identify gaps; eliminate duplication of functions; and continue to strive for greater integration, efficiency and coordination of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development aiming at the implementation of Agenda 21. It also called on the international community to implement fully the international environmental governance outcomes adopted by the UNEP Governing Council at its seventh special session.

23. Part of the international environmental governance package was the development of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building, which was adopted by the UNEP Governing Council at its twenty-third session in February 2005 in its decision 23/1 I. The Plan states that it “should support improved inter-agency coordination and cooperation”, and that as part of its approach “[w]ork 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”.<sup>13</sup> It also states that

“UNEP should work to achieve improved and enhanced communication, cooperation, coordination and synergies with other United Nations organizations, international financial institutions, regional development banks, multilateral environmental agreements, civil society and relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure optimum use of limited financial and human resources, strengthen regional and country level activities and provide a platform for multilateral approaches and consistency . . . .”<sup>14</sup>

### **III. Assessment of the performance of the Environmental Management Group**

#### **A. Progress made by the Group**

24. In the course of its initial years of operation, the Environmental Management Group has, with a limited amount of resources, made progress in a few specific areas, most notably harmonization of reporting on biodiversity-related issues and capacity-building in the field of chemicals management.

25. With regard to the former, many forums, including the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Johannesburg Summit and the UNEP Governing Council have recognized that the reporting requirements of the many multilateral environmental agreements are imposing a burden on Governments. It was decided that streamlining requests for national reporting in an efficient and coordinated manner would help all States Parties. An issue-management group was established under the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) to consider the issue. UNEP initiated pilot projects in four countries to test the possibilities of harmonized reporting. The issue-management group presented its final report in December 2003, recommending further liaison meetings between secretariats, national-level approaches and collaborative workshops. The Environmental Management Group decided that its own members should implement the recommendations of the report and report back to the group in 2005. The report on harmonization of reporting on biodiversity-related issues, after three years of work on what had seemed to be a relatively simple issue, revealed the difficulties in achieving harmonized reporting and brought clarity in terms of identifying the obstacles.

26. A second notable success was the work of the issue-management group on capacity-building for chemicals management. A situation and needs analysis, prepared for the Environmental Management Group by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research in cooperation with the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, provided an overview of the existing policy framework, activities and coordinating arrangements in the area of chemicals management capacity-building in the United Nations system. The report contributed to international dialogue to explore opportunities to enhance information exchange

13 UNEP/IEG/IGSP/3/4, annex, paras. 4, 5 (d).

14 UNEP/IEG/IGSP/3/4, annex, para 26.

and coordination in the area of chemicals management capacity-building and to identify possible areas in which the Group might add value. The report was made available and considered by the Group, the High-level Open-Ended Intergovernmental Working Group to Develop an Intergovernmental Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building, and by the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals during its discussions on developing a strategy for chemicals management capacity-building. It was also submitted to the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the Development of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, which took place in October 2004.

## **B. Main conclusions of the consultant's independent evaluation report**

27. In 2004, the UNEP Executive Director and the Chair of the Environmental Management Group commissioned an independent evaluation of the Group's work since its inception in order to provide a basis for reviewing its procedures and modalities and identifying measures for strengthening its working arrangements. In February 2005, the results of that independent evaluation were presented to the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its twenty-third session, in Nairobi.

28. While generally confirming that the concept of the Environmental Management Group was both necessary and sound, as it was the only mechanism that could provide a neutral platform for bringing together all the key agencies and stakeholders, there were also growing concerns about the ability of the Group to fulfil its original mandate. Key concerns, which remain today, included the following:

- (a) The Group's secretariat and work had developed much more slowly than desired;
- (b) The Group was largely perceived as a support body for UNEP. Its meetings had not been very focused and had been dominated by a UNEP-specific agenda;
- (c) The relationship of the Group to other inter-agency bodies was unclear and risked duplication. It had even supplanted other useful bodies such as the Ecosystem Conservation Group;
- (d) Attendance at the Group's meetings had been poor, with representation at a lower level than originally intended;
- (e) The Group needed to add more value with specific benefits for its members to ensure their full commitment and participation;
- (f) The Group had a very limited impact on information exchange;
- (g) The Group needed to focus more on integrating environmental concerns in the work of all relevant bodies, including at the regional level.

## **IV. Need for coordination within the international environmental agenda**

29. The Outcome document adopted by global leaders at the 2005 World Summit in New York in September 2005 made specific recommendations with regard to United Nations system-wide coherence, based on the recognition that the United Nations brings together a unique wealth of expertise and resources. The Outcome points to the extensive experience and expertise of the various development-related organizations, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system in their diverse and complementary fields of activity and their important contributions to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the other development objectives established by various United Nations conferences.

30. The Outcome stipulates the need for stronger system-wide policy coherence by strengthening linkages between the United Nations' normative work and its operational activities and the need to ensure that the main horizontal policy themes, such as sustainable development, human rights and gender, are taken into account in decision-making throughout the United Nations. The Outcome specifically invites the Secretary-General to "launch work to further strengthen the management and coordination of United Nations operational activities",<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> General Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 169.

calling for such work to be focused on ensuring the United Nations maximizes its contribution to achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and proposals for “more tightly managed entities” in the fields of the environment, humanitarian assistance and development.

31. The document goes on to make specific recommendations with regard to environmental activities:

“Recognizing the need for more efficient environmental activities in the United Nations system, with enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance, strengthened scientific knowledge, assessment and cooperation, better treaty compliance, while respecting the legal autonomy of the treaties, and better integration of environmental activities in the broader sustainable development framework at the operational level, including through capacity-building . . . .”<sup>16</sup>

32. World leaders agreed to explore the possibility of a more coherent institutional framework to address this need, including a more integrated structure building on existing institutions and internationally agreed instruments, as well as the treaty bodies and the specialized agencies.

33. In order to respond to this call, the Secretary-General has announced that he is commissioning a small panel of eminent and experienced international figures to develop concrete and comprehensive analyses and recommendations on United Nations system-wide coherence in the fields of humanitarian assistance, environmental activities and development. The panel will be supported by a small secretariat, with additional research and analytical support from within and outside the United Nations system. The panel’s study will encompass both organizational and funding issues ranging from the duplication and overlap of work across United Nations agencies and programmes to prospects for joint multi-year funding and programming arrangements. The panel will explore ways of making better use of the synergies between the normative and analytical institutions of the United Nations and operational agencies. It will also assess how the United Nations system can best exercise its comparative advantages with its international partners, including the Bretton Woods Institutions, the European Commission and other regional actors, donors, civil society and the private sector.

34. The environment component of the panel’s study will particularly need to address two key issues: how to achieve more comprehensive and coherent implementation, monitoring and management of the growing range of multilateral environmental agreements; and how to achieve better integration of the crucial environmental aspects of sustainable development in United Nations country-level activities, especially on capacity-building and technology support.

35. The General Assembly will also be launching informal consultations on the institutional framework on environment in early 2006. The UNEP Governing Council will continue its consideration of international environmental governance issues during its ninth special session/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, which will be held from 7 to 9 February 2005 in Dubai.

36. These reform initiatives naturally have a direct bearing on the work and future of the Environmental Management Group. The outcome of the Secretary-General’s high-level panel’s study will certainly have implications for the role and mandate of the Group and its links with other United Nations coordinating mechanisms. The task entrusted to the Panel is also an important opportunity for the Group, presenting the possibility for its members to present the panel with a set of coordinated observations and recommendations with regard to enhancing system-wide coherence in the field of the environment. This proposed activity for the Group will be discussed further in the following section.

## **V. Proposals for the future of the Environmental Management Group: How best to revitalize and strengthen it?**

37. Member States have placed the onus on the United Nations to improve significantly system-wide coherence in the field of the environment. The Environmental Management Group has the potential to fill the void in terms of coordination if it is able to address the key challenges

---

16 Ibid.



and if its members can commit to its revitalization in a concerted and targeted manner. This section poses questions that the Forum will need to discuss openly and puts forward a number of opportunities that the Group could embrace as it seeks to fulfil its objectives and functions as originally conceived.

**A. Environmental Management Group terms of reference: do they need to be revisited?**

38. 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. This implies a clarification or expansion of the specifics of the terms of reference, rather than a renegotiation of the broad functions. Any such clarification or expansion should obviously take into account the implications of reform initiatives that are unfolding.

**B. Working methods: is issue-management a useful approach?**

39. One such expansion or clarification could be considered with regard to the Environmental Management Group's working methods, including its focus on the issue-management approach. 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, namely, harmonization of biodiversity-related reporting and capacity-building in the field of chemicals management.

40. There continue to be specific issues on the environment agenda that are neglected in terms of coordination, with a sub-optimal division of labour, an inefficient use of limited resources and significant areas of duplication. Being very selective and steering clear of areas that are addressed elsewhere, the Group should build on examples of its successful issue-management groups, and use those as models for future issue-area collaboration. In this connection, however, it would be necessary to strengthen the Group's secretariat so that it could service issue-management groups; further, the Group should serve these groups in much the same fashion as the United Nations Development Group Office services the United Nations Development Group's substantive working groups, rather than leaving logistical aspects unclear. It would also be essential for the Group's secretariat to provide the necessary substantive support to these initiatives. In considering issue areas that merit attention, it may be useful to lend priority to the environmental issues that were specifically addressed in goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals on environmental sustainability and in the World Summit 2005 Outcome.

41. Other issues that have surfaced in the course of the consultations that were undertaken in preparation for the Environmental Management Group Forum include: health and environment, including with regard to vulnerable groups such as children, and reviving the Ecosystem Conservation Group (comprising UNEP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, IUCN - the World Conservation Union and WWF), which is widely considered to have been a useful interagency mechanism and which had initially been considered as a model for the issue-management groups originally envisaged for the Environmental Management Group.

**C. Working methods – beyond issue-management: broader policy coherence**

42. In addressing the future of the Environmental Management Group, members may consider that its work in the future should go beyond the issue-management approach as the sole or even main functional modality. It is important that the Group's members be able to come together to obtain a clearer sense of the evolution of the broader environmental agenda. Thus, the Group's agenda would include contributing to broad environmental policy development in areas such as integrating environmental issues into development planning at the country-level (see next section on links with the United Nations Development Group); the poverty and environment nexus; and emerging issues such as the linkages between the environment, development and humanitarian agendas of the United Nations; as well as ensuring that the planned programme activities of the members could be discussed and could benefit from a coherent and strategic approach.

43. These issues go to the heart of the question of how the Environmental Management Group can better contribute to system-wide coherence, coordination and cooperation on

environment. In this context, the Group should actively consider embracing the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on System-Wide Coherence.

44. One aspect of this system-wide coherence, which was pinpointed by the UNEP international environmental governance process, is rationalizing policy that emanates from different inter-governmental forums and coordinating policy proposals that are put to such forums. In this regard, it is notable that the international environmental governance process concluded:

“For the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum to effectively play its policy role, it requires an instrument at the inter-agency level to enhance policy coordination across the environmental activities of the United Nations system. The Environmental Management Group is such an instrument and should be charged with reporting annually to the Forum, taking into account the provisions of General Assembly resolution 54/217, as well as on specific issues arising from the work of the United Nations system in the environmental area on which the Forum could make recommendations on the work of the Environmental Management Group.”<sup>12</sup>

Similar relationships should be established with the Governing Bodies of the members of the Environmental Management Group.

45. Another important aspect of policy coherence is the establishment of an effective system of information exchange, which would be of great potential benefit to agencies, the Environmental Management Group secretariat and the governing bodies of the agencies. Information exchange was originally identified as a core function of the Group, but is one which it has yet to address comprehensively. It is envisaged that an effective system of information exchange would allow Group members to check their proposed programmes, projects and activities with those of other agencies to avoid duplication and explore the potential for joint action and synergy. The Group's secretariat could explore potentials for synergy and joint action, including the use of focused web-management as a diagnostic tool to avoid duplication and promote synergy. The information would be useful to the governing bodies of the agencies and to financial contributors to the United Nations system.

46. In addressing both this broader policy and more specific programme (issue management) approach for the Group, the Forum will need to brainstorm on what are the priority issues and components for developing and implementing the Group's short- and longer-term strategic plans.

#### **D. Working methods: how can the Environmental Management Group's operational links with other relevant United Nations inter-agency and issue-based coordination mechanisms be improved?**

47. To enhance its effectiveness, the Environmental Management Group must establish solid working relationships with other relevant inter-agency mechanisms and draw from and contribute to their work as appropriate. The involvement of the Group's Director in the relevant work of such inter-agency mechanisms will be important in this regard. The two most obvious links for the Group are with the Chief Executives Board of the High-level Committee on Programmes and the United Nations Development Group.

48. Members of the Group should consider exploring a mechanism that would allow them to flag emerging environmental issues or those requiring priority attention to the Chief Executives Board through the High-level Committee on Programmes. In this regard, it is significant to note that the High-level Committee on Programmes, in defining its work programme for the coming biennium, has identified sustainability (environmental valuation and economic compensation) as one of its four priority areas. It will also be important for the Group's secretariat to monitor and be involved in (as appropriate) the work of the inter-agency mechanisms that loosely fall within the purview of the High-level Committee on Programmes such as UN-Water, UN-Oceans and UN-Energy.

49. The interrelationship between the Environmental Management Group and the United Nations Development Group has already been heralded as an important one. It was originally conceived in the Task Force's report that the Group would provide a forum and a mechanism to

enhance complementarities between the analytical and normative activities of UNEP with the operational role of the United Nations Development Programme. The report on the state of international environmental governance submitted to the Johannesburg Summit also recommended that measures be taken to establish linkages between the Environmental Management Group and the United Nations Development Group. The former has even been seen as a potential environmental counterpart to the latter, with recommendations for the establishment of United Nations environment groups to complement the United Nations Development Group's groups. UNEP and the United Nations Development Programme will actively collaborate in the United Nations Development Group through a joint chair arrangement on the environment, which could lend the Environmental Management Group credibility. The Group potentially has an important role to play in addressing the environmental dimensions in a number of United Nations Development Group working groups, including on capacity development, non-resident agencies, strengthening the resident coordinator system and a new group that is being constituted on environmental sustainability.

## **E. Membership: how best to engender ownership and deliver returns on investment to members?**

### **1. Non-United Nations members**

50. The Environmental Management Group is set-up as a United Nations system-wide mechanism, but one that allows for the inclusions of views of non-United Nations partners through its issue-management groups. This approach is deemed to be a valuable one if the Group can strategically draw on non-United Nations views when relevant to specific substantive issues being addressed.

### **2. High-level participation**

51. It is important for the profile and effectiveness of the Group, and as a clear sign of commitment, that its members be represented at a senior-level in Group meetings.

### **3. Ownership**

52. A sense of ownership among members can best be achieved if members feel that they are getting significant returns on their investment of human and financial resources. Discussing and agreeing on the way forward for the Group will be an essential first step in building confidence among its members, allowing for the discussion of important proposals such as strengthening EMG interactions with inter-governmental bodies, especially those of its members. The efficient functioning of the Group requires that it have a clear relation with inter-governmental processes, while retaining its inter-agency nature, and that it enjoy a clearly-defined reporting relationship with the Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the Commission on Sustainable Development and other forums in the United Nations system.

### **4. Rotating vice-chair**

53. Another method of enhancing buy-in from members of the Group, and ensuring that it is not perceived as a UNEP mechanism, is instituting a Group vice-chair who would be chosen, on a rotational basis, from the membership.

## **F. Support structure: efficacy and sufficiency of secretariat arrangements**

54. The Forum will need to have an open discussion on what administrative and financial resources are needed for the Group to fulfil its mandate as the restructured secretariat evolves.

55. The Group's secretariat is located in Geneva. Clearly, a capable and effective secretariat is critical to the Group's work. This strategic consideration must be borne in mind in reviewing the structural set-up of the secretariat, which should be positioned so that it can benefit from maximum institutional support and synergies. The secretariat currently has two professional staff seconded by UNEP at its own cost. In his letter of invitation to the High-level Forum, the Group's Chair invited members to provide him with indications of how they might wish to support the Group. Shared responsibility in the running and management of the secretariat will be an important mark of commitment by the membership, including through the secondment of staff. The High-level Forum is invited to exchange views on the nature and scope of secretariat arrangements, including options for a broad-based presence of the Group (e.g., in United Nations capitals and at the regional and national levels).

56. The expectation of predictability and sustainability in the financing of the Environmental Management Group expressed in United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/242 has yet to be realized and should be considered in the context of the current zero growth provision in the United Nations regular budget. An Environmental Management Group trust fund established three years ago has attracted only a single contribution of \$302,115, from the Government of Switzerland. Development cooperation partners, despite statements of support, have yet to respond to the Group's resource needs. Securing adequate means for implementation of the Group's agreed work plan has been and remains a precondition for success and should be addressed unambiguously.

## **VI. Conclusion**

57. The Environmental Management Group needs 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 establish its profile within and outside the United Nations system. Currently, the expectations for the Group are quite diverse and varied. The Forum should utilize this opportunity to develop a clear consensus on how it wishes the Group to function in the future.

58. In this context, the Forum should agree on what it expects the Group to do in the forthcoming biennium, with clear indications of benchmarks and resource implications, and commitment and shared responsibilities. The Group should strive for senior-level participation by member institutions, transparency in operations, adequate resources to support its functioning, shared responsibility in the governance and running of the secretariat, and financial support, particularly from the development cooperation partners for specific activities, including a coordinated approach to issues or initiatives which will help demonstrate system-wide coherence and cooperation.

59. With proper commitment, the members of the Environmental Management Group can work together to revitalize the Group, allowing it to assist all its members in addressing their environment activities within a coherent and effective United Nations system.

---