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**Cooperation and coordination within the United Nations
system on environmental matters**

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**Cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system
on environmental matters: work of the Environmental
Management Group**

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Environmental Management Group under its 2004–2005 work programme, and outlines its work programme for the next two years.

* UNEP/GC.23/1.

I. Introduction

1. The Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the United Nations Environment Programme, in its decision SS.VII/1 of 15 February 2002, entitled 'International environmental governance', adopted the report of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives on International Environmental Governance, which contains recommendations on the subject of strengthening international environmental governance. With regard to the Environmental Management Group (EMG), the report states :

“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.”

2. EMG presented a comprehensive report of its work at the eighth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (UNEP/GCSS.VIII/5/Add.2). In its decision SS.VIII/1, entitled “Implementation of decision SS.VII/1 on international environmental governance” the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum decided to convey this report to the General Assembly for its consideration. In the same decision, the Executive Director was requested “to continue to promote coordination across the United Nations system on environmental activities, in particular those relevant to operations of the United Nations system, keeping in mind paragraphs 36 and 37 of decision SS.VII/1, through the work of the Environmental Management Group.”

3. The Executive Director was further requested “to present a report on this matter to the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its twenty-third session, which should also include a comprehensive assessment of the location of the secretariat of the Environmental Management Group, taking into account, among other things, existing efforts to strengthen the United Nations Office at Nairobi, headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, as well as the mandate and membership of the Environmental Management Group.”

4. The present report provides a summary of the work undertaken by EMG pursuant to its 2004–2005 work programme and outlines its work programme for the next two years. The report requested in decision SS.VIII/1 with regard to the location of the EMG Secretariat is contained in document UNEP/GC.23/6.

II. Institutional background

5. EMG was established by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the purpose of enhancing United Nations system-wide inter-agency coordination in the field of environment and human settlements. It is a central outcome of the endorsement by the General Assembly, in resolution 53/242 of 28 July 1999, of a comprehensive series of measures designed to enhance coherent action within the United Nations system in these areas, as recommended by the Secretary-General in his report on environment and human settlements (A/53/463). The establishment of EMG was further endorsed in General Assembly resolution 54/217 of 22 December 1999.

6. The EMG mandate was confirmed in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in its chapter XI, entitled “Institutional framework for sustainable development”, paragraph 140, subparagraph (b). It is there stated that the international community should “strengthen collaboration within and between the United Nations system, international financial institutions, the Global Environment Facility and the World Trade Organization, utilizing”, among other instruments, the Environmental Management Group.

III. Mandate and structure of EMG

7. EMG seeks to strengthen inter-agency cooperation through an issues-management and problem-solving approach. It aims to find solutions to important and newly emerging issues on the environment and human settlements agenda and to foster joint action.

8. The EMG terms of reference were endorsed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) in 1999, following a process of consultation carried out through the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) and the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives. The terms of reference call for EMG to be a flexible mechanism that meets only when required to facilitate a timely approach to emerging issues and to integrate knowledge available in the United Nations system. They also establish a two-tiered structure for the Group: a senior-level decision-making body, the Environmental Management Group, chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP and consisting of senior-level officials from member organizations of the Group; and temporary ad hoc issue-management groups established by EMG itself and lasting only as long as necessary for the completion of their tasks. UNEP acts as the EMG secretariat.

9. Members of EMG comprise the specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations system, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, as well as the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization.

IV. 2004–2005 programme of work

10. EMG aims at making practical contributions to the implementation of the sustainable development agenda in the areas of the environment and human settlements. It serves as an instrument for its members to share their views or concerns on issues of common interest, review progress, identify obstacles, and convey their views and recommendations to relevant intergovernmental forums such as the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the Commission on Sustainable Development and the General Assembly.

11. EMG has so far considered various issues including the harmonization of biodiversity-related reporting, environmental aspects of water, sanitation and human settlements and environment-related capacity-building. A report on the results of its work on these matters (UNEP/GCSS.VIII/5/Add.2) was presented at the eighth special session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in March 2004 and the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in April 2004.

12. The two issues of environmental capacity-building and sustainable procurement for the United Nations system have constituted the bulk of the EMG programme of work in the year 2004.

V. Environmental capacity-building

13. Guided by the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which emphasizes the importance of capacity-building in all areas of sustainable development and calls for better resourced, more effective, coordinated and complementary capacity-building activities in poverty alleviation and sustainable development programs, EMG at its sixth session, in February 2004, decided to focus on environment-related capacity-building activities of its members to identify needs and gaps and the potential for further synergies and cooperation among United Nations agencies and with the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements and to define its role in furthering such cooperation. EMG has focused particularly on defining its role as a facilitator for more coordinated exchange of information and data on lessons learned, experiences and methodologies within the UN system and is exploring the possibility of establishing a resource library within the EMG framework.

14. To that end, two pilot situation/needs analyses in the areas of biodiversity and chemicals management capacity-building have been prepared in cooperation with the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, respectively. Both studies provide a useful overview of relevant activities of United Nations agencies, related multilateral environmental agreements and other relevant organizations in these two areas. They were also transmitted as a contribution of the EMG to the third meeting of the High-level Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on an Intergovernmental Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building which took place in Bali, Indonesia in December 2004.

A. Main findings of the study on capacity-building for biological diversity

15. The study shows that capacity-building is a core element of agencies and multilateral environmental agreement programmes and activities in the area of biological diversity. In addition, in many cases, there are specific programmes and projects aimed at capacity-building. Capacity-building efforts address the need for capacity development at the individual, institutional and overarching system levels.

16. Capacity-building activities include a wide range of methods such as training courses and workshops, information material and websites. Often, specific strategies or action plans or even regional centres for capacity-building have been established or are envisaged, mirroring the importance that is placed on capacity-building. Capacity-building is further supported by specific awards, funding, direct advice and assistance from agencies to national stakeholders, or information clearing-houses. Gathering and making available local knowledge on biodiversity is an important part of capacity-building efforts.

17. Capacity-building is an important element in strategic plans, work programmes, work plans and other strategic documents of biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements. It is also frequently covered by joint work plans of conventions. Multilateral environmental agreements have included capacity-building as a focus for funding in funding-related provisions.

18. Many biodiversity projects, including those supporting the implementation of biodiversity-related treaties, aim at capacity-building or have capacity-building as a core element. In effect, capacity-building at the local, national and regional levels is receiving high funding attention.

19. There is a wide range of experiences and lessons to share on capacity-building within United Nations agencies and multilateral environmental agreements, but they are not necessarily easily accessible. A number of them are presented in the study, relating to issues like partners' ownership and leadership, multi-stakeholder involvement, self assessment of needs, promotion of partnerships, learning-by-doing approaches and regional approaches.

20. The information available indicates a focus of United Nations agencies and multilateral environmental agreements' capacity-building efforts on issues such as conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use, research and monitoring, outreach and public awareness, and legal, financial and institutional issues. Other areas such as biosafety and access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing are covered by fewer agencies.

21. There are a huge number of collaborative activities in the field of capacity-building for biodiversity, involving not only United Nations agencies and conventions, but also non-governmental organizations, the academic community and business. Most of these activities are project-based and targeted at the national and local levels. Funding has been focused strongly on such activities, particularly through the Global Environment Facility.

22. Horizontal cooperative frameworks for capacity-building on biodiversity are currently very sparse throughout the United Nations system, resulting in a lack of facilities to enable the exchange of information and the sharing of experiences and lessons. On a small scale, provisions in some of the joint work programmes between biodiversity-related conventions have the potential to develop into such frameworks. Some small-scale cooperative frameworks involving the biodiversity sector, but going beyond it to involve the development, climate change, desertification and trade sectors, do exist.

23. There is an apparent widespread lack of self-assessment of capacity-building undertakings; neither does there currently exist a wider framework on capacity-building for biodiversity. Such a framework would allow for making information on capacity-building activities available to other agencies and for sharing experiences and useful lessons. EMG could establish a permanent mechanism for such information sharing. An information exchange of this sort would enable agencies to plan their own capacity-building efforts in a manner that avoids ill-defined approaches with which other agencies might have experience. In addition, high-quality information on effective capacity-building approaches would enable the development of better policies.

B. Main findings of the study on capacity-building for chemicals management

24. The study provides an overview of the existing policy framework, activities and coordinating arrangements in the area of chemicals management capacity-building in the United Nations system. It features a summary of key international agreements and decisions affecting chemicals management capacity-building, summarizes the organizational set-up and activities of international bodies involved and reviews the current status of coordinating mechanisms and information exchange mechanisms in this area. Finally, it suggests some issues for further information exchange and coordination and explores a possible role for EMG.

25. The study analyses existing international agreements within the context of the elements for sound management of chemicals at the national level, as provided in programme area E of chapter 19 (section 19.56) of Agenda 21. These elements include adequate legislation; information gathering and dissemination; capacity for risk assessment and interpretation; establishment of risk management

policy; capacity for implementation and enforcement; capacity for rehabilitation of contaminated sites and poisoned persons; effective education programmes; and capacity to respond to emergencies.

26. The analysis suggests that many of the agreements contain similar provisions related to core capacity elements such as adequate legislation and information gathering and dissemination. There may, therefore, be opportunities for countries to consider and develop approaches whereby concerned ministries work together in collaboration with stakeholders to ensure coordinated and coherent approaches. In addition to the elements referred to above, a “horizontal” review of international chemicals agreements reveals other potential areas for coordinated or synergetic approaches to capacity-building. These include, for example, public participation and stakeholder involvement, integrated import control and technology transfer.

27. A broad range of United Nations organizations and mechanisms are involved in capacity-building for sound chemicals management. They receive their mandate through their governing bodies or the conferences of the parties to specific conventions. The scope of the mandates, however, is often very broad, thereby highlighting the importance of coordination. Analysis of existing capacity-building programmes suggests that a number of elements, for example, adequate legislation, are the focus of the activities of various organizations. An enhanced exchange of experiences and coordination of related capacity-building (e.g., guidance and training material development) might therefore be beneficial. A particular challenge for coordination is that several international organizations have regional offices which are actively, and sometimes independently, involved in chemicals management capacity-building.

28. A number of formal and informal mechanisms are in place to coordinate chemicals management capacity-building. There exists, however, no overview of the various groups, their purposes and members. Many of the existing coordination or advisory groups are linked to specific convention-related capacity-building initiatives or to specific projects. Coordination within thematic areas (e.g., capacity-building for legislation) is currently not the focus of attention. In light of the growing interest in synergy development both at the international level and in countries, opportunities for coordination of thematic areas could be explored.

29. As far as information exchange for chemicals management capacity-building is concerned, a number of mechanisms are in place to provide such information. In light of the growing importance of chemicals management capacity-building, international bodies and processes – such as the Inter-Organizational Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), the strategic approach to international chemicals management and the intergovernmental strategic plan on technology support and capacity-building – would probably need to address how information on chemical management capacity-building can be best facilitated and relevant activities coordinated.

30. While significant dialogue and information exchange takes place within the chemicals community, the challenge of linking and integrating chemicals management with other environmental issues (e.g., biodiversity) and mainstream development issues (e.g., gender issues, poverty eradication) has not yet been systematically addressed.

31. For January 2005, IOMC has scheduled a special session on capacity-building to identify, review and address potential issues to strengthen information exchange and coordination in the area of chemicals management capacity-building. Issues identified in this report prepared for the EMG relevant to the IOMC discussions in January, may include, for example:

- (a) Identification of opportunities to link chemical management issues to the mainstream development agenda and implementation of the internationally agreed goals contained in the Millennium Declaration;
- (b) Strengthening coordination across thematic areas such as legislation development or import control;
- (c) Development of a coherent approach to information exchange for chemicals management capacity-building;
- (d) Exploring opportunities to support countries in developing integrated national programmes for the sound management of chemicals.

32. Finally, the study identifies a number of areas where EMG could provide value added interagency coordination. First, EMG could facilitate discussions across sectors (e.g., the linkages between water issues and chemicals). Second, EMG could facilitate the exchange of experiences on issues of common interest to various United Nations organizations and sectors, such as experiences on

methodologies for capacity self assessment, stakeholder involvement in project implementation, or mainstreaming sector specific capacity-building. Third, EMG could provide value added coordination regarding an exchange of experience among various sectors about sector-specific coordination arrangements.

C. Contributions to the Bali Strategic Plan on Technology Support and Capacity-building

33. EMG work on environmental capacity-building has also contributed to the implementation of Governing Council decision SS.VIII/1, in which the Governing Council, among other things, requested the Executive Director to make available relevant reports, including an inventory of existing capacity-building and technology support activities of UNEP and of other relevant international organizations, to assist the high level open-ended intergovernmental working group on an intergovernmental strategic plan for technology support and capacity-building.

34. Consequently, the EMG secretariat compiled an outline of activities and initiatives of United Nations bodies, programmes and agencies on environment related capacity-building which was submitted for consideration at the second meeting of the High-level Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on the intergovernmental strategic plan, which took place in Nairobi from 2 to 4 September 2004.

35. EMG furthermore decided to establish an issue management group under the joint chairmanship of UNEP and the United Nations Development Programme with the objective of discussing the interagency aspects of the plan and to develop a United Nations system consolidated input on the potential of the plan to enhance United Nations system environmental capacity-building activities. The issue management group prepared a report on its activities for the consideration of the participants at the third meeting of the intergovernmental working group on an intergovernmental strategic plan, which took place in Bali from 2 to 4 December 2004 (UNEP/IEG/IGSP/3/INF/5). It noted examples of existing cooperation among United Nations agencies in the field of environment-related capacity-building and technology support, addressed obstacles and gaps in coordination and highlighted opportunities for improvement.

VI. Sustainable procurement for the United Nations system

36. The need to work further on the inclusion of sustainable development considerations in procurement practices is recognized in Agenda 21 and in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (chapter III, paragraph 19), as it was by the participants at the international expert meeting on a 10-year-framework of programmes for sustainable consumption and production (June 2003), who recommended in paragraph 154 of the meeting report that “the United Nations itself should adopt sustainable procurement and environmental management programmes for its offices and operations”.

37. Furthermore, in 2001 the United Nations Board of Auditors suggested that UNEP take the initiative in bringing to the attention of the United Nations system Chief Executives Board (CEB) the possibility of developing a framework to implement the environmental policies in the United Nations system. This recommendation requests UNEP to develop a policy framework for managing its own operations in an environmentally friendly manner (recycling, energy consumption, environmental aspects in procurement etc.) and share it with the other organizations in the United Nations system.

38. Against this background, EMG discussed how it could best assist in developing sustainable procurement policies and environmental management programmes throughout the United Nations system.

39. The group noted that individual or joint initiatives have been taken by a number of United Nations agencies in order to include sustainable development in the criteria for procurement of goods and services. A coordinated system-wide policy on sustainable procurement is still lacking, however, and procedures vary widely among agencies, depending on operational requirements.

40. The group established an issue management group with the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics as the task manager in close cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme’s Inter-Agency Procurement Services Office, the World Bank, the United Nations Office for Project Services and the Interagency Working Group on Environmentally and Socially Responsible Procurement. The issue management group will complete a survey on current regulations and activities and address work on developing supplier codes of conduct and training. It will coordinate its activities with the work undertaken by the two working groups on facilities management and procurement set up

for the internalization of the Global Compact Principles in the United Nations system, to avoid duplication and create synergies between these initiatives. For comprehensive information on EMG and its current activities, please refer to: www.unemg.org.

VII. Future activities

41. As the only United Nations system-wide mechanism for inter-agency cooperation in the fields of environment and human settlements, EMG is well placed to facilitate joint action with regard to specific environment and human settlements issues, promote information exchange and contribute to synergy and complementarities between activities of its members. By providing support to enhance cooperation among United Nations agencies and by furthering the exchange of best practices, EMG will contribute to achieving progress towards the implementation of the internationally agreed goals contained in the Millennium Declaration in the areas of its mandate.

42. In terms of specific issues to be addressed, EMG will continue its work on environment-related capacity-building with the aim of enhancing exchange of information, best practices and experiences. The outcomes of pilot surveys in the areas of biological diversity and chemicals management have provided a good basis for continuation of this exercise in other environmental areas. As a further step, EMG is currently examining options for establishing a United Nations system-wide clearing-house on environmental capacity-building. Such a clearing-house could complement the database of capacity-building and technology support activities to be established by UNEP under the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building, which was adopted on 4 December 2004 by the participants at the third meeting on the intergovernmental strategic plan on intergovernmental technology support and capacity-building.

43. The issue management group on sustainable procurement policies and environmental management programmes for the United Nations system has started its work and will report back to EMG in mid 2005.

44. EMG will provide a consolidated input to discussions at the next cycle of the Commission on Sustainable Development (the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions of the commission, which will take place in 2006 and 2007). EMG will start in 2005 to collect data and information from its members on best practices, lessons learned and possibly case studies. The focus will be on the thematic clusters of air pollution/atmosphere and industrial development.

45. EMG will also address specific issues related to urban poverty and environment, as requested by UN-Habitat.

46. Finally, EMG will further develop its cooperation with other inter-agency mechanisms such as UN Water, UN Energy and IOMC, and establish closer links with the High-Level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the United Nations Development Group. It will continue its role as an interagency forum in an effort to ensure the mainstreaming of environmental and sustainable development considerations into the work of the United Nations.
