

**Contribution of the Environmental Management Group (EMG) to the
3rd Session of the High-level Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on an
Intergovernmental Strategic Plan for Technology Support
and Capacity Building**

Introduction

1. At the first and second sessions of the High-level Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on an Intergovernmental Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building (IGSP) governments stressed the importance of and the need for further cooperation and synergies among UN organisations in the area of environmental capacity building.
2. The Environmental Management Group, as the system-wide mechanism for inter-agency cooperation in the fields of environment and human settlements, decided to address these issues through an issue management group (IMG) jointly chaired by UNEP and UNDP. The IMG met on 8 November 2004 in Geneva and decided to submit the following views as a contribution to the third meeting of the High-level Open-ended Working Group:

I. Scope, Approaches to and Definition of Capacity Building and Technology Support

3. The international environmental governance process (IEG), which took place in 2001-2002, in accordance with UNEP GC decision 21/21 of 9 February 2001, highlighted the importance of capacity building and technology support in the field of the environment. It concluded that a more coherent or synergistic approach needed to be formulated in order to address the demand existing in developing countries and countries with economies in transition for enhanced capacity in a more strategic manner. Decision SS.VII/1 of 15 February 2002 of the GC/GMEF in Cartagena therefore called for the development of an intergovernmental strategic plan on technology support and capacity building. This decision was endorsed by the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.
4. Ultimately, it is the prerogative of countries to define what they view as capacity building, and perceptions may differ according to different needs. However, for the UN system and international financial institutions in order to strengthen cooperation and synergies in this area, there needs to be a common understanding on what constitutes capacity building and technology support. Capacity building has been central to United Nations operational activities from their beginning. However, the concept has evolved over time and continues to do so.
5. The UN Interagency Workshop on Capacity Development in November 2002, organized under the auspices of the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP), proposed the following definition of capacity building/development for use in the UN system:

Capacity refers to the ability of individuals, communities, institutions, organisations, social and political systems to use the natural, financial, political, social and human resources that are available to them for the definition and pursuit of sustainable development goals. Capacity building or capacity development is the process by which individuals, institutions and countries strengthen these abilities. The United Nations and other external actors can assist this endogenous process, by:

- *focusing on enhancing the skills, knowledge and social capabilities available to individuals, institutions, and social and political systems, but also by*
- *supporting their integration into the knowledge networks that help to sustain these capabilities; as well as*
- *contributing to material and financial support necessary to apply the skills, knowledge and social capabilities.*

6. This approach was adopted by the EMG for the two studies on capacity building in the areas of chemicals management and biological diversity as well as in the inventory of UNEP capacity building and technology support activities. Individual EMG members, like multilateral environmental agreements, have more specific definitions tailored to their objectives, without deviating fundamentally from the general HLCP definition.

II. Examples of Existing Cooperation in the UN System

7. There is a long history of cooperation in the UN system, with a variety of formal and informal coordination and cooperation mechanisms at all levels. At the system-wide level, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) – formerly the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) – brings together the executive heads of all organisations under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General. The CEB addresses coordination and cooperation on the whole range of substantive and management issues facing the United Nations system. The High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) addresses substantive programme and policy issues under the auspices of CEB.

8. More specifically with regard to environmental issues, there are formally established coordination mechanisms, such as UN Water and UN Energy, the Inter-Organisation Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) or more informal groups like the Joint Liaison Group of the three Rio Conventions, to name just a few.

9. The Environmental Management Group is the UN system-wide mechanism for inter-agency cooperation with a specific mandate in the areas of environment and human settlements. The EMG is designed around an issue-management and problem solving approach, aimed at finding solutions to important and newly emerging issues on the environment and human settlements agenda and fostering joint action. It has carried out two studies in the areas of capacity building for biological diversity and for chemicals management. They provide a useful overview of ongoing capacity building activities in these two areas. With regard to cooperation, the findings of the two studies suggest that most arrangements for information exchange and coordination are of a vertical nature, promoting cooperation in a specific area, while inter-sectoral cooperative frameworks are rather sparse (e.g. linkages between water issues and chemicals).

10. The outline of UN activities and initiatives on environment related capacity building and technology support, which was compiled by the EMG for the second session of the IGSP process, shows a range of concrete examples of inter-agency cooperation in environmental capacity building, like joint regional or national projects, joint workshops, joint programmes, harmonized information management, joint divisions between two organisations etc.

11. At the country level, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the Resident Coordinator System guide operations. National priorities are nested within the UN programming frameworks, such as the Common Country Assessments (CCA), the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF), and National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS). UNDP serves as the main operational arm of the United Nations for sustainable development, and in this capacity has the mandate to implement projects in these areas as well as to undertake coordination of overall operational activities for development of the United Nations at the country level, and specifically in the area of sustainable development. In this context, UNDP will continue working at the country, regional and global levels in the mainstreaming of environment into sustainable development strategies in line with the UNDP Strategic Results Framework 2004-2007.

12. Having joined the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) in 2003, UNEP is developing closer cooperation with UNDP and other UNDG members in strategic planning of initiatives in support of environmental sustainability and will work within UNDG to promote the mainstreaming of environmental considerations in UN Country Frameworks.

13. For the World Bank, capacity building and technical support-related activities are predominantly integrated as part of its investment operations. Significant efforts have already

been undertaken to mainstream capacity building in relation to environmental issues at both the local and global levels into the development agendas of the World Bank's client countries.

III. Gaps and Opportunities to Improve Cooperation in the UN system

14. Despite these numerous coordination efforts challenges undoubtedly remain. UN agencies and MEAs receive their mandate through their governing bodies or the Conference of Parties. In accordance with their mandate, the scope of activities of a particular organisation or secretariat can be limited to one environmental area only or cover technical assistance in virtually all sectors of sustainable development. Mandates are different, sometimes overlapping or even conflicting, all of which requires more coordination at the national level by member states and at the international level by the agencies. In some cases, it may be difficult to determine overlaps between activities of several agencies, as similar issues might be explored from different perspectives by different organisations, depending on their mandates.

15. Some environmental issues may receive more attention in terms of capacity building and technology support than others. This was illustrated by the two EMG studies in the areas of biological diversity and chemicals management. There is a need to identify more in detail those issues which require additional capacity building efforts. In thematic areas covered by various organisations (like capacity building for legislation), opportunities for enhanced cooperation in these areas should be explored.

16. In general, coordination efforts require human and financial resources and often considerable time. Coordination therefore has to add value, improve cost-effectiveness and create synergies. This is of particular relevance as the mobilization of additional financial resources for environmental capacity building becomes increasingly difficult. The impacts of capacity building and the added value of coordination need to be demonstrable.

17. While some of the challenges outlined above can be addressed in the short term, others need further exploration and can be resolved only over time. Collecting and analyzing information from agencies on their activities in the area of environmental capacity building in order to get a more systematic overview can be a first step. The EMG is currently undertaking a study to explore how information and knowledge in this area are disseminated and shared in the UN system and to develop options to improve this exchange of information and experiences. Some EMG members have stressed the need to put a system into place to monitor the effectiveness of technology support and capacity building related activities, including the development of appropriate indicators and benchmarks in order to draw lessons learned and best practices for improving the design of future activities. However, this requires more methodological work and discussions among agencies.

IV. The Importance of Coordination at the National Level

18. Improved coordination of capacity building activities among UN organisations, agencies and secretariats will result in a better delivery at the country level if it goes hand in hand with the strengthening of coordination at the national level. Decision UNEP GCSS.VII/1 of 15 February 2002 explicitly encourages countries to promote the coordination of the multiple national frameworks that currently exist in the field of the environment at the national level.

19. There is a need for further coordination both at the donor and recipient level. Recipient countries should identify their national priorities and objectives through better internal coordination in order to solicit and use international support more effectively. Donor countries should ensure that the support they provide is well aligned with the internationally agreed goals and targets (MDGs, Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, decisions of the Conferences of Parties to multilateral environmental agreements), so as to contribute more coherently to the achievement of these priorities. There is furthermore a need for

governments to enhance internal consultation and coordination in order to improve the consistency of decisions taken in international forums and governing bodies of different UN organisations.

V. Conclusions

20. There are a variety of mechanisms in the UN system addressing cooperation and coordination in the area of environmental capacity building. At the system-wide level, the UNDG aims at improving the effectiveness of UN development work at the country level, involving the Resident Coordinator System, the Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The EMG addresses specific environment and human settlement issues and acts as a platform for more strategic interaction and networking (identification of gaps and needs, enhancing information exchange and exchange of best practices).

21. Despite of all existing cooperation efforts, gaps, overlaps and ad-hoc approaches continue to exist. UN agencies are conscious of these challenges and will continue to work together in the above-mentioned and other existing frameworks in order to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of environment related capacity building.

22. The IGSP provides an opportunity to develop a more strategic approach in the area of environmental capacity building at all levels. However, much will depend on the effective monitoring and review of its implementation. The EMG might contribute to this review by collecting information on its members' activities in this area and provide its findings periodically to the UNEP Governing Council as well as relevant UN system coordination mechanisms.