



**Report on the Meeting of the Environmental Management Group
26 September 2003
Geneva, International Environment House**

A. Opening of the meeting

1. The meeting of the Environmental Management Group (EMG) was held on 26 September 2003 at the International Environment House, Geneva, Switzerland. The Chair of the Group, Mr. Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), opened the meeting and welcomed all participants.

2. In his introductory remarks, the chairman reiterated the role of the EMG as a platform offered to all its members for information exchange on planned activities and as a cooperation mechanism serving the entire UN system and other relevant bodies. He added that the Group should focus on contributing to the implementation of the Johannesburg outcomes in the field of the environment, while complementing and adding value to the work programmes of its members.

3. With regard to the focus of the present meeting, the chairman referred to the Group's decision in its last session to discuss the issue of "environment-related aspects of freshwater, sanitation and human settlements" in preparation of its contribution to the next meeting of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF, South Korea, March 2004) and the Twelfth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 12).

4. He emphasized the uniqueness of the GMEF as the only global forum for environment ministers to review important and emerging policy issues in the field of environment and to provide guidance for international policy setting and action taking, including for UNEP. He furthermore informed the Group about the preparatory process for the GMEF with planned intergovernmental consultations at the regional level and stressed that the EMG was being consulted in a very early state of preparations.

5. He underlined that the EMG could contribute to the discussions of the GMEF and the CSD 12 on water by presenting the collective views of its members specifically on the

environmental aspects of water policies and the centrality of an ecosystem approach to water management. He concluded by underlining that the EMG was not questioning the larger mandates on sustainable development issues of the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP), the Millennium Project Task Force on Water and Sanitation, or the UN Water Group, but was aiming at complementing and adding value to their work.

6. The list of participants is contained in the annex to the present report.

B. Adoption of the Agenda

7. The meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda
2. The EMG's contribution to the implementation of the water agenda
3. Briefing by the UNEP Post Conflict Assessment Unit (PCAU) on its current activities, in particular in the context of interagency cooperation
4. Progress report on the work of the IMG on 'Harmonization of information management and reporting for biodiversity-related conventions' by UNEP/DEC/WCMC
5. Date and venue of the next meeting
6. Other business
7. Closure of the meeting

C. The EMG's contribution to the implementation of
the water agenda (Agenda Item 2)

8. The Chairman invited the Coordinator of the Global Program of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (GPA), to present to the Group the draft non-paper entitled "Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements".

9. She made the following presentation on the content and the process of preparation of the non-paper:

10. The GMEF, as a follow-up to WSSD and as a contribution to the twelfth and thirteenth sessions of the CSD (2004-2005) would discuss the issue of water, sanitation and human settlements. CSD 12 and GMEF 2004 would be crucial in determining how future CSD and GMEF meetings should be conducted in terms of a useful integration of their respective work. The envisaged outcome of GMEF 2004 was for environment ministers to provide policy guidance with regard to the environmental aspects of the international water, sanitation and human settlements agenda, including to the CSD, GEF, the Millennium Task Force and other relevant forums of the UN system.

11. UNEP was suggesting to focus discussions at the GMEF on the environmental aspects of a selected number of key issues, namely: water assessments; water and poverty; water and sanitation; capacity building and technology transfer; water and human settlements and changing unsustainable (water) consumption and production.

12. While other UN agencies, not UNEP, had the overall lead on several of these topics, e.g. the UN-Water Group on water assessments, the WB/UNDP on water and poverty, and UN-Habitat on water and cities, it was evident that environmental aspects needed stronger attention. For example, only very few Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) were currently addressing environmental aspects.

13. In the context of water supply and sanitation targets both freshwater and saltwater aspects needed to be addressed.

14. The non-paper prepared by UNEP would go through a process of informal consultations including governments, regions, the UN system and other stakeholders until mid-November and should be finalized by December 2003. During recent consultations in the Asian region governments had put emphasis on the following issues: economics of water; natural disasters, including vulnerability assessment and early warning; ecosystem approaches, including transboundary issues; sewage and sanitation, including technology transfer, and water governance, including capacity building.

15. The EMG was expected to make important recommendations on the proposed content of the paper and on the process of integrating GMEF inputs into CSD 12.

16. The Chairman reiterated that the GMEF was not merely a UNEP ministerial meeting, but that ministers were supposed to give guidance on the international environmental policy agenda. He suggested that EMG members discuss the overall strategic approach of the non-paper first, and then comment on details, including concrete proposals for furthering implementation.

17. The representative of UNDESA thanked UNEP for the preparation of the draft paper. He then briefed the Group on the planned documentation for CSD 12, referring to the preparation of three separate Reports of the Secretary-General on Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements and a fourth report, which would attempt to deal with linkages between the three issues. A fifth report would present an overall review of the state of implementation of Agenda 21 and the WSSD outcomes. Details of the organisation of work for CSD 12 would be discussed by the Bureau at its next session on 3 October.

18. He characterized the non-paper as an evolving paper, which needed to be narrowed down to specific environmental aspects of the fresh water agenda. Referring to the HLCP decision on the role of UN Water as the responsible body for follow-up to WSSD water and sanitation related issues, he underlined the importance of a close cooperation between the EMG and the UN Water Group in addressing these issues.

19. He suggested that the paper should provide more information on factual or non-factual accomplishments in the area of freshwater, since CSD 12 discussions would focus on the review of implementation. The paper should avoid going too far in terms of policy recommendations, which would be discussed at CSD 13 only.

20. The representative of UN-Habitat confirmed her organisation's commitment to contribute to the preparations of the GMEF and informed that a contribution to the non-paper had already been provided. Her organization was also actively involved in the preparation of the Human Settlements Report for CSD 12. She informed the meeting on the establishment of the Habitat Agenda Task Management System which would seek to solicit the support and contributions of UN Habitat's partners in implementing the Habitat Agenda, MDGs and the WSSD Plan of Implementation in the human settlements area.

21. The representative of the World Bank expressed his organisation's full support to the work of the EMG. Underlining the importance of implementation of the internationally agreed water targets as well as the ecosystem approach, he emphasized the need for implementation at the local level, through, inter alia, the development of National Action Plans. He noted the importance of capacity building and technology transfer and referred to the World Bank Global Distance Learning Networks as useful tools in addressing this challenge.

22. The Executive Secretary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, supported the role of the EMG in discussing the issue of water, as it allowed the Secretariats of the MEAs, who are not members of the UN Water Group, to be actively involved in the preparations for the GMEF and CSD

12. He called for an assessment of the impact of the World Water Development Report. Furthermore, he suggested to elaborate on the “ecosystem approach” and “poverty reduction and water” as the two main issues in the further development of the non-paper. He concluded that the next COP of the Ramsar Convention (November 2005 – Kampala) would deal with the role of the Ramsar Convention in poverty reduction, and that the GMEF’s and CSD’s outcomes on water could be important for the COP’s discussions. He then referred to two papers which were made available to all EMG participants, one on the role of the Ramsar Convention in Global Water Supply and the other one on recommendations of the World Parks Congress on freshwater issues (see attached).

23. The Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) expressed the view that discussions at the GMEF should focus on the implementation of the internationally agreed targets on water. The EMG could help in triggering proposals for concrete action at GMEF and CSD 12. Another challenge would be to integrate the implementation of the water targets into the many existing initiatives and work programs. As far as the CBD was concerned, the question was how to incorporate the targets in the Convention’s Program of Work.

24. With regard to the ecosystems approach the GMEF should avoid re-opening discussions on its definition, and further develop the approach by integrating the findings of the CBD and the Ramsar Convention, the UNFF and the recommendations of the Oslo Workshop on an Ecosystems Approach to the Management and Protection of the North Sea.

25. The representative of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) called the non-paper a thought provoking paper and requested to take into account other events and decisions before the GMEF in its final version. He called for a more “science-based approach” and for clarification of the ecosystems approach in the further development of the paper.

26. The representative of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) underlined the importance of early warning, preparedness and response with regard to transboundary effects of disasters. He observed that particular attention should be given to the impacts of such disasters. OCHA’s recent findings had shown that the number of disasters had not increased in the last years, but their impacts had. He expressed his readiness to assist in contributing to the non-paper from this perspective.

27. The representative of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) supported the involvement of the environmental conventions in the water discussions through the EMG, as the conventions were not members to the UN Water Group. He added that UNEP should ‘not be shy’ in taking the lead role on the environmental aspects of the water agenda. He suggested that the paper for the GMEF needed a stronger focus on implementation, especially of the internationally agreed targets on water and sanitation.

28. The representative of the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), while pointing to the fact that the biological diversity of waters had declined faster than that of forests, emphasized the importance of the ecosystems approach and requested a stronger reflection of biodiversity issues under this topic.
29. The representative of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) underlined that the paper should include references on extreme events such as floods and consider the root causes of such disasters.
30. The representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) echoed the UNDESA's comments on the role of the UN Water Group and recommended that the EMG should look at the specific added value of its contribution with a tight focus on the environmental aspects and on implementation. He said that the costs and benefits of water/ sanitation needed to be addressed through an evidence-based approach. Monitoring and assessment as well as the use of legal and regulatory instruments to catalyze the action on the ground should also be adequately considered.
31. The representative of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) noted that the non-paper was prepared with a global focus and might need to be complemented by assessments from the regional perspective. He informed the Group that by the end of October/beginning of November the UNECE would present its first draft regional assessment on Water, which could be taken into account in the GMEF paper.
32. The representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) referred to capacity building and education as key contributions of UNESCO in the area of water. He suggested that UN water might revise its consultative agreement with non-UN actors and encouraged a close cooperation between the EMG and the UN Water Group in the preparations for GMEF and CSD 12.
33. The representative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) observed that water assessments should be given more attention in particular in terms of strengthening the hydro-meteorological networks and the links with climate change.
34. The Executive Secretary of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal supported a stronger focus on implementation in the non-paper and referred to waste management and prevention as pillars of sustainable production and consumption of fresh water, which should be adequately reflected in the paper.
35. The representative of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) highlighted the links between environmental services, waste management and sanitation and underlined the economic aspects of the integrated water resources management approach. She suggested adding an additional chapter on implementation in the GMEF paper with benchmarks projects of all EMG members.

36. The Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) referred to the transboundary management of fresh water resources and offered to contribute a reference in the GMEF paper on the specific water-related problems in refugee areas.
37. The Representative of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) referred to capacity building and technology transfer, the role of cleaner production centers and the private sector, and changing of unsustainable production and consumption patterns of water as important issues, which should be adequately reflected in the paper. UNIDO would be interested to contribute to the paper in these areas.
38. The Representative of the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (NGO) highlighted the importance of rainwater harvesting in water management and sought the guidance of the Secretariat on the participation of the NGO's in the water discussions of the CSD as well as in the context of the EMG.
39. To ensure that the views and comments of the members would be well reflected in the paper, the Chairman suggested that the EMG members send their detailed contributions in writing to the EMG Secretariat. He stressed the importance of aligning the further work of the EMG as closely as possible with the preparations for CSD 12, and of avoiding any overlapping.
40. The Group decided that the EMG Secretariat should prepare a table for distribution to all members seeking inputs on current activities of each organization in the area of environmental aspects of fresh water as well as their suggestions on how their organisations could contribute to strengthening implementation in the areas addressed by the GMEF. The inputs received by the EMG Secretariat would be circulated to all EMG members for integration in the final GMEF paper.
41. The EMG Secretary informed the Group that the Secretariat was planning to hold a consultation with NGOs, private sector representatives and other stakeholders in the near future so as to solicit their views and comments on the environmental aspects of the freshwater agenda.

D. Briefing by the UNEP Post Conflict Assessment Unit (PCAU) on its current activities in particular in the context of interagency cooperation(Agenda Item 3)

42. The coordinator of the PCAU made a presentation on the PCAU's background and its recent post conflict activities in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan. Publications and other information materials were made available to EMG members.

E. Progress report on the work of the IMG on “Harmonization of information management and reporting for biodiversity-related conventions”(Agenda Item 4)

43. The representative of UNEP-WCMC briefed the Group on the latest developments in preparation of the draft Harmonization Action Plan. Harmonization pilot projects coordinated by UNEP had been finalized in three countries (Indonesia, Seychelles and Panama), the results of which have been very successful. The draft Action Plan on Harmonization had been consulted at a number of forums such as the World Parks Congress and would soon be submitted to the CBD/SBSTA for its consideration. A workshop would take place in Bangkok in early 2004 to discuss the lessons learnt. He suggested that the EMG might finalize consideration of this issue by providing a report to the GMEF on successes as well as the failures in defining a unified framework for country reporting to the biodiversity Conventions, seeking the Ministers guidance and policy advice.

44. The representative of CITES, while commending the work of the IMG, referred to the difficulties of harmonization given each convention’s priorities and the lack of effective response from the conventions’ national focal points. He supported the idea of presenting a report to the GMEF.

45. The Group decided that the Secretariat should prepare a report on the results of the IMG’s work for consideration and policy advice of the ministers of environment at the next meeting of the GMEF.

F. Date and agenda for the next meeting(Agenda Item 5)

46. Taking into account the further preparatory processes for the GMEF and the CSD 12, the Group decided to hold its next meeting by the end of November/ beginning of December and requested the Secretariat to consult with the members for agreeing on the exact date.

G. Other business(Agenda Item 6)

47. The Representative of UNEP-GRID Arendal informed about the publication of “The Environment and Poverty Times” planned for the meeting of the GMEF, with the focus on freshwater and poverty. He invited the EMG members’ contribution/articles for the newspaper to be sent to the EMG Secretariat until mid-December.

H. Closure of the meeting

48. The Chairperson thanked all the participants for their constructive contributions and declared the meeting closed.