



Monday, 01 December 2003

Report

The EMG Teleconference on Capacity Building and the Role of the EMG

Friday 21 November 2003

1. The EMG Secretariat organized the teleconference on 21 November in the Geneva International Environment House. The Chairperson, Ms Monika Linn, Head of the EMG Secretariat, opened the conference call and welcomed the participants.¹
2. In her introductory remarks, she referred to the mandate of the EMG in enhancing the UN system wide interagency cooperation in the fields of environment and human settlements. She highlighted the EMG's issue management approach in focusing on specific issues suggested by its Members with the aim of identifying possible solutions for the problems addressed. She stressed the role of the EMG not only as a UNEP supporting body, but a body intended to serve the entire UN system and beyond.
3. She then introduced the EMG Secretariat's background note entitled "Potential work on capacity building within the framework of the Environmental Management Group"². The note was prepared based on the informal consultations held with some members of the Group, in particular with a number of Secretariats of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA's). She mentioned that the informal consultations had started as a result of the interest shown by some MEAs to use the broad framework of the EMG for enhancing their cooperation with other EMG members on specific aspects of capacity building activities.
4. While referring to the importance of capacity building/development as a high priority for the MEAs and as well as for the overall implementation of sustainable development, she stressed that the EMG should identify the issues of common interest where cooperation within the EMG might facilitate or improve the effectiveness of capacity building activities. She continued that the added value of the EMG's work in the area of capacity building needed to be clearly identified, so as to avoid duplication with any on-going efforts.
5. She then referred to the two options provided in the note on the possible role of the EMG in the area of capacity building. These were:

¹ The list of participants is attached to the report as annex 1

² The background note is attached to the report as annex 2

- 1) Enhancing the exchange of information and of lessons learnt in the area of capacity building, including the possibility of establishing a capacity building library with the inputs from all EMG Members.
- 2) To focus on the issue of capacity building in the overall context of achieving the millennium developments goals (MDGs) . The EMG could consider the issue of “performance of the capacity building activities in the field of sustainable development” with the aim of identifying gaps and proposing measures such as developing indicators or benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of these activities in the context of the MDGs.

6. The Chairperson then invited the participants to react and present their views or comments:

UNFCCC

7. The Representative of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), while thanking the EMG Secretariat for convening the teleconference, stressed the interest of the UNFCCC Secretariat in discussing the issue of capacity building in the EMG framework, given its broad membership from within and outside the UN system. He emphasized that these discussions should be continued with participation of all interested members of the EMG.

8. The EMG should focus on specific deliverables in the context of the two proposed options in the note. The EMG should aim at finding solutions, contributing to synergies and adding value to the ongoing efforts in the area of capacity building. The note had proposed potential areas of work and it should be further elaborated to identify specific issues in the proposed areas that could be considered in the context of the EMG.

9. The UNFCCC was not interested in starting a new exercise of MEAs’ coordination under the EMG, as it did not believe that this was the mandate of the EMG or that it would be useful.

10. In terms of capacity building, the UNFCCC, and perhaps other MEAs as well, did not really have capacity building activities except through the GEF and its implementing agencies. Many of these activities were very specifically related to each Convention, at least as far as the UNFCCC was concerned. However, other organizations or conventions might have activities related to the broader sustainable development goals, including the MDGs. Therefore it was very important when looking at the issue of capacity building to take into account the work of the GEF.

11. In terms of cooperation between the Conventions, the Secretariats of UNFCCC, CBD, CCD and the Ramsar Convention had established the Joint Liaison Group (JLG). Even though it had a limited membership, the JLG had been effective in information exchange and setting up a limited number of agreed activities.

12. The proposals mentioned in the note were very interesting and the UNFCCC would like to pursue these ideas. The question was if the EMG would like to embark on the two proposed options or to chose one of them. Were there enough financial resources to undertake the suggested activities?

13. The idea of establishing a resource library was interesting though it seemed very ambitious. The UNFCCC had quite a good experience in this area as it had been trying to develop something similar with some of its key partners such as the GEF and its implementing agencies. The main purpose of the resource library should not be limited to collecting the information but to move to a common development of these resources.

14. Developing a resource library was a difficult process, as it needed to gather and develop the information, to set up a database, to set up contact points to provide the information and to set up criteria for identifying what kind of information was needed. All of these would require sufficient resources.

15. The UNFCCC would be interested to see what its contribution is along with other agencies in achieving the MDG's, but the question was if the EMG is the best structure to do such assessments. However, it would be interesting to see how capacity building activities and programmes of UN agencies contribute to meeting the needs in developing countries and in the agencies themselves for the implementation of the MDGs.

16. The EMG could build on the recommendations of the joint UNDP/HLCP Workshop held in November 2002 on capacity building in consultation with the HLCP Secretariat, as no follow up activities had been undertaken so far in implementing the Workshop's recommendations.

17. It was observed that most of the capacity building programs and activities lack a methodology for measuring their effectiveness. Therefore it would be highly useful if the EMG can do work in that direction.

RAMSAR CONVENTION

18. The Executive Secretary of the Ramsar Convention, while welcoming the initiative of the EMG Secretariat, made the following remarks:

19. The Ramsar Convention was engaged in a variety of capacity building exercises within its sphere of operation, but this was done through the medium of other agencies and with support and funding from bilateral and multilateral agencies. The issues of financial resources as well as a wider participation of EMG members, in addition to the MEAs, were critical in undertaking any activities in the areas proposed in the background note.

20. While the idea of capacity building was important, there were some other areas for more urgent synergies, which could be addressed by the EMG. These included particularly issues of national reporting and duplication of reporting requirements, which in the end were related to the issue of capacity building.

21. The MEA Secretariats as well as their contracting parties would put emphasis on making sure that the delivery of capacity building was associated with these other synergies in terms of facilitating the implementation of a convention.

22. The idea of a workable clearing house was good, but there was a need to ensure that it would be functional and stable in the longer term.

23. All members of the UN family had to get more real about how their activities are contributing to the implementation of the MDGs. This was indeed a natural area for the EMG to be involved in and to provide leadership, as the entire UN family had to work together in implementing the MDG's.

UNDP

24. The representative of UNDP welcomed the role of the EMG as a convener and facilitator of dialogue between the MEA secretariats and the development cooperation agencies. It should not exercise a heavy management function.

25. On the issue of the clearing house, he stressed that this kind of ideas worked well as a concept, but in practice it was very difficult to make them functional and useful. However, if the Group decided to move forward in this direction, careful thought should be given to questions such as “how it is going to be used, who are the users, how will it managed?”

26. He underlined that at the national and local level some artificial divisions between environmental agreements actually interfered with the achievement of sustainable development rather than contributing to it. Therefore one potential role for the EMG would be to identify and examine specific areas and issues for capacity development and to come up with model capacity development programmes or model capacity interventions that involved various MEAs and UN agencies.

27. He observed that another important issue not directly related to the idea of capacity development was the burden of reporting to the convention secretariats. There needed to be a dialogue at the global level, as it was being felt and reported by national stakeholders and governments that the burdens of administrating and reporting were interfering with their abilities to function in trying to achieve environmental protection at the national level. Efforts had to be made by global institutions in developing an approach for harmonizing national reporting requirements.

28. Many of UNDP’s capacity building efforts took place in the GEF focal areas. In particular UNDP had been working on a capacity building indicators framework. The EMG could provide an interesting forum for sharing information on the framework and obtaining feedback from its members. The framework was currently being developed for two issues: protected areas, and the market transformation for energy efficient products and services.

29. He concluded by recommending that the EMG secretariat might strengthen the background note by reflecting some definitions on the issue of Capacity Development taking into account the recommendations contained in the report of the HLCP workshop.

WORLD BANK

30. The representative of the World Bank, while referring to the UNFCCC’s comments on the issue of establishing a resource library, stressed the difficulty of combining capacity building documents produced by various organizations.

31. He raised the question of the beneficiary of such a resource library. It should be clarified if it was established for the EMG members to increase the effectiveness of their capacity building programmes, or for the use of governments as well.

32. In the context of the MEAs, a major goal was to incorporate environmental issues in the development process. He referred to two kinds of capacity building services required. One was at the level of sectoral and microeconomic planning, to make sure that global environment issues were taken into account in decision making. The second was at the level of implementation and might imply redesigning the development process, so that global environmental issues were better taken into account.

33. He explained that most of the international institutions did not know whether external capacity building efforts had been effective, or the internal incentives within countries, or a linkage of the two.

34. He suggested that the EMG in its further work on capacity building should first identify its recipients and beneficiaries. As the needs of each organization/MEA were different, it would be

useful if the Group could further clarify its approach in discussing the capacity building issue. Would the group like to consider capacity building in specific areas such as climate change or biodiversity or rather address the effectiveness of capacity building processes. The answer, he said, would depend again on who is the end user of these efforts.

FAO

35. The representative of FAO said that the objectives of option 1 in the background paper needed to be further clarified. His organization would be interested to contribute to the work of the EMG in this area, given its strong profile in the area of capacity building. He then elaborated on some of FAO's capacity building activities in different fields. He highlighted FAO activities in national communications. For instance, he referred to the FAO activities in harmonizing forest related definitions, which are of importance to the three Rio Conventions. Development of a mitigation forest project in Central America was another example he referred to which was being done in close collaboration with UNFCCC.

UNEP

36. The Representative of UNEP highlighted the main capacity building efforts of his organization. He referred to the decision of the UNEP Governing Council in 2002, which asked UNEP to play a more active role in capacity building. He informed that UNEP was currently working on an intergovernmental strategic plan (ISP) on capacity building and technology support, which included contacts with EMG members. As such, he called the facilitating role of the EMG useful.

37. Elaborating on the ISP, he said that the Plan would not only include what UNEP is supposed to do but also how it is working together with others and what are the roles of the various partners. He underlined that in parallel to the on-going work on ISP, UNEP was working on its internal strategy on capacity building, and that these issues were given high priority in UNEP.

38. He referred to the upcoming meeting of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in (Republic of Korea, March 2004) at which the report on the status of the ISP and other UNEP capacity building efforts would be presented.

39. He touched upon some UNEP capacity building efforts related to MEAs, such as compliance and enforcement, harmonization of national reporting, outreach activities such as implementation of article 6 of the Climate Convention, and environmental law issues relevant to the MEAs. He suggested that it would be a good idea to stimulate a conventions' network at the national level. He added that capacity building meant supporting the implementation of the MEAs at the national level in developing countries.

40. He commented that the clearing house might be a good idea, but was certainly difficult to implement. In several cases similar activities had not succeeded because of a lack of resources. Strong commitments from the partners as well as availability of resources were crucial for establishing a comprehensive clearing house.

41. UNEP, as part of its strategy, intended to present the capacity building activities in a more user-friendly way to stakeholders on the Internet. It would be helpful if this could be done in a systematic way with other partners.

42. He concluded by supporting the proposal made by UNDP. It was a challenge in itself to sort out the division of work between the agencies, and it was important to understand what each of them was doing and to identify the needs. Therefore the role of the EMG in bringing all actors together would be quite useful.

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

43. The CBD representative commended the EMG Secretariat for its initiative. He called the proposed ideas interesting and said that the members just needed to find modalities of making them work and achieving the intended purpose.

44. He continued by describing the status of capacity building activities in the context of the CBD and its Biosafety Protocol. Under the protocol the Parties had developed an action plan under an interim body (ICCP). A number of activities were undertaken, such as establishing databases on ongoing capacity building activities and the lessons learnt. A detailed list of activities had already been provided to the EMG Secretariat.

45. He stressed the importance of being very clear on added value of any of the proposed elements in the EMG Secretariat's note. Over-centralizing efforts should be avoided. The role of the EMG should be seen as facilitating the work of its members rather than being seen as coordinating their work.

46. He said that the note should further define the problems and the needs in the area of capacity building in order to be able to propose necessary actions. Lack of coordination and sharing of information was mentioned in general terms only, and the real problems needed to be further clarified.

47. The idea of a clearing house and information sharing mechanism was great, he said, but it needed to be very systematic and sustainable. Resources had to be identified to build and maintain the system over a reasonable time period.

48. The question of assessing the performance of capacity building activities by the MEAs was somewhat sensitive as it might be seen as judging the MEA's performances. This needed to be clarified, but as such was an important issue where the EMG could play a useful role. He proposed the idea of sharing information by using Internet best tools as another possibility for MEAs to pool together their resources.

CMS

49. The representative of the CMS said that his convention had been one of the first conventions that actively took up the idea of IEG, and the ideas of the Millennium Summit. CMS also had concluded MOUs with all relevant conventions and agencies working in the same areas as CMS, such as CBD, UNESCO and CCD.

50. CMS believed that it was important to cooperate, to avoid duplication of efforts and to exchange information on capacity building in the context of the proposed options. However, in his view, there was a certain risk in trying to establish a clearing house mechanism or to develop indicators because of the time and resources needed. The MEA Secretariats had to focus on implementing their often heavy work programmes, and their involvement in additional activities would require time and resources.

51. He expressed the wish of the CMS Secretariat to join the JLG.

CITES

52. The representative of CITES referred to her Convention's long standing experience in the area of capacity building and said that CITES would be interested in sharing it with other MEAs. She said that CITES was interested in addressing not only the effectiveness of capacity building activities, but the methodologies used in developing such activities.

53. She referred to her Convention's strategic approach to capacity building and described the electronic delivery of capacity building services as a useful and effective tool. She expressed her Convention's willingness to share these approaches and experiences with other MEAs. Examples of such services were standard power point presentations used as implementation manuals for the Convention and a CD Rom developed for customs training.

54. On the issue of the resources library, she said that CITES was very keen to share experience with others, but further clarification was needed on the implications of such undertaking in terms of financial resources and the expected contributions from the EMG members.

55. With regard to the MDGs, CITES had not explored the links to the MDGs yet and would look into this question. The overall integration of environment and development was a high priority for CITES. CITES had been involved in harmonization efforts for national reporting, but had a reporting system that was quite different from other MEAs. CITES had also worked with other conventions on legislative issues and had participated in the recent UNEP meeting on compliance and enforcement.

The Basel Convention

56. The Representative of the Basel Convention referred to the Convention's regional centers as the main vehicles for implementing capacity building activities. The lack of financial resources was a major concern for the Convention, as it did not have a financial mechanism. He referred to the business plan, which involved the private sector as an effective mechanism in delivering capacity building services. He underlined the importance of capacity building in terms of its effects on environmental management at the country level. He highlighted some of the Basel capacity building workshops held jointly with other MEAs.

57. On the issue of the resource library he underlined the need to explore whether similar libraries established had been effective. He referred to the experience of the Montreal Protocol in this area and recommended to ask them what their experience had been in terms of the real status of such libraries and its use by countries.

58. On the MDGs, he said there was a need to look at all ongoing work by MEAs and UN agencies as well as the outcomes of international processes such as WSSD when developing any analysis with regard to the implementation of the MDGs. The EMG should also explore how its work in this area would correspond to similar ongoing work in other fora, if any.

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Comments

59. Reacting to the earlier interventions on the target audience of the proposed resource library, the representative of the UNFCCC said that such a library could be used primarily by the EMG members. He referred to the UNFCCC resource library, which had brought together information and materials from only four agencies but had proved very useful in informing these agencies about each other's activities. Developing resource materials like books and capacity building tool kits were good examples of further products that the group could envisage to develop in a joint exercise.

60. He added that it would be useful to distinguish between different kinds of activities, as there were some activities, which are very specific to each convention and some others that relate to the overall sustainable development issues.

61. The representative of UNDP proposed that it might be interesting to think about developing 'conditions for success' for specific types of capacity development interventions by pulling together the significant experience of the secretariats and the agencies.

62. He also suggested that in continuation of these consultations, it would be useful to organize a workshop followed up by a series of time limited internet conferences that would focus on specific issues and identify tangible and concrete outcomes.

63. The representative of the CBD suggested that it would be useful for the EMG if it could pull together the expertise of its members in the area of capacity building. Such expertise could then be shared with and utilized by all members of the Group. The EMG could also try to identify available financial resources or other capacity building opportunities for the MEAs.

64. The representative of the World Bank requested to further discuss these issues through email exchange so as to define the needs and added value as well as the beneficiaries of the options suggested in the note of the EMG Secretariat.

65. The CITES representative referred to the idea of 'training the trainers' which was of interest to her Convention and could be useful for other MEAs in their capacity building efforts.

66. The Chairperson in her concluding remarks presented a summary of the teleconference. She observed that participants in general felt positive about the EMG taking up the issue of capacity building, and that the EMG Secretariat would further develop the proposed ideas in the background note, taking into account the views expressed in the teleconference.

67. She continued that the feasibility of establishing a resource library needed to be further examined. She noted that the participants were in principle in favor of establishing the library, however their main concern was how to go about it, what would be the financial and other resource implications and who would be the target audience for such a library. She underlined that it was also important to find out what had been done already and what the experiences were so that the group knew where to start from and what challenges it would face before taking any decision.

68. In terms of financial resources, she said that if the Group could pull together a good proposal, the EMG Secretariat intended do fund raising with interested donors. On MDGs, she said that the participants were positive on the approach but aware of the challenge of measuring the effectiveness

of their capacity building activities in this area. However, if such assessment were done successfully, it would be very useful to all EMG members.

69. She concurred with some members on the fact that the EMG's role was not the coordination of Convention Secretariats, and that the aim should be to identify how the EMG could facilitate the work on issues of common concern to its members.

70. She then thanked the participants and informed them that there would be further consultations with them as well as other EMG members on the follow up regarding the issue of capacity building, including further development of the background note. The issue might then be taken up for discussion at the next meeting of the EMG, which would possibly take place in late January 2004. She then declared the teleconference closed.

ANNEX I

List of Participants

EMG Teleconference
on the issue of Capacity Building and the Role of the EMG
Friday 21 November 2003

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Secretariat of the Environmental Management Group (EMG)

06/11/2003

Note on potential work on capacity building within the framework of the Environmental Management Group

Introduction

This note is prepared as a result of informal discussions held between the Secretariat of the Environmental Management Group (EMG) and Secretariats of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs- CBD, CCD, CITES, UNFCCC, Basel Convention) on the issue of capacity building.

The main aim of the note is to initiate further discussions and interaction between the Secretariats of MEAs and the EMG Secretariat on common issues, concerns or needs in the area of capacity-building which could be addressed by the EMG through its issue-management approach. In light of the above consultations, the EMG Secretariat would consequently develop an issue paper for consideration of the EMG members and possibly discussion at the next meeting of the EMG.

Background

Provisions for capacity building are contained in almost all MEAs to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition in implementing the respective conventions. Areas such as national communications, training, information dissemination and awareness raising are examples of capacity building services provided by the MEAs.

Each convention, in accordance with its objectives, has applied a different approach in delivering capacity building services and consequently has a different audience and focal point in the recipient countries. The MEAs have been faced with various challenges in implementing capacity building programs in terms of adequate financial resources, communication with national focal points, assessments of needs, evaluation of activities, etc...

In addition, the Doha and Monterrey Conferences as well as the WSSD highlighted the importance of capacity building and coordination to move towards better resourced, more effective, coordinated and complementary capacity-building activities in poverty alleviation and sustainable development programs.

A number of meetings have taken place between the MEAs' Secretariats and the specialized agencies or programmes such as UNEP, UNDP, WTO and GEF aiming at strengthening synergies and collaboration in particular in the area of capacity building.

A meeting organized by UNEP/DTIE in March 2002, on improving the effectiveness and the coordination of capacity-building activities on environment, trade and development, identified the following areas for improvement in the current approaches to capacity building:

Lack of coordination and cooperation between institutions, national priorities not met by capacity-building programs, lack of needs assessments, inadequate follow-up and evaluation, activities are not sufficiently participatory (“learning-by doing”).

Cooperation between MEAs

The Secretariats of UNFCCC, CBD, UNCCD and RAMSAR Conventions have established the Joint Liaison Group (JLG). It aims to strengthen common approaches and activities, avoid duplication of efforts and to collect and share information on the work programmes and operations of each convention.

The JLG is comprised of the secretariats and officers of the relevant subsidiary bodies of the above conventions and has met twice to date, in December 2001 and January 2002, and has published a joint calendar of MEA relevant events.

The Role of the EMG

The EMG was established pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/242, for the purpose of enhancing United Nations system-wide inter-agency cooperation related to specific issues in the field of environment and human settlements.

According to its Terms of Reference (ToR), 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.

The EMG shall promote inter-linkages, encourage timely and relevant exchange of data and information on specific issues and identify possible solutions to common problems. It shall thus contribute to the synergy and complementarity of activities of its members in the fields of environment and human settlements acting in a complementary manner and adding value to the existing UN system-wide inter-agency cooperation.

Proposals on the potential role of the EMG in facilitating/strengthening cooperation among MEAs and between MEAs and UN agencies in the area of capacity building.

The EMG might play a useful role as a forum to bring together the Secretariats of MEAs and the major players in the field of capacity-building in the UN system for a discussion of common approaches and activities.

The following options have been identified in informal consultations with the MEAs' Capacity Building Focal Points as possible entry points for the EMG's role in strengthening cooperation in the area of capacity building:

Option 1:

Assist in further or more coordinated information exchange on lessons learnt, approaches and methodologies in developing capacity building programs, with the aim of further improving the effectiveness of such policies and programs.

While the MEAs have strong mandates and work programs on capacity building, improving information exchange on lessons learnt in the area of capacity building seems to be one of their main needs. It is therefore proposed that the EMG could assist in providing a platform through which the MEAs could more effectively exchange information and experiences.

The idea of establishing a “MEAs’ capacity building library/information clearing house” is proposed to be considered as a useful tool to access information and data both by the public as well as the MEAs themselves. The EMG could indeed consider this issue in a broader context so as to solicit the inputs of a wider range of UN agencies and CSOs.

Option 2:

Undertake an assessment of MEAs’ capacity building activities in the context of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

This option is proposed in line with the conclusions of the UN Inter-Agency Workshop on Capacity Development, which took place under the aegis of the High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) in November 2002. The workshop was held pursuant to GA resolutions 53/192 and 56/201, which call for greater and more systematic attention to capacity-building by the UN system. For ease of reference some key recommendations of the workshop are mentioned here below:

The workshop recommended that:

- *HLCP should be requested to consider and suggest possible actions/decisions in order to encourage a system-wide strategy in support of the development of national capacities for the pursuit of MDGs and other internationally agreed objectives.*
- *Articulating the benchmarks and indicators needed for capacity building linked to the MDG’s is an urgent task for all agencies concerned and the UN system should draw on its unique reserve of experience in this task.*
- *Each agency of the United Nations system should have a “capacity-building” strategy as part of their own corporate strategy in order to support the pursuit of MDGs and other internationally agreed international objectives.*
- *HLCP may consider requesting – unless this is already foreseen – all agencies of the United Nations system that the annual report that the executive heads of each agency submit to their respective governing body devotes a specific section to the assessment of the strategy adopted by that agency to support capacity building.*

In light of the above recommendations, and in view of fostering an active involvement of the MEAs in implementing the MDGs, it is suggested that the EMG could consider the issue of “performance of the capacity building activities provided by MEAs in the field of sustainable development” and perhaps assist in developing indicators for assessing the effectiveness of the MEAs’ capacity building activities in the context of the MDGs.

The EMG might consider to organize consultations and develop a profile on assessing the contribution of MEAs’ capacity building services to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The EMG could build on the recommendations made by the Workshop and set a stage for exchanges of information between the MEAs on capacity building initiatives and good practices. This could include the use of indicators, benchmarks and other practical ways of verifying evidence of successful performance of MEAs in supporting the development of national capacities.