



## **Environmental Management Group (EMG)**

6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Environmental Management Group

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# **DRAFT**

## **Note on Potential Work on Capacity Building within the Framework of the Environmental Management Group**

### **I. Introduction**

Assisting developing countries in building capacity to make progress towards sustainable development is a task involving many different actors. It has been a concern for governments in the context of implementation of national development programs and an international priority in the context of the achievement of sustainable development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The WSSD Plan of Implementation highlights 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.

With the UN system and the international financial institutions being heavily involved in capacity building activities, questions of efficiency and effectiveness of these activities and the potential for further synergies between actors within and outside the UN system have become ever more relevant.

In light of the above, and in view of the interest shown by some EMG members, the Secretariat of the EMG has initiated a series of informal consultations with the aim to identify specific needs and concerns of EMG members in the area of capacity building which could be addressed within the framework of the EMG<sup>1</sup>. As a result of this first round of consultations, this note has been prepared to initiate further discussions with all EMG members on potential activities to be undertaken in the framework of the EMG in the year 2004.

### **II. Definitions**

Different actors within and outside of the UN system employ the term of “capacity building” or “capacity development” to refer to a similar process of assisting countries in building their capacities to make progress towards sustainable development. For the purpose of clarification, and without intending to enter into a discussion of definitions, the differences in terminology are briefly explained below<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> The full list of participants in those consultations is attached as annex 2.

<sup>2</sup> The definitions of capacity building and capacity development are extracted from the report of the UN interagency Workshop on Capacity Development, Geneva, 20-22 November 2002.

The term “capacity” is defined as the ability of individuals, communities, institutions, organizations, social and political systems to use the natural, financial, political, and social and human resources that are available to them for the definition and pursuit of sustainable development goals.

The term “capacity development” reflects the fact that “capacity” is always available and its development is a matter of degree as well as a primarily endogenous process. “Capacity building,” on the other hand, in the strict sense of the word, implies that capacity is newly created. It is often perceived that external actors play a leading role in this creation of capacity.

Therefore, “capacity development” is the more adequate term to describe the endogenous process of enhancing capacity to which external actors can lend assistance. Nevertheless, while the understanding of capacity development as an on-going, endogenous process has taken root throughout the United Nations system and the wider development assistance community, different actors within and outside of the system have become accustomed to using either one of these terms to refer to this process.

### **III. Issues of Concern**

Capacity building activities, in the field of environmentally sustainable development to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition, are envisaged in the programmes of most EMG members; including the UN Secretariat, specialized agencies, and MEAs.

The major goal of such activities has been to incorporate environmental issues in the development process, and as such two kinds of capacity building services have been provided:

- 1) Activities at the sectoral level and microeconomic planning in order to make sure that global environmental issues are taken into account in decision-making.
- 2) Activities at the level of implementation, which implies redesigning the development process, so that global environmental issues are better taken into account.

In terms of capacity building programmes related to the achievement of environmental goals, there are many different approaches for the delivery of capacity building services and consequently different audiences and focal points in the recipient countries. Issues such as lack of adequate financial resources, insufficient communication with national focal points, assessment of needs and evaluation of activities have been identified as major challenges in implementing capacity building activities.

There are also questions about the effectiveness of existing capacity building services, and whether these are really contributing to building the indigenous capacities and are not just conceived as ad hoc external services. Most of the international institutions still might not know whether external capacity building efforts or rather the internal incentives within countries have been effective, or a linkage of the two.

### **IV. Responses**

The UN General Assembly in its various resolutions<sup>3</sup> on capacity building/development, highlighted the importance of capacity building/development in the context of the internationally agreed development goals. The UNGA encouraged the UN system to intensify its efforts to reflect on and analyze its knowledge of and experience with capacity building with a view to offering improved support to the development of national capacities”. It also requested closer cooperation in

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<sup>3</sup> For instance Resolutions 53/192, 56/201 and E/2002/29

“further defining the indicators and benchmarks used to design, manage and monitor capacity building activities”.

It has emphasized that the UN system should make use of existing mechanisms for information sharing and coordination with the aim of effectively mainstreaming the common understanding of United Nations capacity development assistance and further improving the design, implementation and monitoring/evaluation of capacity building programmes and activities.

The UN system with its wealth of knowledge and experience could help in defining or updating benchmarks and progress indicators that recipient countries can use to design and manage their programmes for building or strengthening their capacity to achieve internationally agreed goals.

The UN organizations themselves could also define a small but selected and well designed set of common indicators of achievement, that would help monitoring and evaluating technical assistance performance. There could be a set of "core indicators" for the UN system, and then an associated "set of indicators" specific to the different agencies and their different type of activities, which of course would not have to be the same since the tasks are by definition different.

## **V. Examples of capacity building cooperation**

Different actors within the UN system have established cooperation frameworks in response to the concerns outlined above. 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. Below are two examples of such cooperative initiatives:

### *MEA's Joint Liaison Group*

The three “Rio Conventions”,(CBD, UNCCD & UNFCCC), have established a cooperation framework: the Joint Liaison Group, which 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<sup>4</sup>.

### *UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity Building Task Force (CBTF)*

In March 2000, UNEP and UNCTAD jointly established the CBTF which aims to help beneficiaries, in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, to effectively address trade-environment-development issues at the national level and to participate effectively in related deliberations at the international level. The CBTF has been conceived to combine the strengths of UNEP to build capacities on environmental aspects of trade, and of UNCTAD to build capacities on the development aspects of trade. The initiative provides five clusters of activities, namely thematic research, country projects, training, policy dialogue and networking.

Latest developments under CBTF can be found at:

<http://www.unep-unctad.org/cbtf/index.htm>

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<sup>4</sup> The JLG is comprised of the Executive Secretaries and the Chairs of the relevant subsidiary bodies of the CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC, It has met four times to date, has published a joint calendar of relevant events, and has agreed to deal with a series of issues of common concern to its members. The JLG has invited representatives of the Ramsar Convention for some past meetings, and may do so again, and with other relevant conventions in the future.

## **VI. The Role of the EMG**

The EMG was established to enhance the United Nations system-wide inter-agency cooperation related to specific issues in the field of environment and human settlements. It 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 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.

## **VII. Potential issues for EMG consideration in the area of capacity building:**

Based on its mandate and through its issue management approach, the EMG could consider some specific issues related to the environmental aspects of capacity building which could provide added value to the work of its members. In this context, the following issues are suggested to be considered by the Group and to be addressed in a time bound manner:

### **1- Capacity building for Environmental Sustainability (MDG 7)**

Ensuring environmental sustainability is the seventh Millennium Development Goal and the major environmental component of the MDGs. The agreed target for this goal is to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

The GA resolution 56/201 calls for greater and more systematic attention to capacity-building by the UN system. It emphasizes “the need for all organizations of the United Nations system to enhance their coordination in accordance with their mandates, mission statements and the relevant decisions of their governing bodies in order to avoid overlapping and duplication and to enhance their complementarity”. It further emphasizes, “the need to fulfil the commitments, goals and targets set in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and by the major United Nations conferences, and in that context reiterates the importance of continuously monitoring progress made in that direction”.

In light of the above, addressing the UN system’s contributions to the capacity building efforts necessary for the implementation of the MDG Goal 7, and identifying the needs and requirements for ensuring the effectiveness of such contributions is essential.

To this end, the EMG could facilitate information exchange between its Members on capacity building initiatives and good practices related to the implementation of MDG 7 and assist in defining indicators, benchmarks and other practical ways of identifying the needs and verifying the successful contributions of such initiatives to the development of related national capacities.

Developing a “MDG 7 capacity-building strategy” that could be integrated, as part of each organization’s corporate strategy in achieving MDG’s, could also be another area of EMG focus.

## **2- Establishing an environmental capacity building resource library or clearing house**

While most MEAs and UN agencies have developed a number of initiatives on capacity building in their respective areas of concern, improving such activities through exchange of information, lessons learnt and best practices remains one of their priorities.

The EMG could assist in facilitating coordinated information exchange on lessons learned, as well as approaches and methodologies in developing capacity building programs with the aim of further improving the effectiveness of such programs.

It could facilitate the establishment of a “capacity building library/information clearing house” as a useful tool to access information and to share knowledge and experience in capacity building in the UN system and beyond. Such a library could be initially used by the EMG members, and would ultimately contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of their capacity building efforts in the developing countries.

Such a library could pull together the expertise of the EMG members in the area of capacity building, which then could be shared with and utilized by all members of the Group. The main purpose of the resource library might not be limited to collecting information, but rather to move to a common development of these resources. Developing resource materials such as books and capacity building tool kits could be considered as possible products of such library.

Developing a resource library is indeed a difficult process, as it needs to gather and develop the information, to establish a database, to appoint contact points, to provide the information and to set up criteria for identifying what kind of information is needed, all of which would require sufficient resources. It is also necessary to explore whether similar libraries have been established and if they have been useful.

As a first step, stocktaking of existing initiatives and identification of challenges and obstacles encountered is therefore recommended.

## **3- Model capacity development programs**

The EMG could identify and examine specific areas and issues for “capacity development” and to come up with “model capacity development programs or model capacity interventions” that involve various MEAs and UN agencies.

Developing ‘conditions for success’ for specific types of capacity development interventions could also be envisaged by pulling together the significant experience of the secretariats and the agencies.

## **VIII. Next steps**

Given the resources and time required, immediate focus on all of the above areas is not feasible. Therefore the EMG could select one of the above areas and request the Secretariat to develop a project proposal specifying clearly the objectives, activities, time frame and the expected outcomes.

After discussion and approval by the Group, preferably through electronic means, the Secretariat could present the proposal to individual donor countries, particularly during the upcoming UNEP GC/GMEF and CSD 12, to seek their financial support for its implementation.

The Group might then consider establishing an IMG on capacity building and appoint amongst its members a task manager to lead this exercise.