Environmental Management Group (EMG)

6th Meeting of the Environmental Management Group
International Environment House, Geneva, 6 February 2004

Report of the 6th Meeting of the Environmental Management Group
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Geneva, International Environment House

A. Opening of the meeting

1. The 6th meeting of the Environmental Management Group (EMG) was held on 6 February 2004 at the International Environment House, Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Shafqat Kakakhel, Deputy-Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), who opened the meeting and welcomed all participants on behalf of Dr. Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP and Chairman of the EMG.

2. In his introductory remarks, the chairperson stressed the Members' common ownership of and responsibility for the EMG. He went on to state that though the EMG was conceived under the auspices of UNEP, it was an inter-agency mechanism with the objective of serving all its members; and further elaborated on the commonality of environment related issues to all the organizations.

3. As regards the work of the EMG, he stated that the Group has now reached the point where its work will be presented to important intergovernmental forums. The EMG will report to the 8th Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/ Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF), which will take place in two months time in Jeju, Republic of Korea. Through the Governing Council, it will then inform the 59th session of the UN General Assembly about its work, as requested in General Assembly Resolution 58/209.

4. He then referred to the main issues on the meeting's agenda, namely the discussion and agreement on the information paper entitled "Addressing environmental aspects of the water agenda: activities of the United Nations System", the consideration of a new EMG activity in the area of environmental capacity-building, and the report of the IMG on 'Harmonization of information management and reporting for biodiversity-related conventions'.

5. Mr. Kakakhel then passed the Chair over to Mr. Bakary Kante, Director of UNEP /DPDL.

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 on Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements to the UNEP GC/GMEF and CSD 12

3. The potential role of the EMG in the area of capacity building

4. Review and finalization of the work on 'Harmonization of information management and reporting for biodiversity-related conventions'

5. Reporting of the EMG to the GC/GMEF and to the UNGA

6. Date and agenda for the next meeting

7. Any other business

8. Closure of the meeting

C. The EMG's contribution on Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements to the UNEP GC/GMEF and CSD 12 (Agenda Item 2)

8. The Chairman invited the consultant, Ms. Ania Grobicki, to present to the Group the draft paper, entitled, "Addressing environmental aspects of the water agenda: activities of the United Nations System". The paper had been prepared by Mrs. Grobicki on behalf of the EMG Secretariat, on the basis of inputs collected from EMG members and in close consultation with the UN Water.

9. Ms. Grobicki presented the draft paper which provides a survey of major programmes and activities across the United Nations system; giving details of the partners involved, their objectives, and their outputs in the areas of:

1. Ecosystem approaches in integrated water resource management (IWRM)
2. Environmental dimensions of sanitation
3. Water, health and poverty.

10. While the survey shows the extent of inter-agency cooperation already taking place, the paper concludes by calling for more concerted programming of activities within the UN system, which also needs to be underpinned by more concerted action on the part of donors, and by identifying some emerging topics on the water agenda to which the UN system might respond by further joint action.

11. The Chairman congratulated Ms. Grobicki and the Secretariat on the paper and stated that the paper is intended as an information document for the water discussions at the UNEP GC/GMEF. He suggested that it might also be presented to the CSD 12 at a side event. He furthermore raised the questions how the recommendations in the EMG paper relate to the recommendations in the UNEP background paper for the ministerial discussions in Jeju (UNEP GCSS.VIII/4).

12. The Secretary general of the RAMSAR Convention stated the need for the EMG's water paper to maintain its own unique identity, independent of the water paper being put forward by UNEP. He also suggested the reorganization of the paper with all tables being presented in the appendix. He further proposed to use the definition of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for the ecosystems approach, instead of referring to ecosystem approaches. Finally, he brought to the attention of the Group the next Conference of the Parties to the RAMSAR Convention in 2005, which would deal with some of the issues raised in the conclusions of the EMG water paper. He supported the idea of organizing a side event at CSD 12 to present the EMG water paper.

13. With regard to the definition of an ecosystem approach, the Chairman referred to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which also contains such a definition.

14. The representative of UN DESA, also speaking on behalf of the UN Water, stated the importance of the paper bringing an interagency message to the intergovernmental meetings. He spoke in favor of a clear interpretation of the ecosystem approach in the EMG water document. The environmental implications of sanitation also needed to be made very clear in the paper. Referring to one of the conclusions of the paper about the perceived lack of statistical data and indicators, he stressed the work in this area undertaken by the World Water Assessment Programme. He also mentioned the need to look at early warning systems as well as the environmental problems that disasters cause.

15. The representative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) supported these comments, and added to them by suggesting that integrated flood management should be brought into the paper, as well as the need for further work on the assessment of resources. With regard to the ecosystems approach, he stated that it is important to take into consideration the views of the water sector. He referred to the written comments submitted by WMO before the meeting.

16. The Director of UNEP/DEPI and UNEP/DEC welcomed the paper and informed the Group about the upcoming meeting of several UN agencies in Copenhagen, where further actions to assist in achieving the WSSD goal of Integrated Water Resource Management Plans by 2005 would be discussed.

17. The representative of UN Habitat welcomed the EMG water paper and suggested that the Group look for common messages through partnership programmes and activities, like those identified through the WSSD process. She stressed that innovative partnerships provide an opportunity for local governments to become major partners in sustainable development. On the issue of institutional follow-up, she informed the Group that a report would be presented on the collaboration between UN Habitat and UNEP to the GC/GMEF. She went on to inform the Group of the 2nd

World Urban Forum set to take place in September of 2004 in Barcelona, Spain and encouraged EMG members to participate.

18. The representative of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) suggested the inclusion of drought risk management in addition to the information on flood risk management. He also spoke of the importance of stressing the linkage between water resource management and sanitation. As concerns statistics on freshwater, he discussed the need for the creation of simpler yet more meaningful statistical information/indicators reflecting water quality for use by governments and lay people.

19. The representative of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) returned to the issue of ecosystem approaches and discouraged the Group from working on a single definition. He however stressed that ecosystems should be thought of as including the human factor. He also stated that issues of sanitation and water could not be separated. He suggested that the Group look at reports from all regional preparatory meetings for CSD 12 with the aim of identifying common points and messages. In response to the indicator issue raised by UNESCWA, he informed the Group that UNECE is currently working with other UN agencies on the development of a set of water indicators for the next World Water Development Report.

20. The representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) referred to the written comments provided to the EMG Secretariat and stated that the 2005-2015 decade 'Water for Life' should be mentioned in the EMG paper.

21. The representative of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) raised the possibility of looking into issues relating to trade in environmental goods and services specific to water and waste-water management and sanitation. He referred to the fact that, at 4th WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha, WTO members agreed to liberalize trade in environmental goods and services. Since then, a considerable number of requests had been made in the negotiations with respect to the water sector. The negotiations raised difficult questions concerning demand for and supply capacity in water services, regulatory capacity, private participation, including public services TNCs, government procurement, monopolies and exclusive supplier rights, subsidies, universal access and pricing. These and other, related questions were addressed at an UNCTAD Expert Meeting on Environmental Goods and Services held in July 2003.

22. The Executive Secretary of the Basel Convention congratulated the EMG Secretariat on the paper and asked for adequate reflection of the linkages between hazardous waste treatment and water resources management.

23. The Head of the EMG Secretariat expressed her thanks to Ms. Grobicki for the paper and to the Members for their input. She referred to the written comments submitted by WMO, FAO, the Ramsar Convention, WHO and UNDP, which would be taken on board in the final version of the paper.

24. The Group agreed that further written comments should be submitted to the EMG Secretariat and/or the consultant within one week's time and that the paper

should be made available to participants of the UNEP GC/GMEF by the first week of March at the latest

D. The potential role of the EMG in the area of capacity building (Agenda Item 3)

25. The Chairman invited the Secretariat to introduce the draft Note entitled " The Potential Work on Capacity Building within the Framework of the Environmental Management Group". The Secretariat informed the meeting on the background and the results of the informal consultations, particularly the teleconference of November 2003, as a result of which the Note had been prepared.

26. The informal consultations had taken place 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. The Note had 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.

27. The Note reflected some common concerns of UN agencies and the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) in the area of environmental aspects of capacity building and elaborated on the existing frameworks and responses in addressing these concerns. The Note had proposed possible options to be considered and approved by the Group for the future focus of the EMG in the area of environmental aspects of capacity building. The options included:

1. A focus of the EMG on capacity building for environmental sustainability (MDG 7). 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 as well as the successful contributions of such initiatives to the development of related national capacities.

2. Establishing an environmental capacity building resource library or clearing house. By establishing a resource library 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. Such a library could be a useful tool to access information and to share knowledge and experience in capacity building in the UN system and beyond.

3. Developing model capacity development programs. The EMG could identify and examine specific areas and issues for "capacity development", and come up with "model capacity development programs or model capacity interventions" that involve various MEAs and UN agencies.

28. Following the introduction of the Note, the Chairman invited the representative of UNITAR to make a presentation on the joint UNITAR-IOMC [1]initiative entitled, "Synergies for capacity building under international agreements addressing chemicals and waste management".

29. He informed the Group that the aim of the initiative was to explore synergies for capacity building under international agreements in the area of chemicals and to assist developing countries to establish/strengthen a collaborative framework at the national level which can provide a foundation for effective and co-ordinated action to address both national chemicals and waste management priorities as well as the implementation of international chemicals and wastes-related agreements.

30. The representative of the UNFCCC Secretariat stressed the interest to discuss 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, and that the EMG should provide a platform for information exchange and lessons learnt between the MEAs and the UN organizations.

31. He added that the EMG should come up with specific deliverables in the context of the 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.

32. He observed that the idea of establishing a resource library was an interesting but difficult task, which required active participation of all interested EMG members. The UNFCCC Secretariat had some experience in this area as it had been trying to develop such a library in the area of climate change with some of its key partners, such as the GEF and its implementing agencies.

33. He concluded by informing the Group on the work of the Joint Liaison Group (JLG) established by Secretariats of the three Rio Conventions, which had the issue of capacity building under its consideration.

34. 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 plans prepared by the Centres 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 and proposed that the EMG should also explore how its work in this area would correspond to similar ongoing work in other fora, if any.

[1] The Inter-Organization Programme for Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) co-ordinates the activities of seven intergovernmental organizations concerned with chemicals management issues: UNEP,UNITAR,OECD,WHO,ILO,FAO,UNIDO.

35. The Executive Secretary of the CITES underlined the need to focus on practical outcomes which could provide the basis for institutions to share aspects of their environmental work. He expressed support for the first and second option suggested in the note of the EMG Secretariat.

36. The Group, while thanking the Secretariat for organizing the informal consultations and the preparation of the Note, reiterated the importance of this issue and agreed to establish an issue management group (IMG) to further discuss the issue and develop a concrete and time bound program on capacity building in the framework of the EMG. The IMG could consider option 2 as its immediate area of focus, which could be specifically linked and targeted to the implementation of MDG7. The IMG's work could also contribute to the respective work of the members in the area of capacity building, such as the work of UNEP on an Intergovernmental Strategic Plan for technology support and capacity building.

37. The Secretariat should consult with the members to appoint a task manager for the IMG. It was recommended that such a task should be assigned to an agency with a strong profile on capacity building.

E. Review and finalization of the work on 'Harmonization of information management and reporting for biodiversity-related conventions (Agenda Item 4)

38. The Director of UNEP/DEPI presented the report on the work of this IMG, which had been established by the EMG in 2001 with UNEP as the task manager. He outlined a set of recommendations for further action in this area: inter alia, Secretariat liaison meetings, collaborative task forces and/or workshops, national level approaches, direct support to nations in reporting.

39. The representative of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) stated the need of showing the purpose of reporting to the governments and stressed the importance of further progress on the harmonization of reporting.

40. The representative from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) suggested that the Group consider specific action to follow up on the recommendations in the report.

41. The representative from CITES reiterated this and also proposed that those members of the Group who are concerned with the recommendations in the report come back a year later to offer a progress report to the Group. The Group agreed to follow this suggestion.

42. It was also agreed that the outcomes of the IMG be presented as part of the EMG's report on its work at the upcoming GC/GMEF in Jeju.

F. Reporting of the EMG to the GC/GMEF and to the UNGA (Agenda Item 5)

43. The Head of the EMG Secretariat presented the draft report of the EMG and provided background information on the request of the UN General Assembly for this reporting. She further informed the Group that the draft report would be revised to incorporate the outcomes of the current meeting.

44. The representative from the UNFCCC suggested that the report be formatted with the process areas being followed by annexes of substantive work. He further suggested that the report should focus on those activities of the EMG which have come to fruition.

G. Date and agenda for the next meeting (Agenda Item 6)

45. The Head of the EMG Secretariat suggested that the next meeting take place in New York during the CSD meeting in April so as to facilitate greater involvement of New York based organizations, as well as civil society representatives. The Secretariat will consult with the members on the date of the meeting in the near future.

46. The Chairman suggested to the Group that bearing in mind the scarcity of time during the CSD, that the agenda should be focused and short. He further recommended the agenda of the next meeting of the Group could include consideration of the EMG's program of work for 2004, further discussion on capacity building and reporting back from the GC/GMEF.

H. Other business (Agenda Item 7)

47. The Head of the EMG Secretariat informed the Group of the availability of the EMG website and that the site can serve as a tool for not only the EMG, but also the individual organizations. She encouraged the members to explore the possibility of linkages between the EMG website (www.unemg.org) and the websites of their respective organizations.

48. The Executive Secretary of CITES underlined the importance of EMG members remaining in attendance and participating for the duration of the meetings, rather than staying on only for specialized issues of interest.

I. Closure of the meeting

49. The Deputy Executive Director of UNEP thanked the participants for their attendance, work and effort and declared the meeting closed.