United Nations Environment Programme
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PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT • PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ
UNEP

Report of the Environmental Management Group
at its First Meeting
International Environment House, Geneva
22 January 2001

I. Introduction

1. The Environmental Management Group (EMG) held its first meeting at the International Environment House, Geneva, on 22 January 2001. The agenda for the session, as adopted by the Group, is contained in annex I, the list of EMG members and the meeting participants[1] is in annex II. The Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Dr. Klaus Töpfer, chaired the meeting.

II. Background and exchange of views regarding expectations of EMG, its working methods, and its relationship to the Ecosystem Conservation Group (ECG)

A. Background

2. The Group was briefed by the UNEP representative on the background, mandate and objectives of the EMG. The establishment of EMG, as a mechanism for enhancing inter-agency coordination in the field of the environment and human settlements, was placed within the context of the overall reform effort of the Secretary General, and specifically the comprehensive series of reform measures designed to promote coherent and coordinated action within the United Nations (UN) system on environment issues, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 53/242. As stipulated in its terms of reference, which were endorsed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) at its first Regular Session of 2000, the EMG will adopt an issue management approach, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General, *Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform* (A/51/950), and proposed in the report of the UN Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements.

B. Expectations of EMG, and its focus and functions

3. The Group exchanged views on the issues and themes that EMG should focus on, as well as with regard to criteria for the selection of those themes. In the course of the discussion, it was noted that EMG should be perceived as a product of the overall process of reform

[1] Representatives from 18 UN Organizations, including OCHA and DESA, and 8 Secretariats of Environmental Conventions, participated in the meeting.

of the UN. It was stressed that EMG should be utilised to further the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), and that it should consider emerging environmental issues, and that these issues should be derived from discussions in inter-governmental fora. It was noted that EMG should consider issues that are not satisfactorily addressed through other coordination mechanisms, and issues that are of common concern to majority of its members.

4. There was some discussion on whether EMG should consider environment or sustainable development issues, and a number of proposals were made with regard to future topics for the consideration of the Group. It was suggested that the focus should be on a limited number of priority issues, and it was stressed that relevant EMG members should be consulted on proposed issues prior to the formal meetings of the Group.

Decision 1:

5. Based on the discussion, it was decided that the Secretariat should prepare a proposal in which the criteria for the selection of issues and themes are defined. The consultation process for the preparation of the proposal should be done through electronic means of communication. Such criteria would be used for the selection of future themes of EMG.

C. EMG and it relationship to the Ecosystem Conservation Group (ECG)

6. In view of the linkages between EMG and ECG, the Group discussed whether ECG should be integrated into EMG as an issue group or as a subsidiary body. The Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) gave a brief explanation of the activities and objectives of ECG, highlighting the important role of ECG in two main areas: coordination of the biodiversity–related activities of UN agencies and with regard to the negotiation and development of CBD and related intergovernmental processes. The view was expressed that the future functioning of the ECG as a self-standing arrangement was crucial, and that ECG should be utilised and consulted by EMG as deemed necessary. Other members, including UNEP, UNESCO and UNDP, also supported preserving the independent nature of ECG.

Decision 2:

7. It was agreed that ECG should continue its activities as a self–standing arrangement, but that it should inform and consult with EMG on issues of common concern. ECG would also be available to EMG as a group that could be consulted or given an issue-management task to undertake in a time-bound manner.

III. Harmonization of National Reporting

8. Based on the background document provided by the Secretariat (Annex IV), the Group exchanged views on the proposal put forward to develop a harmonized system for reporting under MEAs. In introducing the agenda item, the UNEP representative referred to the concerns of many developing and some developed countries with regard to the burden of fulfilling all the reporting requirements related to the various MEAs. The

proposal was also in line with the decision adopted by the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) at its fifth session, as well as the report of the Secretary-General on streamlining requests for national reporting. The harmonisation of reporting requirements would help focal points in developing countries to prepare their national reports in a more efficient, cost-effective and coordinated manner. Such harmonisation would also facilitate access to and maximize the use of national information by different organizations and regional and global environmental conventions.

9. The UNEP representative also referred to the results of the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) feasibility study, which outlined different possible methods for streamlining national reporting, including modular reporting in the field with regard to the biodiversity-related conventions. In this context, it was suggested that this issue be taken up by the first Issue Management Group (IMG).

10. The representatives of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), while referring to the decisions and priorities of their respective Conferences of the Parties, noted that the issue was not an immediate priority from their perspective. The Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, referring to the political and other specific aspects of the national reports, noted that the Committee on the Review of the Implementation of the CCD is the Convention's mechanism through which the development and implementation of national reports are monitored. It was emphasized that the main concern of developing countries was their lack of capacity to fulfil reporting requirements in time, and thus that a plan for enhancing the capacity of developing countries for effective reporting to MEAs should be considered.

11. However, representatives of other conventions secretariats including, CBD, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), the Basel Convention on Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal (Basel), and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (RAMSAR), considered the issue of harmonization of national reporting as an important and vital prerequisite for the effective implementation of MEAs. It was, *inter alia,* stressed that such harmonization would assist regional conventions in better coordinating regional issues through effective cooperation of national focal points. The Executive Secretary of CBD referred to the harmonization of national reporting as one of the standing issues addressed by the CBD Conference of the Parties. He noted that there were 110 national reports to CBD, and that such an initiative would result in the consolidated implementation of MEAs, would provide a good basis for the Global Biodiversity Outlook, cooperation and coordination among the focal points and a stable basis for the CBD Clearing House Mechanism.

12. Representatives of some organizations including, IAEA, ILO and the IMO, while citing the importance of such an initiative, stressed the need to avoid duplication with other existing reporting mechanisms, such as the London convention on marine pollution, and emphasized the need to concentrate on the harmonization of reporting not covered properly under existing mechanisms. The confidentiality of information and the sense of a lack of ownership were other concerns raised. It was further suggested that there was a need to integrate lessons learned and benefit from common ground with respect to other existing reporting mechanisms.

Decision 3:

13. The group agreed to establish an IMG dealing with the harmonization of environmental reporting, for which UNEP would serve as the task manager. It was decided that the task manager should develop its proposal on this theme, with a focus on biodiversity-related conventions[2], while considering the relevance of biodiversity-related aspects of other MEAs. The IMG should look at this issue comprehensively, taking into account issues such as, the best use of lessons learned, the composition of the group and the number of the countries to be used in a pilot phase, and provide EMG, at its next session, with its recommendations.

IV. Environmental Education and Training

14. The Secretariat presented a background paper on environmental education and training (Annex V), which highlights the need for collaborative approaches between the UN agencies in order to leverage limited resources. Underscoring the importance of such cooperation, the Secretariat referred to the issue as a priority, particularly in terms of building the capacities of developing countries, in order to further assist them in responding to international environmental obligations. Reference was made to the important role played by UNESCO and UNDP as the task managers of Agenda 21 in the field of education and capacity building respectively, and the need for concrete UN policy guidance on environmental education through effective inter-agency cooperation. To that end, it was noted that the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 provides an opportunity for the UN system to sharpen its collective profile in the area of environmental education, capacity building and awareness raising. In this context, the development of a comprehensive overview of UN environmental education programmes was suggested, with a view to reassessing priorities. The establishment of programmes to integrate the decisions of the major UN Conferences into the existing UN frameworks, was also suggested.

15. The Executive Director of UNEP stressed the necessity of a coordinated attempt by the EMG on environmental education and suggested that UNESCO be appointed as the task manager for a second IMG on environmental education and training, and that it prepare a proposal on this issue for the next session of the EMG. He also highlighted the importance of a global campaign of awareness-raising for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.
16. The Representative of UNESCO referring to the environmental education as a vital pre-requisite in attaining sustainable development expressed his agreement on the proposal of the Secretariat for the development of an overview. Other members agreed with the proposal to create an IMG on environmental education. UNFCCC and CBD, supporting the initiative, considered the proposal to be in accordance with the decisions of their respective COPs. The CBD representative referred to the cooperation of UNEP, UNESCO and IUCN on environmental education in the field of biodiversity. The representative of the World Bank referred to its programmes on education and emphasized the need to integrate the activities of all actors, including the private sector.

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[2] CBD, CMS, CITES, Ramsar, World Heritage Conventions, MAP

Decision 4:

17. It was agreed that UNESCO serve as task manager, and together with other interested members of EMG, convene, within a month, a meeting at UNESCO's Headquarters with a view to preparing the IMG's terms of reference, taking into account the recommendations made both in the meeting and in the background document. The IMG should devise a time-bound strategy. The proposed terms of reference for the IMG should be presented to the next meeting of EMG.

V. Waste minimisation and handling

18. The secretariat introduced the item on waste management and handling, presenting the background paper that had been prepared. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of UNIDO, while referring to the organization's experience in the field of waste management, particularly at the national and regional level (for example in China), emphasized on the importance of developing a global policy on the handling of the waste to combat the contamination of the environment. The problem of waste management in urban areas and in small island developing states (SIDS) was particularly stressed. It was thus suggested that the theme of waste management, be taken up by a future IMG, perhaps linked to the issue of education and awareness raising.

19. Members of EMG, while recognising the importance of addressing waste management as a priority issue, underscored the fact that the criteria for the selection of issues to be addressed by EMG, should first be developed, in order to ensure that there is no duplication with other inter-agency mechanisms.

Decision 5

20. It was decided that UNIDO would provide written comments and suggestions to develop the proposal for EMG to address this topic, focusing on education, training and awareness raising issues related to waste management, for the further consideration of the Group.

VI. Enforcement and compliance, including liability

21. The secretariat introduced the item on enforcement and compliance, including liability in environmental law, presenting the background paper that had been prepared. In the ensuing discussion, it was suggested that UNEP develop this idea further, in more narrow and concrete terms.

VII. The future work of the EMG

22. The Group discussed modalities for future discussions of EMG. In this respect it was agreed that while issues suggested, both in the background documents and at the meeting itself, including, compliance and enforcement, waste management, climate change and the coral reefs, and capacity building, are of importance for inter-agency cooperation, in future, EMG when considering issues should take into account the following:

(i) Issues should be prioritised, based on the criteria, which the Group should develop as soon as possible, through electronic means of communications. These criteria should be presented to the next meeting of EMG;

(ii) EMG should discuss issues to which the Group could contribute an added value;

(iii) Issues should be of a crosscutting nature, so as to integrate and utilise the potential of all members;

(iv) Emerging environmental issues, which concern governments and the public (to be reached through the media), should be considered by the Group as a priority, and the results should be made available to governments and civil society;

(v) The Group should take into account lessons learned to avoid duplication in the consideration and development of specific issues.

(vi) The focus should be on issues, which can be addressed, in a defined time frame.

Decision 6

23. It was suggested and agreed that each member of EMG put forward two topics, which they consider to be priorities that could be addressed by EMG, in order for the future work programme of the Group to be developed, based on consultations with all its members.

VIII. Next meeting of the EMG and closure of the meeting

24. The next meeting of EMG will be held on 15 June 2001 in Geneva, to consider the results of the work of the two IMGs, and to adopt the proposed criteria for the selection of future issues and themes. It was requested that, for the time being, all correspondences to the Secretariat of EMG should be sent to the office of UNEP's Executive Director. The members thanked the Executive Director of UNEP for preparation of the substantive documentation and for the organization of the meeting.