



# GMGSF Bulletin

A Briefing Note of the Fifteenth session of the  
Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF-15)  
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## BRIEFING NOTE OF THE FIFTEENTH GLOBAL MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS FORUM (GMGSF-15) 21-22 JUNE 2014

The fifteenth session of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF-15) was held from 21-22 June 2014, at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The Forum took place ahead of the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the UNEP (UNEA) and was self-organized by all nine Major Groups and stakeholders (MGs) through the Major Groups Facilitating Committee (MGCF). More than 120 participants representing all MGs and regions participated in the discussions.

GMGSF-15 aimed to facilitate the preparations of Major Groups and stakeholders accredited to UNEP for the first UNEA, allowing them to discuss the main themes and to prepare their input. During the closing session on 22 June, GMGSF-15 participants adopted a common statement to forward to the UNEA.

This briefing note summarizes the discussions at the forum.

### Opening Session

On Saturday morning, Marcos Orellana, co-Chair of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee and representative of the NGO MG, opened GMGSF-15, welcoming participants and emphasizing that the objective of the GMGSF is to strengthen civil society participation in UNEP. Orellana explained that major groups and regional representatives would convene in thematic clusters to address decisions to be taken by UNEA, and discuss input to the thematic discussions during the UNEA high-level segment, and said that UNEA represents a landmark moment 'when the environment ceases to be the backwater of international politics.'

Ibrahim Thiaw, UN Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Director of UNEP, underscored that participants in the meeting are part of history, explaining that UNEA differs from the Governing Council in that it brings together 'governments, stakeholders and all other actors' to look after the world's environmental issues, not just a specific programme of work. Thiaw noted ongoing work on the stakeholders' policy, expressing hope that this work would be completed by the close of UNEA, and highlighted the release of UNEP's first policy on access to information. Underscoring the burden of environmental degradation on humanity, Thiaw emphasized the need to link environmental issues to sustainable development.



View of the opening session of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF-15)

### UNEA: Significance, Structure and Expected Outcomes

This session was facilitated by Kehkashan Basu and Nhattan Nguyen, Children and Youth MG on Saturday morning.

Jiří Hlaváček, Secretary of the Governing Bodies, UNEP, charted the process so far to strengthen UNEP as the leading global environmental authority. He highlighted UNEP Decision GC.27/2 that adopted a two-day high-level segment as an integral part of the governing body of the UNEP, with the mandate to take strategic decisions and provide political guidance. Outlining the provisional agenda of the first UNEA, he noted member states will discuss draft decisions on: the science-policy interface; chemicals and waste; ecosystem-based adaptation; promoting air quality through UNEP; marine plastic debris and microplastics; Global Environmental Monitoring System Water (GEMS/Water); illegal trade in wildlife;

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amendments to the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility; trust funds and earmarked contributions; and stakeholder engagement.

Alexander Juras, Chief, UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch, said Major Groups and stakeholders (MGs) will be able to contribute to UNEA plenary sessions and working group meetings. With regard to the status of the Stakeholder Engagement Policy and Rule 69 of UNEA's Rules of Procedure, he said that since no agreement on a draft text was reached during the Open Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR) meeting in March 2014, the issue would be taken up by UNEA's Working Group on Rules of Procedure. Among accomplishments so far, he highlighted provisions in the draft policy for, *inter alia*: participation of MGs in all meetings of UNEA and its subsidiary bodies; submission of oral and written interventions from MGs during such meetings; proposal of UNEA agenda items by MGs through the UNEP Secretariat; recognition of national MGs organizations with UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) accreditation, and; recognition of the right of MGs to self-organize their representation to UNEP. Among unresolved issues, Juras highlighted: the accreditation criteria and process; access to documents for accredited stakeholders beyond what is described in UNEP's access-to-information policy; and informal meetings of the UNEA/OECPR bureaus with MGS representatives.

In response to queries from participants, Hlaváček clarified that ministers and heads of delegation will adopt decisions during the final plenary session on Friday afternoon. Responding to calls for special recognition of environmental NGOs in the draft stakeholder policy, Juras clarified that environmental NGOs are not designated as a tenth major group, and said that drafting of decisions will be done by governments.

## UNEA: Common Statement - Introduction & Process



Calvin James, Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management and Global Coordinator for Farmers, MGFC

This session was facilitated by Norine Kennedy, Business and Industry MG.

Calvin James, Farmers MG, introduced the process for developing and agreeing on a common GMGSF statement, noting that this is one of many advocacy tools that MGs can use to represent their constituencies. James noted that an open group could be chaotic, and participants agreed that a small group would draft the statement, taking into consideration any textual or oral

contributions from other participants. Delegates called for a draft text to be circulated to all GMGSF participants on Saturday evening for their input.

## UNEA: Thematic Clusters - Definition, Facilitators And Breakout

This session on Saturday afternoon was facilitated by Marcos Orellana, co-Chair, Major Groups Facilitating Committee and NGO MG.



Marcos Orellana, Co-Chair, MGFC

Introducing the session, Orellana noted the purpose is to enable MGs to come together in a crosscutting way. He added that the discussions were not expected to develop an agreed statement but would instead seek to reflect different viewpoints and hence strengthen the diversity of voices in the UNEA process. Kennedy clarified that the thematic cluster approach had worked well at the OECPR as a forum for keeping abreast of key emerging issues.

Answering a question on whether there is an official mechanism for providing feedback from MGs, Juras noted the outcomes can be brought to UNEA's attention in various ways, including: interventions during plenary sessions of the Committee of the Whole; written statements submitted via the Secretariat and uploaded to the online portal; or through symposia and other side events, including the Ministerial Dialogues.

Orellana proposed nine topics for the breakout sessions, saying they are closely aligned to issues that will be taken up in thematic discussions during the UNEA high-level segments or some of the draft UNEA decisions. After some discussion, delegates agreed to convene in nine thematic clusters during the two days to consider GMGSF input on: environmental rule of law; green economy/financing for environment; illegal trade in timber and wildlife; the post-2015 sustainable development goals (SDGs), including sustainable consumption and production; UNEA rules of procedure and stakeholder engagement policy; science-policy interface; chemicals and waste, including marine plastic debris and microplastics; promoting air quality through UNEP; and ecosystem-based adaptation.

## Open Dialogue with Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UNEP

This session on Saturday afternoon was facilitated by Marta Subirà, Representatives of Local Authorities MG.



UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner

### WELCOME REMARKS BY ACHIM STEINER:

In his welcome remarks, Steiner said that despite some setbacks, notably in the climate change negotiations, there is broad consensus today that environmental protection requires addressing the relationship between humanity and nature. In this regard, he

welcomed the return of the principle of universality in the SDG process, but noted that the greatest challenge facing environmental governance today is helping societies to make informed decisions that do not dichotomize people and nature, or the north and south. Discussing the UNEA agenda, Steiner said the focus on illegal trade in wildlife matters because, despite an abundance of national and international instruments, trade in endangered species has exploded in recent years. He said that UNEP's latest report on this topic which will be

launched during UNEA, highlights the extent of an unfolding “environmental, economic and governance disaster,” and added that the illegal economy around wildlife could be worth as much as US\$200 billion and is also driving conflict.

**OPEN DIALOGUE:** During the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted the challenge of conveying the message that poverty cannot be resolved without addressing environmental issues; said UNEP should return to its environmental roots; queried whether UNEA will recognize the planetary boundaries concept; and asked about the future role of MGs in UNEP.

Underscoring that the questions posed are part of very substantive conversations, Steiner emphasized that biodiversity is not a “complementary issue,” but the foundation of future development. He urged participants not to “abandon the scientific narrative” because knowledge strengthens rationales for action. He further encouraged participants to “bring the power of facts, figures and science” to discussions of environment and the SDGs.

During a second round of discussions, participants highlighted a number of practical challenges facing UNEA including how to, *inter alia*: optimize coordination between UNEP and other multilateral environmental agreements and the SDGs process; ensure that a stronger UNEP regional presence delivers improved means of implementation and practical solutions on the ground; resolve outstanding issues on MGs access, including other stakeholders that are not represented by the nine recognized MGs; and facilitate a meaningful dialogue on the concept of planetary boundaries. One speaker expressed concern about the apparent ‘backtracking’ of member states’ commitment to work with non-state actors, noting that this trend is also being observed in the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) process.

Responding to these comments, Steiner encouraged MGs to address the UNEA thematic agenda in their discussions, noting they have a lot of ideas to offer. He agreed that the concept of planetary boundaries offers a useful conceptual framework for uniting the broad body of scientific knowledge, as well as for framing the required policy responses. However, he cautioned that, just like the green economy, the concept could “outlive its usefulness” if, despite being based in sound science, it “taps into latent distrust” about what its adoption means in practice. He encouraged MGs to “pursue the discussion, try to understand what issues are driving the resistance and address them.”

On pathways to resolve issues around stakeholder engagement, Steiner highlighted two possible solutions: continuing UNEP’s tradition of working through partners in

stakeholder communities; and carefully weighing any calls to expand UNEP’s secretariats, both at global and regional level. On the latter, he noted that UNEP’s strength lies in its capacity to influence environmental dialogue processes and implementation, leaving room for other actors to take the lead in addressing environmental challenges. In this regard, he emphasized that the current process of setting up sub-regional offices will follow the same model of working through partnerships. With regard to concern about regression in member states’ treatment of non-state actors, Steiner advised MGs to use the ‘intent’ of the Rio+20 outcome as a standard to ensure that member states do not fall back on their commitments.

In a follow up question and answer round, a participant highlighted the need for a robust enforcement system, with courts being used only as a last resort, since by the time a judgment is rendered environmental damage is often irreversible. One speaker lauded the inclusion of advocates and jurists in the symposium on rule of environmental law, but expressed disappointment with, and called for reconsideration of, the policy on access to information, saying it was “way behind.”

Noting the “avalanche” of environmental cases going to courts, Steiner said the judiciary must be empowered to enforce laws, and highlighted the importance of being able to hold governments accountable in national judicial systems for their international commitments. On the access to information policy, Steiner said the approach is deliberately conservative and incremental, and should be viewed as a one-year pilot that will evolve according to input received.

Responding to a question about the absence of oil and gas on the UNEA agenda, Steiner said UNEP is committed to addressing gas flaring, describing it as a practice that “doesn’t belong in the 21st-century fossil fuel industry.” Another speaker asked how UNEP might address the lack of capacity in many countries to implement green economy policies. Noting that finance is critical for the SDGs and the green economy, Steiner said UNEP is cooperating with other international bodies “to create a pool of resources” that will facilitate capacity building, and requested participants’ views on UNEP’s comparative advantages.

During a final round of discussions touching on next steps in the UNEA process, among other institutional issues, a participant queried the relationship between UNEA-2 and Habitat-3, which will coincide. Another participant commented that effective participation of stakeholders would be contingent



UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner giving his welcome remarks during the open-dialogue session

upon UNEP's acknowledgement of necessary resources, including giving enough notice for meetings to allow stakeholders to consult with constituencies.

In his response, Steiner noted that UNEP and Habitat have signed a partnership agreement to jumpstart cooperation. He underscored that UNEA is the successful outcome of "a very long battle" to upgrade UNEP and establish universal membership, and said his greatest fear is that participants will leave the meeting feeling nothing has changed. Acknowledging that governments "can get nervous" and that an element of caution may factor into the meeting, Steiner also underscored that ministers often use international standards as a point of reference in pushing for national legislation.

During concluding remarks, Steiner highlighted two innovations: first, 'UNEA Unplugged,' a townhall debate to be held on Tuesday 24 June that will give all participants the chance to articulate their views, and; second, 'UNEP Live,' a database that will facilitate global, real-time access to environmental information, data and technology. Steiner said UNEP Live will take time to develop and will require input from stakeholders to be successful. Finally, Steiner thanked the participants and encouraged people to use their time at UNEA to "sow the seeds of partnerships."

## Dialogue Session on UNEA High-Level Segment Themes

This session took place on Sunday morning and was facilitated by Norine Kennedy, co-Chair, Major Groups Facilitating Committee, and Business and Industry MG. Mohamed Abdel Raouf, representing the Scientific and Technological Community MG, introduced the speakers.

**ENVIRONMENTAL RULE OF LAW:** Elizabeth Mrema, UNEP, emphasized that this is not an isolated issue that should concern only lawyers; rather, it is relevant to all of the issues UNEA will address. She explained that UNEA provides a global platform and unique opportunity for 'environmental lawmakers, implementers and enforcers' to identify ways to strengthen environmental rule of law. Noting that efforts to combat the surging illegal trade in wildlife demonstrate the importance of strengthening rule of environmental law, Mrema said that effective implementation of law is essential for strong institutions, human rights and accountability in decision-making. She further emphasized that a shift to a green economy will not succeed in the absence of adequate legislation interpreting both human rights and environmental protection.



Norine Kennedy, Co-Chair, MGFC



Elizabeth Mrema, UNEP

Daniel Magraw, CIEL, commented on Mrema's remarks, underscoring the need to strengthen mechanisms and opportunities for public participation and transparency, and to create mechanisms for enforcing international human rights. Magraw also explained that rule of law has been interpreted differently throughout history, and reiterated Mrema's call for law that is adequate and implementable.

**SDGs AND POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA:** Maryam Niamir-Fuller, UNEP, said that the Open Working Group (OWG) zero draft provides a good basis for further negotiations as it takes on the "unfinished MDG agenda," proposes additional social and economic priorities, and addresses key environmental issues, albeit with some gaps in the area of chemicals and waste, marine debris and drylands.



Maryam Niamir-Fuller, UNEP

Referring to an infographic that shows most SDGs focus on only one of the three pillars of sustainable development, Niamir-Fuller said this 'silo effect' could be addressed by defining a few "overarching or aspirational" goals around which the other goals and targets can be clustered. She said the UNEA high-level debate on this theme could be structured around three such aspirational goals, namely:

- "leave no one behind": integrating discussions on poverty and sustainable rural economies, and poverty as a multi-dimensional issue incorporating universal coverage of sustainably-derived water and energy;
- "living within a safe operating space": integrating discussions on employment and SCP, and sustainable consumption;
- "building assets for the future": integrating issues around healthy and clean environments, restoration of natural assets, and developing long-lasting, low-carbon, resilient infrastructure, buildings and products.

Among contentious issues in the zero draft, she mentioned the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, highlighting questions around whether there should be differentiation "among or within targets" and calls for "preferential differentiation" for some groups of countries. She identified other unresolved issues as the debates around means of implementation and intergenerational equity.

In her response, Sascha Gabizon, Women in Europe for a Common Future, expressed agreement with an approach that merges the development and environment strands of the post-2015 debate, and noted the zero draft captures the intent of the Rio+20 outcome for a unified process. She noted that Major Groups favor an open and transparent negotiation process modeled on the OWG and opposed calls from some parties for a maximum of 10 "tweetable goals" as this will not sufficiently reflect the complexity of sustainable development challenges. On means of implementation, she supported G77 proposals for goal-related targets and urged countries currently opposed to this approach to show greater flexibility to avoid "torpedoing the entire process."

**ILLEGAL TRADE IN WILDLIFE AND TIMBER:** Neville Ash, UNEP, noted that illegal trade in wildlife and timber is an all-encompassing term that includes mammals, fisheries, plants on land, timber products, charcoal, and other animal and plant products. Ash emphasized the rapid

escalation of illegal wildlife trade, noted growing recognition that this issue affects people and economies as well as the environment, and highlighted the link between illegal supply chains and threat finance. Underscoring that demand is driving trade, Ash called for improved collaboration to address the multidimensional nature of the problem.

In her response, Susan Brown, WWF International, highlighted the interlinkages among the high level themes, and encouraged participants to ask ministers to take tangible action such as implementing commitments made by their governments, supporting the international consortium on crime, and engaging in Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Brown raised the possibilities of creating a UN protocol on wildlife crime and establishing a special representative for the Secretary General with responsibility for wildlife crime. Brown also underscored the need for well-resourced judiciaries and for national legislation that will make wildlife crime a serious offense.



Susan Brown, WWF International

**FINANCING A GREEN ECONOMY:** Peter Cruickshank, UNEP, provided an overview of the UNEA symposium on 25 June, which will explore how the global finance system can contribute to the green economy and what makes the green economy work for the financial systems. He noted that the policy debate has shifted from theoretical concepts to the practical challenges of supporting the transition to greener economies. In this regard, he said the symposium will examine how key drivers and governance of financial markets can be mobilized to deliver long-term sustainable prosperity.



Brian Flannery, Business Green Economies Dialogue Initiatives

Responding to the presentation, Brian Flannery, Business Green Economies Dialogue Initiative, highlighted a number of issues from the perspective of business and industry

During discussions participants highlighted the need for, *inter alia*: a strong and practical message to ministers; more explicit language expressing MGs' concerns about the draft UNEP Stakeholder Engagement Policy; and reference to MGs' views on SDGs and the post-2015 process. Several speakers noted the difficulty of reflecting the diversity of views in a short statement and stressed the need for each MG to make full use of opportunities during UNEA to highlight thematic issues.

In the afternoon, James presented a final draft text, which participants adopted without further discussion.

In the statement, the GMGSF-15, *inter alia*: acknowledges the historic significance of UNEA; urges UNEA to deliver a "bold, forward-looking and meaningful outcome" that can be implemented in a timely and effective way; welcomes UNEA's agenda; underscores the centrality of a rights-based, as well as a science-based, approach to UNEA's work; notes the need for special attention to indigenous peoples and communities in vulnerable situations; calls on ministers and delegates to commit to full implementation of UNEA's outcomes; expresses concern about "the serious inadequacies" in UNEP's new access to information policy; and expects UNEA to adopt rules of procedure that will enable meaningful and effective civil society engagement.

## Cluster Facilitators Report to the Plenary and Discussion

Alice Odingo, Women MG, introduced the session and invited representatives of thematic clusters to present their final outcomes.

**SDGS & POST 2015 (INCLUDING SCP):** Anabella Rosenberg, International Trade

Union Confederation, presented the group's statement outlining nine "demands," including that, *inter alia*: the environment must be factored into all SDGs, including through the underpinning targets and indicators; natural resources and diversity are the foundation for societies and economies, and there is opportunity for economic and social progress in responsible environmental stewardship; a single environmental goal should be avoided; universality is crucial; strong review mechanisms and accountability are key; potential conflict could emerge from support for "growth," which is still advocated in the zero draft of the OWG. Rosenberg also cited the need for: an intellectual framework based on the concept of planetary boundaries; a human-rights based approach; decoupling natural resource use from economic well-being; and for SDGs to promote a transformative agenda. The

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