

## **Stakeholders Worldwide Prepare for UNEA-2**

### **A Comparative Analysis of Stakeholder Engagement Sessions in Three Global Capitals**

#### **Introduction**

Stakeholder Forum (SF) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) held three meetings in the month of April 2016 in Geneva, New York and London to help stakeholders prepare for the second United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2), which will take place in Nairobi at the end of May 2016. SF and UNEP delivered the meetings with the help of the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service in Geneva, CIVICUS in New York and the network of UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development in London.

The meetings aimed to inform Major Groups and stakeholders with and without knowledge of UNEP and UNEA-2 about the importance of the meeting, the issues to be discussed, and the available methods of participation for civil society.

Each meeting was based on a similar structure which included presentations by experts on the main topics to arise at UNEA-2: the overarching theme 'Delivering the Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Development Agenda', the topic of the Ministerial Policy-Review 'Healthy People, Healthy Environment', the subject of the multi-stakeholder dialogue 'Partnerships to Deliver Sustainable Development' and the two symposia 'Environment and Displacement' and 'Mobilising Resources for Sustainable Development'. There was also an item on stakeholder engagement to explain the principal means for involvement in the meeting.

Despite having a similar basic structure, the events naturally differed with regards to organisers, speakers present, particular topics discussed and audience members and numbers (see table below).

Whilst the events amounted to valuable instances of stakeholder engagement and input in locations outside Nairobi, we do not claim the report to be fully reflective of the participants' views, nor the events to be comprehensive in international non-governmental engagement, given the nature of their occurrence in the Global North. We would hope to extend our reach to the Global South given the possibility in a future project.

The sections that follow summarise the speaker and stakeholder input on each topic from each meeting, and offer analysis based on these discussions.



## UNEP Representative



Jan Dusik, the Director of UNEP Regional Office for Europe, introduced both the Geneva and London sessions, whilst Elliot Harris, UN Assistant Secretary General and Director of the UNEP New York office, initiated at the New York event. In all three cases, a comprehensive overview of the events taking place during UNEA-2, opportunities for Major Groups and stakeholder engagement, and expected outcomes, were provided. Jan Dusik highlighted the timeliness of this year's UNEA, occurring in the midst of much positive international energy towards the sustainable development agenda, with the COP21 Paris Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Addis Ababa Action Agenda having recently been adopted. Mr Harris underlined the importance of the new Sustainable Innovation Expo at UNEA-2 which will showcase private sector efforts in coming up with innovative methods to solve environmental problems.

Participants in all three locations were disappointed about the clash of dates between UNEA and the WHA, the World Health Assembly, given that the UNEA ministerial discussion was intended to provide an opportunity to unite the health and environment communities around a common agenda through the theme of its ministerial discussion, Healthy People, Healthy Environment. Mr Harris responded to these concerns by explaining that the report will be circulated to health and environment ministers at the same time at both Assemblies, so the discussion of the same issue simultaneously by participating experts should help to build momentum amongst both policy communities.

New York participants posed further questions about UNEP and the HLPF's (High Level Political Forum) structure to Mr Harris: how does UNEA feed into the HLPF? Several different processes are intended to feed into the HLPF but are not linked with each other - how can this produce a coherent integrated outcome?

Further statements from the Geneva audience directed to Jan Dusik included an underlining of the importance of a ministerial declaration for SDG delivery which could be used as a reference point for all sectors to ensure the implementation of the environmental dimension; a request for more ministerial roundtables at UNEA to increase ministerial participation; and a demand for the discussions at UNEA to be better linked with the proposed resolutions.

## Delivering on the Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Development Agenda



The overarching theme of UNEA-2 was discussed both in Geneva and London, by Mark Halle, European Representative of IISD and Trevor Hutchings, Head of UK and EU advocacy at WWF, respectively.

Both highlighted very similar points: they flagged the importance of 2015 as a significant watershed year for sustainable development, as Jan Dusik also mentioned, and hailed the indivisibility and integration of the Sustainable Development Agenda.

For implementation to occur, they affirmed the need for the full participation of all major group members and stakeholders, that partnerships were crucial for delivery, and Mr Halle added that these could be fostered using UNEP as a forum. Both speakers set out the necessity to align the interests of the private sector with the sustainable development agenda given the agenda's estimated costs of trillions of dollars. Mr Halle additionally stated the importance of UNEP's role in tracking, assessing and ensuring accountability with regards to the implementation of the environmental dimension of the SDGs.

As an example of how to implement the SDGs into a national plan, Mr Hutchings cited the UK example of the Welsh Future Generations Act, which transposed the agenda into national legislation. He further claimed that a huge shift was necessary in leadership and in day to day working methods in order to bring about 'business unusual', which is itself necessary to achieve sustainable development.

## Partnerships to jointly deliver on the environmental dimension of Agenda 2030

Whilst our speakers agreed on the challenges and opportunities for implementing the environmental dimension of the Agenda 2030, a detailed discussion of one of the methods of implementation, building partnerships, brought out many conflicting arguments. The wide variety of experiences with partnerships stemmed from the differing perspectives of our speakers: from the Major Groups, a UN agency, business and the third sector. The speakers commented on their experience of the participation of the Major Groups, NGOs and the private sector in partnerships.



Norine Kennedy, Co-organising Partner for Business and Industry Major Group, shared her positive experience of partnerships formed under the auspices of UNEP in the Major Groups with the New York participants. She noted the excellent cooperative working spirit amongst Major Groups and praised UNEP for consistently fostering partnerships between Major Groups and stakeholders, but noted the lack of institutional infrastructure to build partnerships in the UN, despite the positive support the idea wins from civil society. Perhaps there could be a Partnerships and Environment thematic team at future UNEAs to ensure this happens, she proposed.

Public-private partnerships were an important issue in both cities. In London, Steve Kenzie of UN Global Compact claimed that businesses had great difficulties in building partnerships with the UN given its somewhat closed culture. In a report *The United Nations and the Private Sector: Working Together for Development*, it was found that 80% of UN agencies had received funding from the private sector, whilst only 30% of private sector engagement by UN agencies involved knowledge sharing. Mr Kenzie said that businesses typically seek balanced partnerships with the UN, which, he claimed, require equity, transparency, and mutual benefit, if they are to be successful. On the role of business in partnerships, Ms Kennedy also argued that business should not be called upon to merely support projects

financially but that it is necessary to bring all parties to the table to deliver effective projects. A New York participant reminded the floor of the importance of the private sector's contribution towards soft technology options in partnerships, which are important for implementing policy.

Steve Waygood, Chief Responsible Investment Officer at Aviva Investors, disagreed with Mr Kenzie, however, citing his multiple experiences of working with UNEP on policy.

Speakers encouraged the participation of NGOs in partnerships in London and New York. The New York audience for example called for other configurations of collaboration amongst sectors since they always seemed to necessarily include the private sector. Jan-Gustav Strandenaes supported this argument and went further to argue that civil society was responsible for creating its own partnerships. Ms Kennedy added that partnerships can be helpful for mainstreaming the role of stakeholders who have an important job to deliver the joint projects.



In London, Sue Riddlestone, Chief Executive of Bioregional, shared her productive experience working with UNEP as the NGO focal point for SDG 12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP), thanks to the wealth of knowledge her organisation had gathered in this area, including building successful partnerships to achieve SCP. Ms Riddlestone proposed ways that the UN could better facilitate partnerships, including:

- Scaling up existing initiatives;
- Making it clear how people can get involved;
- Creating a UN logo showing an organisation's support for the SDGs;
- Using advertising agencies working pro bono to publicise UNEP's work;
- Allowing stakeholders to take governments to account through National Action Plans.

Reflecting on her run of extremely successful partnerships between third, private and public sectors, she gathered together some guidelines for best practice. These include:

- The objective must be simple;
- All partners must understand the objective;
- There must be a real reason for all parties to be involved;
- It must be easy for partners to become involved;
- The project must work financially in order to be sustainable;
- An action plan should be co-created with all stakeholders, including training, reporting and knowledge sharing.

She suggested that this is an ideal time to form partnerships with other parties in order to deliver on the sustainable development agenda.



In summary, there is a large appetite for partnerships from all sectors but there is a lack of infrastructure on the part of the UN to foster these and facilitate delivery. Business should not just be called upon to provide the funds, but also to offer their vast set of softer skills, knowledge and experience in equal partnerships.



## Mobilising Resources for Sustainable Investments

The Geneva meeting and one speaker from the London panel on partnerships for sustainable development focussed on the topic of this year's symposium, Mobilising Resources for Sustainable Investments.

In Geneva, speakers responded to Iain Henderson's (G20 Green Finance Study Group Project Manager at UNEP Inquiry) overview of the findings of the UNEP Inquiry on the Design of Sustainable Finance Systems which will be presented at the symposium at UNEA-2. The findings included the prediction that financial corporate markets can be aligned with sustainable development and that a quiet revolution is already under way to do so through government policy.

The other panellists and moderator Hamish Jenkins, Head of the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service in Geneva, were sceptical of the extent of this quiet revolution and urged that our entire financial system needed a dramatic overhaul in order to align itself with sustainable development. Mr Jenkins called for the inclusive provision of long-term affordable credit, for raising public revenue for long-term public investments, and warned against the international investment agreements giving rise to investor-state dispute settlements, which could compromise the progress of sustainable development.

Stephanie Blankenburg, of Head of UNCTAD's Debt and Development Finance Branch, also found fault with the Inquiry for conveying "too much confidence, too little criticism". She agreed that systemic problems characterise the core features of the international finance system, including volatile private capital funds and the system's automatic tendency towards regular financial crisis. She also criticised the procyclical nature of the economy and the private sector's inability to assign liability in obstructing the achievement of a sustainable financial system.

Katharina Serafimova, Head of Financial Sector Engagement, WWF International, supported the concerns about the UNEP report: the quiet revolution described in the inquiry was "a bit too quiet". She remarked that a much greater shift was needed beyond the recommendations made in the report, in order to reach the less than 2 degrees target in the Paris agreement.



Meanwhile in London, Steve Waygood from Aviva Investors focussed on the contribution of large investors' portfolio flows in preventing the advancement of sustainable development. He praised the UNEP report as the first occasion he had seen a sophisticated inquiry on the topic of a sustainable financial system. However he proposed that the UN should have a dedicated agency for capital markets, or commission on sustainable finance, to continue the inquiry's work.

Mr Waygood announced that the sustainable development goals are market failures as they do not take the externality of planetary boundaries onto a company's cash flow: standards and incentives should be provided to ensure externalities become internalities. He suggested individuals take on responsibility themselves, including asking financial advisors to to invest your private wealth in ethical funds, or voting for green leaders at board meetings of companies in which you have shares.

Mr Waygood met with an animated audience following his presentation, with questions including: why is there no fossil free investment fund in the UK? How can we lobby to get university economics and business degrees to encompass sustainable finance? How can businesses be open about what kind of market mechanisms are required to encourage sustainable development? The Addis Ababa Action Agenda includes helpful guidance on sustainable financing, how can we translate these general statements into action?



Mr Waygood's answers to each question encouraged proactive stakeholder engagement: vote against funds with fossil fuel investments or file a resolution; students should demand what they want in their curricula, and league tables should include sustainability studies as part of their ranking criteria; businesses should join advocacy partnerships such as the Sustainable Markets Network to enable open conversations; organisations need to hold businesses to account through an SDG league table which is free for all to access.

This topic seemed to present the largest challenges of all to sustainable development, and was of correspondingly high interest to the audiences. Mr Waygood's practical recommendations were warmly welcomed in London, where this issue could be seen as most relevant to stakeholders.





## Healthy People, Healthy Planet

Speakers from all three events dealt with the topic of this year's Ministerial Policy-Review Session. The discussions ranged from a presentation of the UNEP report with practical policy recommendations to a survey of ethical philosophy relating to the environment and a call for a paradigmatic shift in discussing health.

In London, Anthony Kessel, Director of International Public Health at Public Health England, opened the panel with a review of the philosophical background of this topic. Moral philosophy from Descartes through to Kant and John Stuart-Mill treated the environment as having an instrumental value to individuals rather than an inherent value for itself. Now that human life and the natural environment are understood to interact together in a single global ecosystem it is important that we all recognise the need to value and protect the environment as an integral part of our moral duty to one another, he argued; damaging the environment also damages the health and well-being of others.



In New York, Dr. Natalie Jeremijenko, Environmental Health Clinic and Associate Professor in Art of New York University, seemed to support Kessel's argument with a call for an entire paradigm shift in the field of health and the environment. A change from rhetoric around reducing negative harm to the environment, like degrading air quality, to a rhetoric of 'mutualism' (benefitting from association rather than competition) is required. She advocates small-scale paradigm shifts towards mutualism, like Pier2Pier or Farmacy, rather than relying solely on punitive government measures against harmful activities like pollution or overfishing. She suggested that health could be used as a proxy for common good, since no one is anti-health.

In Geneva and London, experts in the field offered practical policy suggestions referring to recent reports they had worked on to target linked health and environment problems.

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