



UNEP OECPR HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 25 MARCH 2014

On Tuesday morning delegates convened in plenary to consider stakeholder engagement, the science-policy interface (SPI), contributions by regional environment ministerial forums and the access-to-information policy. In the afternoon delegates addressed: the process to prepare a UN system-wide strategy on the environment; consolidation of UNEP headquarters functions in Nairobi; international water quality guidelines for ecosystems; and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). A working contact group on budget and POW also convened in the afternoon.

CONSIDERATION OF POLICY MATTERS

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: CPR Vice-Chair Julia Pataki chaired the morning discussion. The Secretariat introduced the report of the Executive Director on stakeholder engagement at UNEP (UNEP/EA.1/2) and the annexed draft policy.

Pataki outlined the main issues for consideration: defining stakeholder categories; process for accrediting stakeholders; roles of CPR and UNEA in accreditation; accredited stakeholders' access to information; and accredited stakeholders' access to Bureau meetings.

The US called for clear, pragmatic and understandable accreditation processes. NORWAY, supported by BRAZIL, recommended avoiding "cumbersome and politicized" procedures. CHINA, supported by SENEGAL and IRAN, urged addressing rules of procedure for UNEA before the draft policy. ARGENTINA, supported by EGYPT, COLOMBIA, BOLIVIA, the EU and SWITZERLAND, preferred discussing the draft policy first. SWITZERLAND recommended moving forward based on the existing GC process, saying stakeholder participation is crucial at the first and subsequent meetings of UNEA.

NGOs, for MAJOR GROUPS and regional representatives, recommended developing a policy in line with UN General Assembly resolution 67/290 establishing the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Greece, for the EU, emphasized the principle of non-regression, supported by NORWAY. She recommended that the Secretariat handle accreditation. EGYPT, supported by BOLIVIA, called for member states to engage in accrediting stakeholders. JORDAN, with BOLIVIA, called for ensuring a regional balance of stakeholders.

SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACE: Jacqueline McGlade, Chief Scientist, UNEP, presented document UNEP/EA.1/3/Add.1, which summarizes ongoing as well as proposed actions to help UNEP in strengthening the SPI. She pointed out that the proposals are closely linked to draft decisions on state of the environment (UNEP/EA.1/4) and the UNEP-Live platform

(UNEP/EA.1/4/Add.1). Noting that "a week is a long time in science," McGlade stressed the need to fill data gaps, especially with regard to understanding the complexity of actions and their implications and outcomes, and creating a "common language" to facilitate benchmarking and implementation.

NORWAY called for clustering the three related texts, as well as elements of the IPBES draft decision into one streamlined text. BRAZIL, the EU, NEW ZEALAND, the US, MEXICO and SWITZERLAND supported Norway's proposal.

ARGENTINA emphasized reflecting agreed Rio+20 language, calling for the SPI to be based on inclusive and transparent scientific assessments. BRAZIL opposed referring to "planetary boundaries," and called for more precise language in operative paragraphs.

JAPAN asked for clarification on the budgetary implications of proposed interventions, such as the centers of excellence, and avoiding duplication of regional and global actions. The EU called for focusing on strategic actions and avoiding repetition of general principles already agreed to in other processes.

The US called for integration of the SPI with UNEP's role in developing assessment capacity at national and regional levels. SWITZERLAND called for the GEO 6 process to support the proposed global outlook report on sustainable development.

Responding to the issues raised, UNEP Deputy Executive Director Ibrahim Thiaw expressed UNEP's willingness to streamline the related decision texts. Clarifying the reference to centers of excellence, he explained that this refers to existing institutions and will help leverage the effectiveness of UNEP's 1400 partnerships. McGlade emphasized that the challenge is ensuring global data is scalable to the local level, and stressed that capacity building should address scientific as well as policy expertise.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY THE REGIONAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUMS:

Munyaradzi Chenje, UNEP, provided an overview of UNEP's engagement with regional ministerial forums (UNEP/EA.1/2/Add.2), highlighting UNEP's technical support. MEXICO presented on the Latin American and Caribbean Ministerial Forum held in Los Cabos, Mexico, and supported the idea of bottom-up and top-down decision making through regional forums. CUBA, supported by BRAZIL, cautioned against only focusing on South-South and triangular cooperation because official development assistance is fundamental for implementing UNEP activities. Tanzania, for the AFRICAN GROUP, with the ARAB LEAGUE, underscored the importance of regional forums for implementing the Rio+20 outcomes. He called on UNEP's Executive Director to provide further technical and financial support to the regional forums. GEORGIA urged UNEP to formalize the provision of secretariat services for the Pan-European Biodiversity Platform. Greece, for the EU, supported by the US and SWITZERLAND, said no specific decision on this topic is needed and stressed that any actions should remain within the POW.



ACCESS-TO-INFORMATION POLICY: Masa Nagai, UNEP, described implementation of GC decision 27/2 on UNEP's policy on access to information (UNEP/EA.1/2/Add.4).

BRAZIL, supported by CANADA, ARGENTINA, the EU, JAPAN and CUBA, asked for clarification of disclosure rules, and under what circumstances exemptions would apply. CANADA said the policy should build on best practices from other UN and international organizations.

JAPAN asked for clarification on how the policy applies to UNEP member states compared with external stakeholders. The EU, supported by CUBA, said that the policy should ensure documents are translated into the six UN languages. The US urged UNEP to begin sharing more information, with the understanding that the policy could be improved over time.

Thiaw said that UNEP would continue internal discussion and aim to have an updated draft policy ready for UNEA in June. Nagai noted that the policy applies to governance of the Secretariat and that confidential information would not be disseminated. He said the updated policy would spell out exemptions.

UN SYSTEM-WIDE STRATEGY ON THE ENVIRONMENT: CPR Vice-Chair Rosemary Semafulu-Mukasa (Uganda) invited delegates to consider four draft decisions in the afternoon. Nagai introduced UNEP/EA.1/2/Add.3 on a process to prepare a UN system-wide strategy on the environment.

While welcoming a strengthened and upgraded role for UNEP, the EU requested clarification on the relationship between the UNEP-led process and that of the UN Environment Management Group (EMG). With ARGENTINA, CUBA and JAPAN, he requested the Secretariat to undertake an analysis of past experiences with system-wide strategies, and lessons learned.

NORWAY said she was "perturbed and confused," because the previous UNEP GC had adopted a decision on the EMG, with a similar mandate. With ARGENTINA, BOLIVIA and the US, she cautioned against duplication of efforts and underscored the need for urgency on this long-standing issue.

SWITZERLAND supported calls for an "omnibus approach" on system-wide strategies.

In his closing remarks, Thiaw urged member states to provide input on the proposed process and assured them that any coordination efforts will involve close collaboration with the relevant UN entities.

CONSOLIDATION OF UNEP HEADQUARTERS FUNCTIONS IN NAIROBI: Michele Candotti, UNEP, shared the Executive Director's report on consolidation of UNEP headquarters functions in Nairobi (UNEP/EA.1/2/Add.5).

SWITZERLAND said the report was a "surprise," and requested a broader analysis of effectiveness and efficiency at UNEP duty stations, noting that the report's proposed actions need justification.

The US said the report lacks detail on long-term cost implications, how relocations will strengthen UNEP, and what is meant by "headquarters functions."

KENYA, with JAPAN and BRAZIL, said the decision to consolidate UNEP's headquarters was taken at a political level. He said that some interventions gave a sense of renegotiating the Rio+20 outcome. He recommended that the Secretariat communicate how consolidation improves efficiency.

Candotti reflected on requests to provide information about costs and benefits of consolidation. He observed that intergovernmental processes determine the location of MEA secretariats and UNEP cannot unilaterally relocate those staff members.

J. Christophe Bouvier, UNEP, reiterated that the intention is to implement the decision taken by member states and that headquarters functions were defined at the annual subcommittee meeting in December 2013. He welcomed further input and noted that extra-budgetary funding for UNEP, such as trust funds, is attached to terms of reference that link staff positions to specific programme locations.

INTERNATIONAL WATER QUALITY GUIDELINES

FOR ECOSYSTEMS: Elizabeth Mrema, Acting Director, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation, UNEP, introduced document UNEP/EA.1/3 on international water quality guidelines for ecosystems. She informed delegates that the draft conceptual framework was developed through a broad consultative process and an advisory group has been established to support the Secretariat in finalizing the draft guidelines for the second UNEA in 2016.

The EU reiterated the importance of guidelines for managing water pollution and quality and to support decision making, but questioned the need for a separate UNEA decision on this issue, saying it could be incorporated in the POW.

Zimbabwe, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, called for focusing on the impact of declining water quality, while PAKISTAN said the guidelines should cover surface water as well as groundwater.

ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, GUATEMALA and BOLIVIA stressed the voluntary nature of the guidelines, and called for broad parameters that can be adapted to different local contexts. Noting the need to respect state sovereignty, BOLIVIA opposed linking water and security. The US said that making data available through the UNEP-Live platform is a crucial factor for success. REPUBLIC OF KOREA highlighted his country's support for the process, including through participation on the advisory group.

IPBES: Mrema summarized past GC decisions on IPBES (UNEP/EA.1/3/Add.1). She noted that UNEP is creating a trust fund for IPBES.

NORWAY with JAPAN, the US, BRAZIL, PANAMA, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, MEXICO, and CHINA, expressed appreciation of the efforts to operationalize IPBES.

Anne Larigauderie, Executive Secretary, IPBES, thanked delegates for their support and noted that the IPBES Secretariat is screening more than 1,000 nominations for its multidisciplinary expert panel, considering 10 offers for technical support units, and moving its work programme forward.

Mrema said the focus was on operationalization, with a few tweaks to be made regarding the trust fund and how to report to UNEA.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The pace of deliberations cranked up several notches on Tuesday, as delegates continued to discuss policy matters in plenary, while a budget and POW group met. "Well, the process is finally kicking off," said one delegate, alluding to difficulties faced in forming the working group, because some countries had preferred to discuss everything in plenary. Others, however, noted the impossibility of dealing with issues in sufficient depth in the plenary format, and the need to make the most of the presence of many non-Nairobi-based delegates at this meeting.

The compromise was to squeeze the budget and POW group discussion into a one-hour time slot during lunchtime. Despite their best efforts, the group ran significantly over time, drawing the ire of delegates who had earlier stressed the need to contain working group discussions.

Nevertheless, in the view of those participating, the short, intense session covered some important issues, including how to determine the extent to which UNEP's contributions have resulted in achieving broad environmental objectives. One observer described this issue as "vexing," partly because budget figures don't reflect the whole story. "Some important achievements are made through partnerships, including by encouraging donors to contribute directly to partners," he noted. Many anticipated other issues coming to the forefront during the week.