

BRIEFING NOTE ON THE THIRTEENTH SESSION OF THE GLOBAL MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS FORUM (GMGSF-13): 18-19 FEBRUARY 2012

The thirteenth session of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF-13) was held from 18-19 February 2012, at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The forum was organized by UNEP and took place ahead of the 12th Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GCSS-12/GMEF). Approximately 150 representatives from all regions and the nine major groups and stakeholders of civil society attended the forum. In addition to facilitating their participation at the UNEP Governing Council and its associated meetings, GMGSF-13 aimed to provide a platform for exchange between major groups and governments on their respective positions for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

This briefing note summarizes the discussions at the forum.

OPENING SESSION

Welcoming participants, Tomoko Nishimoto, UNEP, thanked the Governments of Spain and Norway for their financial support. Anabella Rosenberg, International Trade Union Confederation, urged participants not to “lose the opportunity to build the global governance structure we want.” Amina Mohamed, Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, called on participants to provide specific suggestions for strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD).

INTRODUCTORY SESSION: WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

Gillian Martin Mehers, Bright Green Learning, meeting facilitator, stressed the need for discussions to also look beyond Rio+20, and highlighted the importance of interaction among the different groups and regions.

Alexander Juras, UNEP, provided an overview of expectations from GCSS-12/GMEF, and the opportunities for the major groups to air their views and influence the process and outcomes.

SESSION I: THE STATE OF NEGOTIATIONS AND PREPARATIONS OF RIO+20

Chantal-Line Carpentier, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), noted that out of over 686 submissions received on the “zero draft” of the Rio+20 outcome document, 493 were from major groups. She identified priority areas as: energy access, efficiency and sustainability; food security and sustainable agriculture; green jobs and social inclusion; sustainable water management; urbanization; oceans; and improved resilience and disaster preparedness.

Aron Belinky, Vitae Civilis, identified Rio+20 as a unique convergence point and an opportunity to integrate discussions from the three parallel processes - official, semi-official and autonomous. He however noted that such discussions will be challenged by the distance between the main conference venue and the People’s Summit for Social and Environmental Justice.

Speaking on Brazil’s expectations for Rio+20, Antonio Ricarte, Brazil, stressed the need for coherence, integration and implementation at the multilateral, national and local levels.

The ensuing discussion focused on: the importance of linking all levels of participation; the need to bring together cross-disciplinary groups of people; and the imbalance among the three pillars of sustainable development.

SESSION II: WORKING GROUPS ON RIO+20 THEMES

Participants attended three parallel working groups on: international environmental governance (IEG) in the context of IFSD; green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and emerging issues.

SESSION III: REPORT BACK TO PLENARY

Lalanath de Silva, World Resources Institute, facilitator for the IEG working group, noted that the group had discussed: creating a specialized environmental agency and an upgraded Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to ensure equal attention to the three pillars of sustainable development; integrating the Bali guidelines on Rio Principle 10 into the *modus operandi* and substantive processes of all IEG structures; launching a process towards a global treaty and regional conventions on Principle 10; and establishing an office of ombudsperson with a strong mandate to protect the interests of future generations.

Oliver Greenfield, Green Economy Coalition, facilitator for the green economy working group, highlighted key issues as: equity and social inclusion; governance and market reform; a roadmap for transitioning to a green economy; and agreement on a definition and principles of a green economy. He outlined some of the group’s recommendations, including: developing a transparent and inclusive steering committee to guide the transition towards a green economy; increasing the requirements for commitments from governments; establishing clear elements on capacity building, particularly regarding technology and finance; and ensuring equity and social inclusion.

Presenting the main findings of the working group on emerging issues, facilitator Peter Bates, International Council for Science, noted concerns that the zero draft is not sufficiently ambitious. He highlighted key gaps as: the lack of a strong interdisciplinary approach and effective monitoring of actions; and knowledge gaps in such areas as human rights to food and water, health, nutrition, atmosphere and the global commons. He underlined the need for Rio+20 outcomes to be actionable, measurable and implementable.

SESSION IV: DIALOGUE SESSION ON RIO+20: A MILESTONE IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Sascha Gabizon, Women in Europe for a Common Future, moderated the session. Sharing his views on preparations for Rio+20, Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director, emphasized the need for immediate action, noting that the diffuse Rio+20 preparatory discourse is a reflection of current global realities. Acknowledging concerns that the economic dimension has been overemphasized, he said focus should be on the nexus between development, equity and justice, suggesting that the phrase “inclusive green economy” might be more appropriate.

On IFSD, Steiner observed the need to overcome the UN “political paralysis” and called for an aggressive discussion at Rio+20, stressing that “if we don’t move now, environmental governance will remain in the dustbin of the economic juggernaut that is driving this planet.” He further noted that a systemic fix for the current dilemma with UNEP may not exist.

During discussions, many participants commended UNEP's contribution to raising the profile of environmental issues globally. Asserting that paragraph 58 of the zero draft is "insulting" to the original intent and scope of Rio Principle 10, several participants called for stronger language on institutionalizing public participation in environmental governance. Others called for increased dialogue to "bridge the gap between the Davos and Porto Alegre" in the green economy discourse. Steiner highlighted that, with more than two million downloads, the green economy report, "Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication," is UNEP's most widely disseminated publication, which affirms a widespread desire for a fundamental shift in the economic development discourse towards a focus on linking prosperity, social equity and environmental protection.

SESSION V: VOICES FROM MGS AND FROM THE REGIONS: REFINING THE KEY MESSAGES TO THE GCSS.XII/GMEF

Vanessa Timmer, UNEP, introduced this session which focused on the outcomes of the UNEP Regional Consultations on Rio+20.

Asia and the Pacific suggested that the green economy should include enabling policies to promote sustainable economies. Europe called for more effective regulation of financial actors and flows, and a strong institutional framework for nuclear energy. West Asia and Europe highlighted the need for increased social justice and integration. Africa and West Asia called for the protection of food security and sovereignty, eradication of poverty, and enforcement of human rights. North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) highlighted the need for concrete commitments to maintain momentum on Agenda 21 and, with Africa, stressed the need for regional consensus on the green economy and fulfillment of technology transfer commitments under Rio Principle 7.

On IFSD, all five regions called for an upgraded UNEP and CSD. North America and Europe highlighted mechanisms for implementation, accountability, compliance and enforcement, supported by a science-based approach. They also called for a technology assessment unit and best practice clearing house within UNEP.

Regarding Principle 10, Asia and the Pacific suggested benchmarks and indicators to improve performance. All regions called for kick-starting negotiations towards a global treaty and regional conventions at Rio+20.

On the regional IFSD, North America called for the US and Canada to establish a sustainable consumption and production framework in consultation and partnership with major groups. All regions emphasized the need for a robust review process and support mechanisms for implementation.

On "other issues," Africa made a strong call for the adoption of global governance as the "fourth pillar" of sustainable development, remarking that despite abundant natural resources, little progress has been made in eradicating poverty.

The major groups then discussed recommendations for the zero draft. Women highlighted that the green economy should include the value of women's unpaid work when considering indicators of wellbeing.

Children and Youth said proactive language with concrete accountability targets should be included in the decision making process.

Indigenous Peoples called for safeguarding rights to land and resources, enforcing prior informed consent and recognizing indigenous peoples' intellectual property rights.

Non-governmental organizations stressed the need for full access for all major groups and stakeholders in the entire Rio+20 process, and called for the outcomes of GMGSF-13 to be incorporated into the Ministerial meeting.

Local Authorities stressed the need for a territorial dimension to all multilateral processes and governance.

Labour and Trade Unions highlighted three key priorities: getting the principles right; negotiating a set of concrete targets; and ensuring accountability in implementation.

Business and Industry provided an overview of enabling conditions that integrate social, economic and environmental innovation, with the broader enabling environment.

The Scientific and Technological Community stressed the importance of clear, actionable and measurable next steps to define topics, implement solutions and monitor activities.

The Farmers group called for safeguards for farmers and vulnerable communities, and urged a rebranding of agriculture to engage the youth, in order to ensure food security.

In the ensuing discussion, participants identified commonalities regarding principles of a green economy and the strengthening of text on IFSD.

SESSION VI: THE ROAD TO RIO+20: WHAT IS AT STAKE FROM NOW ON, AND BEYOND RIO+20?

Felix Dodds, Stakeholders Forum, identified critical indicators for success at Rio+20 as, *inter alia*: adoption of a set of sustainable development goals and integrating them with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in a single post-2015 framework; creation of new and innovative financing mechanisms; and the kick-starting of legally binding agreements on corporate sustainability, Principle 10 and new technologies.

De Silva stressed that good governance must be included in discussions of sustainable development goals and Principle 10, and listed transparency, participation and accountability as the basis of both.

Christine Von Weizsäcker, European Network Ecoropa, noted that attempting to "speak in one voice" would dilute the diversity of interests and concerns represented by the various major groups.

Uchita de Zoysa, Centre for Environment and Development, underlined that it is the responsibility of civil society to "move out of their comfort zone" in order to "rescue the agenda" and "create our own future."

In the subsequent discussion, several participants stressed that major group representatives could improve the chance of a successful Rio+20 by collectively focusing on a few priority issues and facilitating dialogue between stakeholders inside and outside the official conference.

On post-Rio+20 actions, panelists stressed the need to enhance synergies with the MDG review process in 2013 and underlined the important role of people's treaties in maintaining focus and momentum on key issues.

Other issues raised in the general discussions included: establishing an international court on the environment to hold governments accountable; integrating promising transitional initiatives, such as the greenhouse accounting mechanism, in the Rio+20 process; and embracing new technologies to enhance public outreach. On enhancing public awareness, several speakers stressed the need to convey the message of sustainability, rather than the event.

CLOSING SESSION

Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, The Northern Alliance for Sustainability, called for optimism amidst historical and current challenges in order to create quick actions and solutions to tackle the challenges of the future. Tomoko Nishimoto, UNEP, thanked participants for their substantive input and support for a strengthened mandate for UNEP. She declared the meeting closed at 5.20 pm.