



BRIEFING NOTE OF THE 2012 PLANET UNDER PRESSURE/GEF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY PANEL JOINT DISCUSSIONS - LEVERAGING CONFERENCE OUTCOMES TO INFORM THE GEF PROGRAM: 29 MARCH 2012

The biannual meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), convened in London, UK, on 29 March 2012. The meeting was held in the sidelines of the 2012 Planet Under Pressure Conference, which convened from 26-29 March.

This briefing note covers the high-level segment of the STAP meeting which included a keynote address by UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director Achim Steiner, as well as a facilitated panel discussion on leveraging the Planet Under Pressure outcomes to inform the GEF Programme.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STAP

The STAP is an advisory body to the GEF, and the Secretariat of the STAP, is hosted by UNEP.

The STAP is mandated to provide objective, strategic scientific and technical advice on GEF policies, operational strategies, programmes, and on projects and programmatic approaches.

The STAP is made up of six appointed members and a chairperson, each is appointed for a two-year term, renewable for a further two years. STAP members are selected for their leadership in specific relevant fields in the GEF focal areas of biological diversity, climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, international waters, ozone depletion, persistent organic pollutants, and land degradation, as well as an ability to bridge scientific, technological, economic, social and policy issues.

The STAP reports to the GEF Council and, if requested, to the GEF Assembly on the status of its activities.

STAP MEETING REPORT

OPENING OF THE MEETING

On Thursday afternoon, Meryl Williams, (Vice-Chair, STAP), welcomed participants, on behalf of STAP Chair Tom Lovejoy. After a round of participant introductions, Williams welcomed UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, who provided the keynote address.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Achim Steiner underscored the importance of the STAP's work, noting that he views the STAP as a "reinsurance" mechanism, constantly providing a "birds-eye view" of the GEF portfolio, thus determining the value-added of the

GEF Instrument, and delivering advice on the most efficient allocation of funds. Reflecting on the fact that STAP is meeting in the margins of the 2012 Planet Under Pressure conference, shortly prior to the launch of UNEP's fifth Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-5), and the announcement of the launch of Future Earth, a 10-year initiative aiming to deliver knowledge to enable societies to meet their sustainable development goals, Steiner said science is reconfiguring itself. He explained that the STAP Panel is in a unique position to enforce the collective influence of science.

Steiner stressed the mixed experiences of the GEF Instrument, noting it should be viewed as a catalytic instrument, as opposed to one creating transformational change, as its size is an indictment in itself. He explained the STAP's review of projects, puts science at the cutting edge of project interventions.

He observed that the scientific community is now speaking with a louder voice, and that humanity has a clearer view than ever before about the state of the environment. Steiner stressed that we should not await perfection of data and understanding, or perfect knowledge, before acting, and emphasized that the GEF enables experimentation and catalyzation.

Steiner recommended that the STAP push the boundaries of its scientific mandate by challenging accepted wisdom. Questioning if GEF focus and methodology should be taken as a given, Steiner queried the wisdom of focusing on the perfect implementation mechanism, and encouraged STAP to consider if the GEF is focused on the most contemporary and strategic areas to make a difference.

He concluded by noting that the GEF should be considered as having a role as a "venture catalyst," underscoring that the more it is driven by a consolidated environmental perspective, the better reinsurance it will provide. Steiner then thanked outgoing STAP members Meryl Williams (International Waters) and Nijavalli Ravindranath (Climate Mitigation), for their commitment to the work of the STAP.

In the ensuing discussion, Gustavo Fonseca (Natural Resources Team Leader, GEF) observed that Rio+20 is contemplating how to reconnect the initiatives that were launched in 1992, and that subsequently went separate ways. He questioned how STAP should evolve in an environment where GEF is no longer the "major player," outlining the need to consider linkages and synergies.

Bob Dixon (Climate and chemicals, GEF) noted developments in the climate and chemicals sectors, including the Green Climate Fund, and the streamlining of the chemicals and wastes conventions. Ravindranath highlighted that incremental change fails to impact climate change and biodiversity, and that even the Green Climate Fund may be too small to usher in transformational change.



L-R: Thomas Hammond, UNEP; Tom Lovejoy, STAP Chairperson; Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UNEP; and Meryl Williams, outgoing STAP member)

Responding to participants' interventions, Steiner drew attention to the Green Economy discourse, and underscored that GEF finance and development finance, do not equate to more than proof of concept money. He noted that through the Stern Report and the work of the The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), true costs are increasingly understood, and said that such information is influencing assessments of supply chain risks and reinsurers.

Steiner drew attention to the issue of perverse subsidies, which drive irrational use of resources, and underscored the need to carefully study the nature by which vested interests influence the political system. He observed that economics is inherently political, because it tells us who is benefitting, and said people should be empowered by this.

PANEL: LEVERAGING CONFERENCE OUTCOMES TO INFORM THE GEF PROCESS

Tom Lovejoy (STAP Chair) introduced the panel discussion on leveraging conference outcomes to inform the GEF process.

Georgina Mace (Chair of the Scientific Committee of DIVERSITAS) noted that there is a lot of science in existence that is not being used to inform better environmental governance, and that the door is open for more science-policy interaction. Mace also observed that despite the interconnectedness of Earth's systems, these systems are currently managed in parallel. She said science providers tend not to congregate around shared challenges, but that perhaps the policy world could act as a "magnet" to bring science from various disciplines together.

On biodiversity and ecosystems, Mace said biodiversity is approached by different actors in discrete ways, noting that some look at biodiversity as a response to loss, essentially a response variable for environmental change; others approach biodiversity as the genetic library of life, thus preserving billions of years of Earth's history in a library of living things; and others still approach biodiversity in the role of providing ecosystem

services. She underscored that biodiversity is fundamental, and suggested that the concept of ecosystem services should be anchored in a shared understanding of natural capital rather than centered around flows, likening the concept to tracking the flows in and out of a bank account without taking into account the bank balance. Mace underscored that natural capital is what all processes depend on. She highlighted the potential usefulness of the planned Future Earth project, which she said will ask questions about desirable outcomes, and how they may be delivered.

Robert Watson (Chief Scientific Advisor Defra, UK) reflected on the GEF's targeted research policy, noting the draft "Review of Experience with Targeted Research, Lessons from Related Approaches, and Recommendations for the GEF" report indicates that GEF's targeted research has failed to deliver useful results. Despite the report's findings, he argued that more knowledge will lead to cost effective and sustainable interventions.

Watson stated the Resources Allocation Framework and its successor the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources represent a monstrous step backwards with regard to the role of research in the GEF, as they stymie the development of regional and global initiatives. He stressed that GEF can play an important role in making (and linking) national and regional assessments on climate and ecosystems, which indicate key knowledge gaps. Watson explained that though GEF can make little impact on addressing mitigation and adaptation, it can ensure that there is the knowledge base to make relevant interventions.

Watson acknowledged that countries want action in the form of projects, but cautioned that the STAP should confirm that an adequate knowledge base exists for such action, and called for a greater commitment to building the knowledge base. He also noted that projects should be co-designed with governments,

so that governments build capacity and use project results to inform their activities and decisions when research activities are completed. Watson raised the notion of GEF support to regional centres of excellence, and also underscored the usefulness of the trans-disciplinary Future Earth project.

Joseph Alcamo (Chief Scientist, UNEP) discussed three emerging issues related to land-ocean interactions with science-policy implications.

Alcamo first drew attention to increasing concerns over nutrient impacts causing eutrophication of the coastal zone and hypoxic areas. He explained that these zones are caused by increased nutrient input from agriculture, as well as from municipal waste inputs, but that there is evidence that hypoxic zones can recover as nutrient concentrations decrease due to reduced nitrogen and phosphorus releases. Alcamo highlighted UNEP's work in developing the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management to begin addressing this issue.

Secondly, Alcamo outlined the impacts of endocrine disrupting chemicals, including pesticides, pharmaceuticals and industrial chemicals on aquatic wildlife in Europe and North America, noting that there is currently no data for developing countries. He said endocrine disruptors have been detected in vertebrates and invertebrates. Stressing the need for further assessments, Alcamo also highlighted that UNEP is interested in initiating an international wastewater partnership.

Thirdly, Alcamo outlined the issue of plastics and other marine debris, noting that debris is accumulating in some parts of the oceans, leading to impacts on aquatic life through physical damage by ingestion, entanglement in debris, and chemical contamination through the ingestion of microplastics. He said poorly managed landfills and untreated sewage were key drivers for the increase in marine debris. Alcamo highlighted that the Scottish fishing industry has estimated marine debris reduces its catch by 5% overall, and that UNEP is also considering developing a partnership on marine litter. He called for advancement of the scientific agenda, strengthening of the science-policy links (eg. through global partnerships), and the need to take precautionary policy action, incorporating land-sea connections into areas such as integrated water resources management and integrated coastal zone management. He also stressed the link to Green Economy and green agriculture.

In the ensuing discussion, Fonseca queried if the scientific community was ready to respond to requests from policy makers. Alcamo responded that although there remain broken bridges between the science policy communities, the climate change process has begun to mend these, with scientists increasingly talking to governments. He called for more explicit interaction, noting that scientists need to ready themselves to undertake the research demanded by the policy community, as well as continuing to undertake curiosity driven research.

Watson noted the increasing nexus between the science and policy communities, including the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Montreal Protocol Technology and Economic Assessment Panel. He noted improvements could still be made and that Future Earth plans to involve policy makers, scientists, civil society and business in shaping the research agenda. Ravindranath supported this point, underscoring that lack of access to knowledge, as opposed to

the knowledge itself, is the key challenge. He suggested parallel bodies to the IPCC be set on the regional and subregional levels. Watson noted that the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is planning regional assessments, with subregional assessments embedded in them, as global assessments do not make sense for adaptation. He also stressed the importance of building the capacity of the scientific community to undertake assessments, as well as the capacity of policy staff who utilize the information.

Aaron Zazueta (GEF Evaluation Office) asked Alcamo if UNEP was planning to integrate climate change into the nitrogen work, and Junu Shrestha (GEF) noted that when science is integrated into policy, one must ensure that the message the science is sending is itself integrated. She stressed the importance of considering how nitrogen pollution would affect ocean acidity, like CO₂ does, as well as how changing rainfall patterns will need to be taken into account to prevent fertilizer runoff. Alcamo noted the Global Nitrogen Initiative is just finding its feet, but that a broad view would be taken.

Zazueta explained that the GEF Evaluation Office has observed that even when projects have budgets for monitoring, there is not a sufficient number of qualified staff to conduct the monitoring. He noted in Cambodia for example, that scientists' interests are limited to their own research activities. Watson responded that long-term monitoring is essential, but not something GEF should undertake. In regard to capacity building, he explained that the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment made progress on this by instituting a young scientist fellowship programme, which involved many young scientists from developing countries, noting that many of them have gone on to become promising scientists. Mace supported this, stating said that training through assessments is inexpensive and very effective.

Dixon suggested that parties could ask the GEF to contribute to the biennial GHG emissions reports, and that there may be a role for STAP to improve the current superficiality and inaccuracy of the reports.

Ravindranath suggested that GEF support an IPCC type assessment for a selected subregion. Dixon suggested discussing the idea further. Alcamo emphasized the usefulness of regional centers for excellence, noting that scientists have the opportunity to learn quickly where there is a critical mass.

Watson noted that despite the apparent proliferation of assessments, there is little cross pollination, and mentioned that he would be meeting with scientists in the evening to discuss how to increase information flows between assessments, as well as to the national level. He expressed hope that, in the future, knowledge would be assessed continuously at the national, subregional and international levels.

Lovejoy closed the discussion and updated participants on the appointment of new STAP members to replace outgoing members Williams and Ravindranath. He noted that for climate change and adaptation, Anand Patwardhan (India) had been selected, and that for land degradation, Annette Cowie (Australia) had been selected. Lovejoy said the appointment of both candidates had been approved by Steiner.

Lovejoy then thanked panelists and participants and closed the discussion at 4:10pm.