

FINAL DRAFT

Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement in the work of UNEP and UNEA.

A Report by Stakeholder Forum

UNEP commissioned Stakeholder Forum to undertake several activities and studies to support stakeholder engagement in preparation for UNEA 2 in June 2016, most of which have been completed and already separately reported.

As a final element of this project, UNEP commissioned Stakeholder Forum to develop an options paper, with proposals on improving the effectiveness of stakeholder participation in UNEA in future including through the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF).

The lead consultant for this work was Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, a long-standing associate of Stakeholder Forum and world expert on stakeholder engagement and governance issues. He undertook a deep and broad analysis of the history of stakeholder engagement in UN and UNEP processes, and conducted a number of interviews with stakeholders and major group representatives. His full report “Quo Vadis UNEP and UNEA” is currently undergoing peer review and is expected to be available shortly.

In the light of that deep and broad study and drawing on some of its analysis and recommendations this shorter complementary paper by Stakeholder Forum highlights some of the key points about the role of stakeholder engagement in the work of UNEP, including the specific questions about the role of GMGSF requested by UNEP.

Derek Osborn

Jan-Gustav Strandenaes

Farooq Ullah

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Summary

There is a vast range of organisations or stakeholders around the world that are concerned with environmental issues. Many of these are – or could be - valuable allies for UNEP, UNEA and national governments in the continuing quest for better protection and enhancement of the world's environment.

Some have expert knowledge, original policy analyses, profound insights and practical experience to help shape policies. Some have important capabilities that can help to deliver action on the ground. Some have mass membership and the capacity to build public awareness of environmental challenges and to generate political pressure for change and action. Some represent interest groups that may be significantly affected by the state of the environment or by actions affecting it.

All of these can make important contributions to the work of UNEP and collective international action on the environment – and their own work can benefit from the global knowledge base and internationally concerted action that UNEP and its activities can generate. Over the 40 years of UNEP's existence there have been many occasions when stakeholders of various kinds have played a significant part in analysing and debating environmental concerns, helping to devise solutions, and building the necessary momentum for their adoption and implementation.

Recent UN Summit decisions¹ have led to the upgrading of the standing of UNEP in the global intergovernmental system by giving it a biennial high level assembly (the United Nations Environment Assembly or UNEA) with a universal membership of all the countries of the UN to lead it. They have also given it an important additional mandate to monitor and promote all the environmental aspects of the 2030 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)². In principle these changes should increase the authority and capability of UNEP to lead and inspire action for the environment in the world.

These changes ought also to increase the potential for fruitful interaction with stakeholders. In particular the biennial meetings of UNEA should provide a strong focal point and opportunity for drawing together a significant range of stakeholders to engage productively with each other and with the high level governmental participants, and to help raise the global visibility and ambition level of those meetings.

In practice however the first two UNEA meetings have not yet completely fulfilled this potential.

UNEA 1 was largely preoccupied with procedural and process issues which could not be expected to attract a wide range of stakeholders.

UNEA 2 had a much broader agenda and began to draw in a wider range of participants. But the range of stakeholders who attended did not cover the whole agenda under discussion adequately;

¹ In particular, the Rio+20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development and the September 2015 Summit at the UN Headquarters on Transforming our World

² A/RES/67/290 General Assembly Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 9 July 2013 -Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, paragraph 21

and in a number of cases those who did attend had not been fully engaged early enough in the cycle to be able to make a strong contribution. The Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF) which immediately preceded UNEA was not as well organised productive as it could have been and did not feed as productively into UNEA as it should have done. This “engagement deficit” may in turn have contributed to the rather modest and unambitious conclusions in many of the UNEA 2 resolutions, and in particular on what was meant to be one of the over-arching themes of the event – environment and health. Deeper levels of stakeholder engagement and higher levels of ambition for outcomes are often closely correlated.

Against this background, SF have examined what could now be done to enhance existing arrangements and create a more useful, meaningful and productive stakeholder engagement process around UNEA for the future.

Starting from the analysis and assembly of stakeholder views in Mr Strandenaes’ longer report the SF authors of this shorter report offer a number of suggestions for consideration by UNEP and other parties concerned.

We have formed three principal conclusions:

- (i) UNEA meetings are not stand-alone conferences. They are the culmination of a two-year cycle of work by UNEP and its Member States and the launch of a new cycle. Stakeholder participation at UNEA meetings can only be fully effective and achieve significant impact if it is based on a thorough, well-informed and adequately resourced interaction with UNEP and member governments throughout the whole two-year cycle.
- (ii) Having stakeholders present at meetings cannot be regarded as an end in itself. Stakeholders will only want to engage more deeply if their contributions have the potential to have more impact on outcomes, whether it be through influencing the agenda, the decisions and actions on particular topics, or in the implementation of decisions and agreements. Many of the most important stakeholders will only want to re-engage more deeply if they feel that in doing so they will be helping UNEP and UNEA to stand forward with new determination in their role as environmental leaders in the world, helping to lead an ambitious transformative global agenda towards a more environmentally sustainable world.
- (iii) In order to enable such dynamic participation and partnership to flourish effectively there needs to be a significant effort both by UNEP and its member states and by the Major Groups and other stakeholders to improve and diversify the mechanics of the engagement process, to attract a wider range of stakeholders into the process and to resource the whole engagement process adequately.

We have grouped our suggestions accordingly into three main chapters.

The first chapter “Continuous Engagement” reviews experience of stakeholder engagement with UNEP and member states on the environment, and how important continuity of engagement is. It identifies key stages in the UNEP/UNEA cycle at which stakeholder engagement needs to be reinforced.

The second chapter “Raising the Sights” focuses on UNEP’s role as leader of the environment in the UN system and in the world, and how it might try to generate a new impetus for international action on the environment. It makes suggestions for some new or expanded forms of outreach activity

which UNEP and UNEA might undertake in order to draw in contributions and support from individuals and stakeholder organisations of all kinds that are at the forefront of the worldwide movement for protecting the global environment and safeguarding the planet for future generations.

The third chapter “Oiling the Wheels” focuses on the processes and procedures for enabling stakeholder engagement with UNEP and UNEA and suggests a number of changes that might help them to work more effectively and productively. Rules of procedure and engagement are of course important to ensure transparency, fairness, accountability and balanced participation. But to find their way through these rules so that they can make effective contributions stakeholders also need proactive support from the UNEP secretariat and their own collective Major Group organisations and other networks. There needs to be some reinforcement of these support arrangements to facilitate effective engagement; and they need to be adequately resourced.

The recommendations in the three chapters are interdependent. Taken together they could help to rebuild a more vibrant and committed stakeholder community around UNEP. This would enhance the significance, ambition level and visibility of successive UNEA meetings; and that in turn would then resonate through the whole of UNEP’s work and help to achieve progressively more ambitious outcomes for the world’s environment.

Ch 1. Continuous Engagement

The importance of stakeholder engagement in international work.

The UN family is made up of the UN itself and many affiliated programmes, funds, and specialized agencies, all with their own defined membership consisting of national governments.

Although formal membership is confined to governments³ the work of these international bodies is however of immense interest and significance to a wide variety of other stakeholders throughout the world including the stakeholder grouping known as the Major Groups⁴—and an enormous variety of NGOs reflecting a great variety of civil society concerns. There need to be good processes to ensure that the knowledge and experience of stakeholders of all kinds, their vital interests and legitimate concerns, their wisdom and their energy, can all feed into the international processes. Conversely the work of stakeholders of many kinds can be inspired, enriched and enhanced in many ways by the global vision and perspectives which international work can provide and by the agreements and action programmes agreed at that level.

Governments differ in their approach to this interaction with stakeholders. At one extreme a few appear still to believe that each government should handle its relations with its own national stakeholders and that separate stakeholder input is not much needed or even desirable at international level. But most now believe that in an increasingly globalised world there is a need for direct relationships between the international bodies and stakeholders of many different kinds.

Over the years most of the international community has therefore come to recognise the importance in principle of building stakeholder engagement processes into international work. It has been endorsed in many decisions by the UN itself, (found in outcome document from, inter alia, the UN summit documents such as UNCED and Agenda 21 (1992), The Malmoe Declaration on UNEP, 2000, WSSD, Johannesburg in 2002, and the World Summit in 2005,) including many other international fora. It was strongly supported in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was promulgated by the UN Summit in September 2015 which launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁵

The special importance of stakeholder engagement in relation to international action on the environment

Effective action to protect the environment is especially dependent on good stakeholder engagement. Frequently the impetus for action on environmental problems arises from a combination of good data and good scientific analysis about a problem, brought vividly to wider attention and active political debate by concerned NGOs, and then carried through to effective

³ The only exception to the membership restrictions is UNHABITAT which allows local authorities as elected representatives of municipalities to participate.

⁴ There are officially nine major groups, as decided by Agenda 21, Chapter 23, A/Conf/151/26/Rev .1 Vol 1 and by the UNGA - A/Res/47/190 of March 16, 1993. They are: Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, Farmers, NGOs, Trade Unions, Science and Technology, Local Authorities and Business and Industry. The Rio+20 Outcome Document also made efforts to expand on the multitude of NGOs by naming several other stakeholders – see paragraph 43 of the Outcome document.

⁵ A/Res/70/1

implementation by creative innovation, adaptation and investment by governments, businesses and other stakeholders acting together.

At international level, environmental issues arise and can be addressed in a number of different international fora. There are Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) on some key issues which have their own conferences of the parties and processes for stakeholder engagement. Environmental issues come up in other international fora, such as the WHO, FAO, WMO, ICAO, etc. The environmental agenda is also a key part of the sustainability debate which is kept under review by the UN itself through ECOSOC and the recently established High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

Stakeholder engagement and participation is important in all these arenas. But as global champions for the environment, UNEP and UNEA should be the heart of that engagement at global level. They should be leading exemplars and champions of good engagement processes and practice for the whole international system and for promoting it at national level. And since the environment interacts with so many other subjects in the context of sustainability they should be showing the way in how to secure effective interaction between environmental and other stakeholder communities so as advance environmental sustainability on a broad front.

The need for an inclusive, transparent, well-focused, well-organised and continuous engagement process.

To make the most of the potential for constructive engagement there needs to be an inclusive, transparent and well-organised plan or system for engaging stakeholders of all kinds in a continuous way throughout the work of UNEP and UNEA.

The processes for engaging stakeholders effectively at the UNEA meetings themselves are of course one important aspect of this. But contact and communication at these high level biennial events can only add real value to outcomes if they are the culmination of a significant process of engagement and interactive working throughout the previous two years and act as the launch pad for further productive engagement over the next cycle. Currently UNEP and its Member States do not achieve enough engagement in depth and breadth with stakeholders (and between stakeholders) in between one UNEA meeting and the next.

To achieve an effective and continuous stakeholder engagement process needs careful planning and sequencing of activities, meetings and other contacts over the whole biennial UNEA cycle, and the whole of UNEP's Programme of Work.

In principle, the cycle of UNEP's work can be conceptualised as having five main stages

- Monitoring and review of progress using indicators and other reporting processes;
- Agenda setting; the identification of key topics and emerging issues for deeper analysis, debate and possible international action
- Discussion and negotiation on key topics
- Adoption of key decisions at UNEA
- Implementation by UNEP, Governments and other parties

Opportunities and specific and resourced modalities for appropriate stakeholder engagement need to be built into each of these stages.

Some stakeholders may want to focus more on the strategic level, and to be involved in the general preparatory processes that lead to the establishment of priorities in the overall programme and the identification of significant new issues for analysis, discussion, negotiation and action. Others may be more tightly focused on particular topics and issues and arrangements for their engagement need to be built in at an early stage when such topics come on to the active UNEP agenda. Others again may be more interested in participating in action programmes or partnerships initiated by UNEP and UNEA to implement UNEA decisions. The engagement arrangements should be sufficiently flexible and responsive to draw in the appropriate stakeholders at the appropriate time. Scientists may want to engage in one way, NGOs in another, and business in a third. Different types of engagement may be appropriate for different types of stakeholder, though it is important to keep some significant space for multi-stakeholder engagement so that the different perspectives of different types of stakeholder can be brought to bear on one another.

Stakeholder Engagement with Monitoring and Review Processes.

Typically, UNEP monitoring and review processes are built around three main components – analysis of environmental conditions and trends as revealed by statistical indicators; analysis of country reports on general trends or particular topics; specially commissioned studies or reports on key topics. One crucial product is the periodic Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) report which brings together a wide range of material from sources both inside and outside UNEP to give a comprehensive assessment of the state of the global environment, trends, prospects and drivers of change.

Stakeholders of many kinds are regularly drawn in by UNEP to contribute to these major reports, and that process is well understood and respected. For example, the global scientific community has a great deal to contribute in terms of ensuring decisions and policies are based on sound and current science. Other stakeholders sometimes have important information and expertise of their own to build into the review process and valuable insights into the issues and trends revealed by other reports. It might for example be useful to draw together a compendium of stakeholder views and reactions to such comprehensive assessments as the GEO.

UNEA2 introduced for the first time the Science Policy Forum. This meeting was successful in drawing together significant contributions from many of the leading scientific authorities in the field of environmental science, and should clearly be built on for the future. In particular it needs to be considered how the insights generated by such a gathering can best feed into the periodic assessment processes and the identification of priorities for future action to protect the environment. Other stakeholders could have an important part to play here too

Stakeholder Engagement with agenda setting.

The crucial transition from analysis and assessment to identification of key issues and priorities for action is not always well articulated. There need to be real opportunities for stakeholders to comment on emerging conclusions about existing conditions and trends and their implications, and to engage in open discussion and debate about possible solutions to problems, especially new and emerging issues that may require innovative solutions.

Key issues requiring international attention in UNEP may arise naturally from the monitoring, review and assessment processes. They may arise from high level reports or reviews by groups of eminent

persons and UNEP should keep in view the possibility of commissioning such studies on key issues or concerns. They may arise (as they often have in the past) from widely expressed concerns starting initially amongst NGO groups or other stakeholders. They may arise from reactions to environmental disasters or threats.

The official machinery and governments need to be alert to all these possible drivers for change, and open to bringing the issues raised into the active agenda for wide-ranging discussion that may allow possible new solutions to emerge. Currently they do this well in relation to some specific and comparatively well-developed topics such as the management of chemicals and waste. But on other topics and in particular on strategic overview engagement is less well-developed.

Stakeholder Engagement with Discussions and Negotiations

Stakeholder Engagement with UNEP on a significant issue may take many different forms. UNEP may need to commission research, assemble data and other information about the situation in different parts of the world, explore policy options, bring together countries willing to work together on the issue, develop advice, guidance and support programmes for member states and their stakeholders, and from time to time support a full-scale negotiation amongst member states on the way forward.

Different modalities of engagement will be appropriate for different topics. But UNEP needs to be particularly attentive to the logistical and resource constraints that many stakeholders have to contend with, and make their arrangements for consultation, participation and engagement as transparent and user-friendly as possible. Stakeholders may need to make their own arrangements between themselves to invite one or more of their number to take the lead on particular issues so as to concentrate their resources and deploy them most effectively. The Major Groups and their organising partners have an important part to play in facilitating such arrangements. But UNEP should also consider how they themselves can identify some of the stakeholders they particularly want to engage with so as to be able to draw them in at the appropriate time.

Once a proposal gets to the stage of formal negotiation between countries more formal rules have to govern the way in which stakeholders can participate in the formal sessions. But it is important for the negotiations to be kept as transparent as possible so that stakeholders can keep abreast with the process, and add their voices appropriately inside and outside the negotiating chamber and help to maintain the momentum and support needed to generate significant outcomes.

Stakeholder Engagement at UNEA

UNEA is the highest authority in the UNEP system, bringing together Ministers and other leading figures in the environmental world to take key decisions and chart the way ahead. It may debate and resolve outstanding issues on some of the key decisions. But its primary role is to give political commitment and visibility to the decisions made, to launch their implementation process with as much impetus as they can generate, and to give guidance for the next two-year cycle.

In the margins, crucial discussions about financing of action and the formation or reinforcement of partnerships for practical implementation action may be taken forward. Overall it is a two-yearly opportunity for Ministers and other leaders of national and international action on the environment to come together in one place to review what has been achieved, set the priorities for the years ahead and renew collective political commitment to the goals.

Many stakeholders of all kinds naturally wish to associate themselves with that coming together, to highlight what they have contributed already to the global endeavour and what they can contribute to the path ahead, and to urge their recommendations for inclusion in the decisions or in the agenda and workplan for the years ahead. When soundly based on earlier participation in the preparatory phases they have much to contribute in and around UNEA meetings as idea generators and policy advocates, as environmental actors and partners, and as commentators and communicators.

Such participation helps to attract more media interest and to contribute to greater visibility for international environmental issues and what is or should be done to tackle them. Stakeholder attention and participation of this kind both at national and international level also encourages Governments to engage more actively, to be represented at UNEA at higher level, and sometimes to increase their level of ambition to reach stronger conclusions and to take more decisive action for the environment.

Stakeholders have found it helpful to have their own two-day event the GMGSF - preceding the main UNEA meeting to articulate and integrate their own positions and to promote their own contributions and potential. This meeting should enable stakeholders of all kinds from around the world to review their experience of engagement over the previous two years, to consider their positions on the issues being brought to UNEA for decision, and to identify and promote strategic issues that they would like to see given attention at the international level in the following two years, and to plan how they can best work together to help UNEA and UNEP to achieve significant outcomes going forward.

The GMGSF before UNEA 2 was not however as successful as it should have been. Some important stakeholders were not present at the meeting or for the UNEA meeting itself. And some of those that were present had not been sufficiently involved in the earlier stages and were not sufficiently prepared or focused on what could realistically be achieved at the GMGSF or the UNEA itself. Some came more in the spirit of attending an interesting one-off conference to learn about the process rather than as taking part in a well-briefed strategic drive to optimise the final decisions on the previous two year's work and to set ambitious objectives in the strategic guidance for the next two years.

It is of course for the Major Groups and other stakeholders themselves to consider how best to improve the GMGSF meetings for the future. But SF have detected some support for remodelling the meeting as a three-day event. The first day might be devoted to orientation and finalising stakeholder positions on the forthcoming UNEA meeting and its resolutions and declarations. (Such positions should be well-prepared in advance and based firmly on stakeholder input during the previous two years of the cycle.

The second day might be devoted to a kind of fair for the promotion of the role and activities of stakeholders present and for mutual learning and identification of opportunities for collaboration, partnership and networking. The third day might be devoted to looking ahead, horizon-scanning and forming views on the priorities for UNEP/UNEA work and engagement over the following two-year cycle, and for discussing possible implementation partnerships.

It is particularly important that when the agenda unites the environment with another major area (e.g. environment and health at UNEA 2) special efforts should be made to reach out to the corresponding stakeholder community so that an integrated approach can be developed. re a chosen theme

At the meetings of UNEA itself it is desirable that as much time as possible should be flexibly allocated for genuinely interactive meetings between Governments, UNEP and stakeholders to reach common understandings on issues and problems, and to develop policies, programmes and partnerships for tackling them.

Formal presentations in plenary have more of a symbolic value, and it is important that the rules of procedure should allow voices of stakeholders to be heard there, recognising the crucial importance of their role. Given the number of countries and potential stakeholders there will inevitably be severe pressures on the time available for each speaker in the plenary debate. But rather than squeezing down the time allocated to stakeholders perhaps a system for writing some speeches by all types of speaker into the record without delivering them orally could be developed to handle this perennial problem (as is permitted in the American Congress).

Outside the plenary as many opportunities as possible should be created for more interactive discussion and dialogue between key stakeholders, governments and international bodies in side events, workshops, informal meetings etc.

Stakeholder Engagement with Implementation. Following up UNEA meetings.

The outcomes from UNEA meetings may need following up in various ways at international, regional, national and more local levels, and may need to involve a greater variety of stakeholders. Typically, the primary responsibility for implementation action will lie with governments at national level. In carrying through this task Governments will often need to work with their own national communities of stakeholders on particular issues – and occasionally stakeholders may also play a useful role in ensuring that Governments remain aware of the task and the issues requiring their attention.

This national-level dialogue with stakeholders need to be informed by and to contribute to the dialogues with stakeholders at UNEP and UNEA level. One way to achieve such two-way communication is to establish or reinvigorate the national committees of stakeholders linked officially to UNEP, including national representatives of all the Major Groups, concerned with environmental issues domestically and with the work of UNEP and UNEA and other relevant international bodies internationally. This kind of arrangement has worked well in some countries in the past, and could usefully be promoted again by UNEP as an appropriate mechanism for linking national, regional and international stakeholder engagement processes in the environmental field.

At international level stakeholder participation in implementation partnerships is crucial. There is rightly a growing interest in associating business and financial interest with some of these activities. But other stakeholders should also be included, not least to ensure that wider public interests and concerns are not overlooked.

Ch 2. RAISING THE SIGHTS. Building a transformative agenda.

The Crucial Central Role of UNEP and UNEA, and the continuing importance of effective stakeholder engagement with its key activities.

UNEP with UNEA have certain unique and crucial functions and responsibilities in relation to the environment. UNEP is the only UN body whose primary focus is on the environment of the planet as a whole, and on what needs to be done to protect it.⁶ It has special responsibilities for keeping under review the environmental dimension and impacts of the UN system as a whole, and of the Sustainable Development Goals. It has a particularly important role in identifying new and emerging issues within the environmental field that may require new and innovative solutions.

At a time when many threats to the global environment are becoming more severe, and the totality of human activity is pressing more closely against several planetary boundaries⁷ the task of addressing these global challenges to the environment in a coherent and systematic way is more important than ever. UNEP's task is a central and critical one for the future of the planet and for creating the safe and just space for humanity as part of it. It should be gaining steadily more attention and support amongst Governments and stakeholders alike.

As described in its own website "The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.

UNEP work encompasses:

- Assessing global, regional and national environmental conditions and trends
- Developing international and national environmental instruments
- Strengthening institutions for the wise management of the environment"⁸

All of these activities are strengthened and achieve more impact when they are enriched by engagement with stakeholders around the world. Stakeholders have knowledge and insights to contribute to the monitoring and assessment of the global environment and trends. They can be powerful allies in drawing the world's attention to problems and to new and emerging issues, in shaping new policies and instruments, and in building political pressure for ambitious and effective action. They can be valuable partners in capacity and institution building and in implementation of agreements.

⁶ Paragraph 87 of the Rio Outcome document

⁷ See Rockstrom at the University of Stockholm for a more detailed definition and explanation of the concept – the nine planetary boundaries, which remains a controversial concept among nations and scientists. <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>

⁸ See UNEP's home page: <http://www.unep.org/>

Conversely stakeholders benefit from engaging with UNEP and UNEA and gaining strength and insight from their global perspective and vision. UNEP's work can help stakeholders to think more clearly about global issues; and to act locally with more insight into the implications of the cumulative impact of local actions for global outcomes.

There are therefore - or ought to be – many positive synergies between the work of UNEP and UNEA and that of many different stakeholders

UNEP itself was born at the crest of the first wave of global concern and action for the environment which came together at the Stockholm Conference in 1972, and has subsequently had a long and successful history of engaging stakeholders of all kinds in its work. It has regularly drawn on the knowledge, energy, and capabilities of the stakeholder community to enrich and deepen its work, to enlarge its outreach, and to help implement international agreements and programmes. Conversely stakeholders of many kinds have found it valuable to work with and through UNEP to advance international understanding and action on global environmental concerns, and occasionally to gain political attention and build support for the disruptive policy changes that are sometimes needed.

There have inevitably been fluctuations over time in the depth and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement with UNEP and in the degree of commitment to engagement by different parties, partly related to changes in the level of worldwide attention to environmental concerns. From 2008 onwards, continuing economic and financial crises and political instability in some parts of the world have to some extent diverted attention from global environmental problems both at political level and amongst stakeholder communities themselves. UNEP itself has found it more difficult to advance a transformative agenda. These changes have in turn led to some falling off in the breadth and intensity of stakeholder engagement with UNEP and its work in recent years.

Now however the tide could possibly be turning again. Many global studies and assessments have underlined the extent and severity of the environmental problems facing the world in the 21st century. The two UN Summits of 2012 and 2015⁹ have strengthened and enlarged UNEP and given it a crucial role in monitoring all the environmental elements of the 2030 Agenda including implementing the SDGs. There should be opportunities in the years ahead to rebuild support for a more active international environmental agenda led by UNEP and UNEA as the world's environmental champions.

Resolution 2.5 adopted at UNEA 2 on Delivering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development specifically requests the Executive Director "to initiate new multi-stakeholder partnerships, where appropriate, and within available resources, and strengthen existing ones, including with the private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, to promote activities that contribute to delivering the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

Achieving that result will clearly require strong and ambitious leadership from UNEP and its Executive Director, and from Member States. It will also need extensive participation and engagement with the many stakeholders throughout the world who are keen to see progress on environmental issues in the world. So it is timely to review what could be done to reinvigorate the stakeholder engagement processes of UNEP and UNEA, and thereby to help stimulate higher levels of engagement and political commitment to international action on the environment.

⁹ Rio+20 in 2012 with the outcome document «The future we want» and The UN Special Session in September 2015 deciding on the agenda called: "Transforming the world – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

To be the effective champion of the environment which its mandate requires UNEP needs to find ways to reach out to the more dynamic forces in civil society and the stakeholder community to find new ideas, new thinking, new challenges, new agendas and new combinations. It is not sufficient for it simply to ensure that there are formal opportunities built into formal processes for stakeholder voices to be heard at plenary meetings. UNEP needs deliberately to reach out to identify and draw in to continuing engagement the most profound and challenging thinkers, the most ambitious environmental organisations, the most expert specialists, the newer voices and ideas that are still struggling to be heard and to make their way in the world. They need to create contexts in which such new and progressive thinking can be expressed powerfully and effectively, and be transmitted more widely amongst stakeholders, amongst UNEP staff and with governments themselves.

The environment covers a vast field. But it is not possible for the international system to work creatively on all aspects of the environment simultaneously. To achieve significant outcomes from the two-yearly cycle of UNEP/UNEA work it is important to identify at an early stage of each cycle a limited number of topical and high profile issues on which a sufficient number of governments and key stakeholders want to work together with UNEP to help to shape new international action. It is particularly important to identify themes on which UNEP and UNEA can contribute to the implementation of the SDGs either acting within the environmental community alone, or frequently often through building bridges and alliances for change with other important communities such as those involved with health, energy, transport, agriculture, etc.

The establishment of such informal communities or coalitions of interest around an important topic is crucial to attracting the interest and engagement of key stakeholders, and in turn of increasing political interest and engagement by governments.

In order to enable stakeholder input to feed into agenda setting in a productive way, it might be useful to organise environmental policy review meetings involving leading stakeholders in each region of the world in the years between UNEA meetings with a key objective to identify issues that are ripe for international action, and to focus wider attention and debate upon them.

Such meetings might usefully take as a starting point the results of the latest global assessments or other major reports on the environment. They could help to draw out the key messages and challenges for action arising from such reports, and discuss how to bring these challenges onto the active political agenda. In 2017 or 2018 it might for example be appropriate to take the forthcoming GEO 6 report as the starting point for consideration by the regional meetings suggested.

The results of the regional meetings might then be drawn together in a culminating Global Environmental Meeting (GEM) intended to worldwide attention to key environmental priorities, challenges and opportunities that are ripe for international attention and action. Such a meeting should have something of the character of an intersessional meeting between UNEA meetings, but more informally structured without negotiations so as to allow stakeholder input to play a larger part.

Such a meeting could then play an important part in helping to identify key issues to be addressed at the UNEA meeting in the following year, and also in preparing the new Programme of Work when such discussion is relevant. This could lead to more intense engagement on those issues with relevant stakeholders in the preparatory process for the UNEA meetings during the following 12 months. Stakeholders need to be involved both in building global awareness of the problems, and in the elaboration of possible solutions and building political support for them.

Discussions in the margins of the regional meetings and GEM could seek to identify which stakeholders have the willingness, capability and capacity to work at international level with UNEP on jointly agreed high priorities over the following 12 months, and how and where necessary resources could best be mobilised to enable them to do so effectively.

Sometimes the environmental issues identified for attention at the GEM meeting may also need to be addressed at other international fora as well as at UNEP and UNEA. The GEM meeting could then provide a good opportunity for working out the most effective way to take up these issues in the relevant fora, and how stakeholders might most effectively work with UNEP to press the environmental concerns in those arenas.

The outcome of the regional meetings and the GEM meeting should feed both into UNEP's ongoing programme of work and into the preparatory work of the CPR for the UNEA gathering the following year and in particular into the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, OECPR, which functions as a preparatory meeting for UNEA. If the key topics for attention identified in the regional meetings and the GEM attract sufficient support within UNEP and amongst governments further analytical work by UNEP may be needed. Working Parties may need to be formed to examine particular aspects.

If the agenda setting process has worked well clusters of interested stakeholders will already begin to emerge around the key topics selected for the active agenda. They will naturally wish to participate in and contribute to the deeper analyses and discussions that are involved in working a topic of concern up to the point of formulating specific proposals for action. And UNEP and governments will no doubt want to draw on the knowledge, experience and political vitality that stakeholders can contribute during this process.

Ch 3. OILING THE WHEELS. Support services for enhanced stakeholder engagement

Role of UNEP secretariat to support engagement.

Effective stakeholder engagement with UNEP and UNEA cannot happen by itself. It requires strong commitment and leadership from the Executive Director and throughout the secretariat. There need to be strong and well-resourced units both at Headquarters and in the regions dedicated to nurturing productive relationships with the stakeholder community and ensuring that appropriate and resourced opportunities are built into the cycles of UNEP and UNEA work to enable effective engagement can take place.

UNEP work takes place continuously at its Headquarters, in its regional offices, and in its various specialised offices and contributing centres, and involves an enormous range of contacts, partnerships and other interactions with Member States and with a very wide range of stakeholders in many parts of the world. Governments keep in regular contact with the work of UNEP and with each other through the work of their Permanent Representatives (PRs) in Nairobi who meet frequently in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to discuss UNEP's work and sometimes to negotiate intergovernmental agreements or to develop other forms of concerted action on the environment.

Stakeholder engagement with UNEP and its work needs to reflect and interact with the whole of this complex structure of activity. Stakeholder participation at UNEA meetings can only be fully effective and achieve significant impact if it is based on a thorough and well-informed interaction with UNEP and Member States during the whole two-year cycle and particularly in the preparatory processes that leads up to UNEA meetings. Stakeholder engagement at UNEA meetings also needs to take account of the experience of stakeholder engagement at local, national and regional level, and the stakeholder concerns that have arisen at those levels that need attention at international level.

In order to address these problems it is clearly necessary to review the whole cycle of stakeholder engagement with UNEP's work. Strengthening GMGSF cannot be considered as an objective by itself. It can only be effective if it is made part of a broader partnership effort between UNEP, its Member States and the world's stakeholder community to improve the stakeholder engagement processes and practices in relation to the whole of UNEP's work and throughout the whole of each two-year cycle of UNEP and the CPR's work leading up to UNEA.

Given the physical difficulties and expense of physical access to Nairobi maximum use needs to be made of modern communications technology to facilitate engagement at a distance when physical meetings are impossible. These practical problems also reinforce the case for making the best use of smaller more accessible regional meetings for some of the engagement processes.

Moreover, any drive to enhance stakeholder engagement with UNEP must be appropriately funded and resourced. For many stakeholders, a trip to Nairobi is desirable but unfeasible due to shrinking budgets and funding sources. Stakeholders often list financing as a primary barrier to greater engagement in international fora.

A Calendar for Stakeholder Engagement

It is important to establish a clear timetable and identify engagement opportunities for each of these stages at the outset since stakeholders intending to engage seriously with the UNEP agenda or parts of it need themselves to be able to plan their work ahead and be ready to make significant contributions at the appropriate stages. In order to enable effective arrangements for stakeholder engagement to be put in place on the main active agenda it would be desirable for UNEP to establish a stakeholder engagement calendar based on the Programme of Work (POW) running at least two years forward from one UNEA to the next. This would highlight the key points in the cycle at which agendas will be determined, when preparatory work of different kinds will be undertaken on the different topics, and where stakeholder input and participation would be most useful and welcome. The calendar would be helpful to stakeholders in planning their own work, and to UNEP itself in reminding them when and where they need to be proactively seeking out the some of the most important stakeholders to engage with on particular issues.

Ideally the timetable should also include references to the timetables of other international bodies where significant environmental issues will arise so that the relationship of UNEP's work to those other bodies, and the way in which stakeholder engagement with those bodies can best relate to their interaction with UNEP can also be considered at the same time. The timetable should also include the timing for the regular cycles of regional meetings, and how and when stakeholder should have opportunities to feed into these processes.

The Major Groups and other stakeholders should be invited to contribute to this forward planning exercise by the units engaged in creating and reviewing the POW so that they can indicate on what topics they will wish to be active participants and have contributions to make and can try to ensure that sufficient time is allowed at the different stages for their own consultative and deliberative processes to operate on realistic timetables to enable them to bring well considered and informed input to bear at the appropriate times. The Major Groups and other stakeholders could then more confidently make their own forward plans for engagement with UNEP, establish arrangements for collaboration with other stakeholders, and identify where they may need to seek additional financial support in order to optimise their contribution.

Role of Major Groups and their representatives.

The Major Groups and their representatives have a crucial responsibility for supporting and co-ordinating stakeholder engagement. They need to work with UNEP and the CPR on activities described above to help expand outreach, interest and engagement amongst their members.

The Major Groups Organising Partners (OPs) have many difficult balancing acts to perform. They have to maintain good relations with all members of their own Major Group, encouraging engagement with UNEP's work by all who have something to contribute or to learn in an open, transparent and balanced way. At the same time, they have to ensure that attention is given to those of their members who have the most well-developed and supported positions, or to those who have the most creative or implementable solutions to offer. They must maintain good relations with the other Major Groups, defending the positions and rights of their own members, while also recognising that not all subjects are of equal interest and concern to all Major Groups so that sometimes it may be appropriate to let other groups take a more leading role, and more time or space on time- or space-limited occasions.

Since UNEP Headquarters is in Nairobi, and the ongoing oversight of its work lies with the CPR it is highly desirable that the Major Groups should either have their own organising partners in Nairobi to keep in touch with progress regularly (or to make arrangements for another Nairobi-based

organisation to play that role on their behalf in relation to UNEP work). Given the crucial importance of this role, NEP may wish to consider if they could facilitate adequate Major Group representation in Nairobi in an appropriate way.

The role of Member States

Most member states claim to support stakeholder engagement in principle. But it is embarrassing that UNEA 2 failed to carry this through into a formal resolution about the modalities for engagement and participation. This needs to be put right at the next opportunity.

Commitment in principle also needs to be carried through into whole-hearted commitment in practice. Member states need to be ready and willing at both Ministerial and official level to interact seriously with stakeholders in order to get the most out of the contributions they can make.

Member states also need to ensure that engagement is adequately resourced. A significant engagement process on the lines described in this paper cannot be delivered on a shoestring. The modest level of resources currently committed by the UNEP secretariat to supporting the engagement process are not adequate to support a significant engagement process and have themselves contributed to the current low level of engagement and to some disenchantment amongst the major groups and other stakeholders. If UNEP and Member States believe in the value of a stronger engagement process they will have to commit substantial resources to rebuilding the capacity of the secretariat to support the process, and to support the work of some of the Major Group Organising Partners (OPs) that do not have sufficient resources of their own to draw on for this task.

Conclusions

With the new UNEP and UNEA, and with the 2030 Agenda in place, a new chapter has been opened for work on environmental issues. In many ways this is well reflected in the Medium-Term Strategy adopted by UNEA 2. There is a need for UNEA and UNEP to adjust their practices to the new world of responsibilities for the environmental aspects of the SDGs. This short paper has made a number of suggestions about how this engagement could be developed further towards UNEA3 and beyond. It should be regarded as a complement to the deeper analysis and more extensive recommendations in the longer “Quo Vadis UNEP” report by Mr Strandenaes which is being submitted to UNEP simultaneously.