

Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to UNEP
Subcommittee meeting
Thursday, 18 May 2017

Briefing note on international environmental governance

Introduction

1. The landmark *UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)* held in Brazil in June 2012 has redefined the global governance system for sustainable development through its outcome document “The future we want”, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 66/288. Part of this redefined governance system involved the establishment of the *High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)* to replace the *Commission on Sustainable Development* and strengthening of the UN Environment as the leading global environmental authority by, among others, upgrading its governing body to the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) with universal membership.¹
2. “The future we want” paved the way for the inclusive intergovernmental process that led to the adoption of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* in September 2015. While some Goals related directly to the environment,² others contain a strong environmental dimension, without which their full achievement would not be possible.
3. Within this new governance landscape for sustainable development, renewed discussion is necessary on what roles the UN Environment and its governing body should play vis-à-vis HLPF and other relevant intergovernmental processes in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It is also timely to review, five years after Rio+20, whether the UN Environment and UNEA meet up to the expectations set by world leaders in bringing the environmental agenda to the forefront of international politics and public consciousness.

Progress

4. On the occasion of HLPF in July 2016, the UN Environment organized a side event and an experts’ workshop in New York, entitled “Achieving environmental sustainability for sustainable development”. The objectives of these events were to assess where UN Environment and UNEA stood as institutions responsible for effectively delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and for shaping international environmental governance, particularly in the context of various actors within the UN system.

¹ The UN Environment Assembly replaced the Governing Council, which was established by the UN General Assembly 2997 (XXVII) in 1972 and comprised of 58 members elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms.

² Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources
Goal 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

5. The events provided the following condensed thought-starters for further strengthening the UN Environment and UNEA as key advocates for the environment:
 - a) Prioritize the implementation of resolutions adopted at UNEA through concrete national and regional level activities in partnership, where possible, with Ministries other than Ministries of Environment, regional economic commissions and other UN entities;
 - b) Identify environmental nexus issues that would bring development gains in other areas (e.g. health and environment, food security and environment, etc), especially in countries where pure environmental concerns are not prioritized;
 - c) Enhance the interface between UNEA and multilateral environmental agreements, by, for example, having the latter report to HLPF through UNEA and inviting their representatives to periodically brief the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR), which is an intersessional subsidiary organ of UNEA;
 - d) Consider organizing UNEA sessions in other geographical locations, in a format that attracts high-level participation and produces tangible messages that resonate in other high-level platforms.
 - e) Play a more active role as environmental norm-setter within the UN system through the Environment Management Group;
 - f) Align the membership between UNEA (193 UN Member States) and CPR (118 members) to enhance communication between the two bodies.

6. The Government of Switzerland plans to provide an opportunity to carry on the discussion of these and other pertinent issues at a *Workshop on International Environmental Governance* to be convened in Glion from 20 to 22 June 2017, with the participation of Government delegates and representatives of the UN Environment and multilateral environmental agreement secretariats.

Way forward

7. UN Environment expects to continue interacting with Member States and interested stakeholders to find ways to meaningfully position itself in the sustainable development governance architecture vis-à-vis the HLPF (convened by the UN Economic and Social Council), regional environmental ministerial fora, multilateral environmental agreements and other relevant entities.

8. As one step forward, the Secretariat made a proposal for a side event on environmental governance in response to the call made by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs for side events to be organized in the margins of the forthcoming HLPF, to be held in New York from 10 to 19 July 2017.

9. Through the present briefing, CPR is invited to share their views on the way forward in reinforcing the role of UN Environment as the key player in international environmental governance. It is also worth considering ways to enhance the internal governance of UNEP governing bodies – UNEA and CPR – by clarifying the respective roles of the UNEA Bureau, CPR and the CPR Bureau, possibly by amending the rules of procedure. It is also important to finalize the new stakeholder engagement policy and develop innovative strategies for engaging the UN Environment National Committees, which can prove to be essential partners in carrying out the work of UN Environment at the national level.