

# Preliminary report of the Survey on Models and Mechanisms of Civil Society Participation in UNEP

*7 December 2012 –9 January 2013*

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## Executive Summary

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### Chapters 1 and 2: Institutional arrangements for MGS participation

#### Directions for improved MGS representation at both policy and programmatic level

The majority of survey respondents were of the opinion that MGS participation within UNEP's work at both policy and programmatic level is especially vital for influencing decision-making through advocacy; facilitating the voices of MGS on the environment at national, regional and global levels; and providing expert input into decision-making processes. To fulfill these and other objectives, most of the respondents would welcome the establishment of a permanent body that allows for more effective MGS engagement. This body should, according to a majority of survey participants, have both representative and advisory functions.

The survey results do not specifically bring forward one particular UN or multilateral institution/body that could serve as a best practice example for effective MGS participation to be adopted by UNEP. However, respondents did list requirements that they consider essential for the effective functioning of such a body. They recommended that the body needs to include grassroots organizations and other constituencies beyond the conventional nine MGs and have links to the regional level or regional representation. In terms of legitimacy and transparency, the body should feature MGS representatives (members) that have strong links with their constituencies and that are transparently elected/endorsed by MGS. Moreover, the body should have clearly defined rules and procedures and have an impact on decision-making processes within UNEP.

#### Evaluation of current engagement mechanisms at UNEP

Participants were requested to rate the legitimacy and effectiveness of MGS representation within existing UNEP mechanisms, such as the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, the Regional Consultative Meetings and Regional Representatives and the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum. The majority of respondents rated the effectiveness of such mechanisms as fair, good or even excellent. However, despite what seems to be overall satisfaction, various weaknesses were identified and therefore recommendations were made to improve these mechanisms. The latter mainly related to the elements listed above (transparency, legitimacy, inclusiveness, effectiveness, etc.).

In terms of weaknesses, respondents highlighted that various engagement mechanisms were too focused on a particular event or meeting (e.g. the Governing Council), thereby neglecting opportunities for engagement throughout the year. They were also of the opinion that UNEP is not taking sufficient advantage of information technology (IT) and providing funds for enhancing MGS participation opportunities and capacity-building activities. Moreover, they perceived the communication processes within the MGs system as inefficient, affecting the system's overall transparency.

## Chapter 3: Rules and procedures for MGS participation in UNEP's work

### The status, the accreditation system and the selection process of MGS

The survey clearly shows that MGS would like to have more influence in UNEP's decision-making processes. The overall majority of survey participants called for MGS to receive full participation and engagement rights, including voting rights, in all relevant UNEP bodies and committees. To a much lesser extent, participants were inclined to welcome full participation *without* voting rights.

Currently, to participate in UNEP's governing bodies, Major Groups need to be accredited with UNEP. To improve the accreditation system, participants were requested to indicate what they would consider necessary criteria for future accreditation of MGS. The majority of respondents were of the opinion that one of the main criteria should be that MGS actively work in the field of sustainable development. In order of frequency, other criteria mentioned by a majority of respondents were: each organization applying for accreditation should have at least two years of existence; work mainly in the environment field; and have demonstrated interest in supporting UNEP's objectives.

Concerning the process for selecting MGS representatives (e.g. for a permanent body), respondents were split between having a formal, transparent election by all UNEP accredited organizations within each Major Group, or having a selection process within each Major Group, with modalities transparently defined by the respective Major Group.

### Regional representation

A vast majority of respondents would welcome the establishment of regional MGS bodies tasked with advising and working closely with UNEP's Regional Offices. As some respondents explained, this could improve UNEP's outreach to MGS; better reflect local realities; and improve the preparation of Regional Consultative Meetings (RCMs). Opponents of such bodies fear that they would bring additional costs or an overrepresentation of the bigger groups (see Chapter 2).

Concerning regional representation at the global level, a majority of the respondents suggested having nine regional representatives (one per Major Group) for each region (adding up to 54 regional representatives for the six UNEP regions). A smaller number of respondents preferred the option of having two regional representatives representing all accredited MGS organizations of a particular region (adding up to 12 regional representatives for the six UNEP regions).

## Chapter 4: Access to information and information disclosure policies in UNEP

### Access to information

In terms of access to information, the survey shows the imperativeness of providing easily accessible, relevant, accurate and timely information. The majority of survey participants rate their current access to and the timeliness of UNEP information as fair to good, and especially show an interest in written information, such as draft Governing Council documents.

Despite overall satisfaction, recommendations were made to enhance MGS access to information, including: creating practical guidebooks on how UNEP's sectoral/thematic reports are elaborated; using adequate information channels more frequently; customizing and extending information to and beyond target audiences; and providing better access to regional office documentation. It was also suggested that UNEP should make all information publically available, except for information that involves personal matters, high security risks or third party privacy.

### **Appeals process and disclosure policies**

For the sake of accountability, transparency, fairness, inclusiveness, and for upholding the right to information and the freedom of expression, a large majority of survey respondents support the establishment of an appeals process that would make it possible to request information that UNEP has committed to publish, but has not yet made publically available. Prior to such a process, however, some respondents recommended the elaboration of a transparency policy to institutionalize the principle within UNEP's work. It was also recommended that a civil society representative should be sitting within such a body. Some voiced caution concerning unnecessary bureaucracy and the time-consuming nature of such an appeals process.

With a few exceptions, the majority of respondents could not identify any satisfactory public information/disclosure policies within other institutions. Some identified processes that they appreciated most, but cautioned that even those processes could be improved. Although UNEP can learn from other processes, it was emphasized that UNEP is expected to not only adopt best practices already in use in other processes, but also to set a new benchmark as an inclusive process.

Respondents further acknowledged that access to information is only half the challenge, as they perceived it as next to worthless without adequate and equal participation.

## **Chapter 5: The Nine Major Groups Concept**

### **Evaluation of the Major Groups concept**

The majority of survey respondents was satisfied with the Nine Major Groups concept. In their view, it supports fair and inclusive decision-making and representation; channels very diverse civil society views; and acknowledges the indispensable role and valuable ideas of MGS in deliberations, analysis, policy formation and implementation, advocacy, and in operational activities. However, some argue that many stakeholders do not feel represented or feel underrepresented. They feel that the concept has brought some level of rigidity and/or not enough relevant participation opportunities. There is a clear call for more regional and thematic expertise and voices; as well as for more transparency within each Group, especially in terms of membership, the diffusion of information, mobilization, decision-making (including on funding), and in the selection and operations of facilitation committees. Other concerns are overlap (some organizations fit various MGs); insufficient assistance to civil society from developing countries; insufficient respect for diversity; and a weak link with the local level.

Finally, some respondents would like to exclude MG organizations that do not adequately support the principles of the UN Charter; as well as separate the private sector (business and industry) from broader civil society, especially those that do not adhere to environmental (inter)national legislation.

## **Approaches that best facilitate participation**

The Government-Private Sector-NGOs approach was perceived by many as the best option to facilitate participation of civil society and the private sector in UN institutions. The particular approach was considered to foster public and private partnerships. However, some respondents expressed concern over giving the private sector the same voice as civil society organizations.

Many respondents considered the Nine Major Groups approach (the second most selected answer category) to be a more inclusive approach that provides space for more perspectives and acknowledges the different roles that civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders play. It has the potential to enhance the scope and scale of UNEP's work and increase civil society representation. However, respondents warned that in order for the approach to evolve, mechanisms to prevent a few groups from monopolizing the process should be established.

According to respondents, one option to involve and facilitate interaction with organizations and groups that do not fit under the Nine MGs classification in UNEP's work is to establish additional Major Groups categories, provided there is evidence of their long-term and sustained input.

Other options include common themes among these groups or organizing these groups around thematic issues; involving thematic experts as consultants and independent experts for specific tasks; creating (web-supported) multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms or fora; and adopting a more open approach that differentiates between granting opportunities the MGs and to individual organizations.

## **Chapter 6: Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in UNEP's work**

### **Evaluation of the participation opportunities and experience in UNEP's work**

The majority of respondents rated current opportunities for MGS participation in UNEP's work – both at programmatic and at the regional level – as fair or better. Those who rated it as bad considered that they were hardly informed and consulted by UNEP and have no real opportunities to provide input.

Concerning the experience of respondents in engaging in project implementation and partnerships with UNEP, a majority of survey respondents either did not respond to this question, or stated that they had no or hardly any experience in terms of project implementation or partnerships. However, many did indicate their willingness to collaborate more with UNEP in the future. Among those survey respondents that have some experience in engaging with UNEP, the extent of engagement and the type of partnerships established varied. Various organizations indicated that their experience with UNEP has been good, but some cautioned that they have experienced different results in collaboration, depending on the project and division they collaborated with within UNEP.

## Chapter 7: Major Groups involvement in UNEP through modern information technologies

### Online participation versus physical presence

On the question whether participation through modern ICT can replace the physical presence of MGS in relevant meetings or formal processes within UNEP, the respondents were mainly divided in two corners. Many respondents underscored the need to have a combination of both forms of participation. Arguments in favour of replacement by ICT included the fact that online participation would increase work effectiveness, save time, reduce financial and environmental costs, while guaranteeing sufficient participation and engagement. Arguments against emphasized that face-to-face meetings are more effective in facilitating the exchange of a diversity of views, discussions and decision-making; give more confidence to participants; and allow for better accountability in terms of participants' implementation commitments. Various respondents also emphasized that replacing physical participation by online participation would exclude and marginalize many groups and individuals that do not have proper access to modern ICT.

### Best practices in the use of modern ICT

Respondents identified specific tools to facilitate public participation and information sharing which include the use of e-mail and listservs, newsletters, Internet/websites, (mobile) telephones, tele- and videoconferencing, fax, cloud and supercomputing, social media and also e-learning, online platforms, online consultations and surveys, webinars, etc. For concrete examples of best practices in the use of modern ICT, see Chapter 7 of the report.

This is the Executive summary of the report which presents the results of the survey that was conducted by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) on the Models and Mechanisms of Civil Society Participation in UNEP between 7 December 2012 and 9 January 2013. The report does not claim to be representative of the views of all parts of civil society, and does not attempt to do so. It represents the views of the respondents to the survey. The opinions, figures and estimates set forth in this report are not the responsibility of the authors, and should not be considered as reflecting the views and policies or carrying the endorsement of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS).