

## THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY 2017: SUMMARY OF A SURVEY AMONG PARTICIPATING MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS

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The third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly attracted a large participation from Civil Society. The theme of the Assembly, “Towards a Pollution-free Planet” resonated with a wide audience who wanted to share their views on the matter and how their constituents are affected by pollution.

Following the Assembly, UN Environment sent an electronic survey to Major Groups and Stakeholders participants requesting for their feedback and recommendations on the Assembly, its associated meetings and events and included questions on communication, logistics, and registration portals as well as on the substantive themes of the Assembly and suggestions towards the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. 135 individual responses were received.

Responses from Civil Society participants who attended the Assembly mainly came from non-accredited organisations with 63% and accredited organisations with 36%. Respondents came from Africa (52%), Europe and the Asia Pacific (13%), West Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean (3%) and North America (2%). 53% of respondents were male while 43% were female.

### Preparatory-United Nations Environment Assembly Meetings

Concerns addressed include:

- Time allocated for meetings was insufficient and not utilized in an efficient manner;
- Engagement with Civil Society Organizations needs to be enhanced; youth and most vulnerable groups’ participation needs to be increased; need for more financial support.
- Focus on topics under discussion in future Environment Assemblies should not focus on one only,, majority of responses expressed concern on discussion of one subtopic under the theme of the Environment Assembly and not able to discuss other subtopics under the respective theme.
- Need for local expertise to be shared and evidence-based grass-root experience from communities to be increased.

### Committee of Permanent Representatives on the way to UN Environment Assembly

Concerns addressed include:

- Effectiveness of the participation of Major Groups in the Committee of Permanent Representatives Meetings was questioned.

Some of the reasons given include:

- Limited opportunity for active contribution and interventions during the Committee of Permanent Representatives by Civil society participants; and the Chair not giving Civil Society the opportunities to take the floor to comment in a flexible manner.

- Though, their participation was considered relative as they are kept abreast on the state and direction of resolution negotiations undertaken by Member States.

## **Communication and Outreach:**

Concerns addressed include:

- The difficult accessibility of the website, slow updating of resolutions and lack of reaction or response to comments from Major Groups made on official draft documents and resolutions. Also, respondents questioned if received comments were taken into consideration by the Secretariat and the Committee of Permanent Representatives. On communication strategies, less than 50% of the respondents considered the platforms and websites useful
- A majority complained that the UN Environment and Environment Assembly webpages were confusing and relevant information hard to find.

## **Registration**

- Over 50% of responses received found the registration platform as too complicated and tiresome. Assistance was often needed either online or at the Main registration desk by the Main Entrance.
- Some of the problems they faced include: poor network connection and slow system, uploading of correct picture, slow approval of non-accredited organisations, lack of registration confirmation, need for a new email and password for each participant and wrong colour-coded badges given to participants.

## **United Nations Environment Assembly 2017 Sessions and Events**

- Comments were raised on lack of active engagement of Civil Society during the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representative session.
- With regard to sessions/events taking place during the Assembly, 15% expressed concern on the strong focus on private sector and not the same attention being accorded to Civil Society. Of this, the Science Policy and Business Forum and the Sustainable Innovation Expo were commented as being too business-oriented and not enough oriented towards sustainable development.
- Concern on the gender imbalance in many side events was raised.
- For the Global Major Groups and Stakeholder Forum, it was commented that sessions were at times too formal and not interactive enough. With the Leadership Dialogues, a comment was made on lack of no real discussion and that it was pre-scripted and lack of space for questions and dialogue
- With the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue, over 50% of comments received found that it was well set-up and informative. However, complaints on participation were made as not many were able to attend due to too many parallel events taking place at the same time which compromised on a broad participation.

## **Overall Evaluation**

- Security was seen to be well organized and adequate. However, concerns were raised on prevalent incidences of theft.
- On the role mandate and responsibilities of the Major Groups Representatives from the Major Groups Facilitating Committee and the Regional representatives, responses varied as some found respective representatives as superb, excellent and organized while others saw that there was uneven performance by different representatives and there is room to improve.
- On Greening the UN, participants were pleased with the initiative taken by UN Environment to have a paper-smart event but commented on the need to reduce the use of plastic during the Assembly.

- On carbon-footprint, a participant requested for information on how it was offset during the 2017 Environment Assembly.

## Suggested Themes for the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

Some of the suggested themes included:

- Water and the Environment
- Sustainable Consumption and Production
- Biodiversity
- Global action on degradation of nature ecosystems and biodiversity
- Water, climate change and Sustainable Development Goals
- Oceanic issues
- Education as suggested by a respondent from the Children and Youth Major Group
- Building sustainable livelihoods
- Food Security
- Health impacts on climate change
- Governance on natural resource management
- Impact of conflict on the environment
- Technological impact on the environment
- Urban Farming and Clean Air in cities
- Citizen Science as an essential requirement for delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals

## Recommendations

<b>Regional Consultative Meetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More break-out sessions and small group discussions with short presentations to be presented during plenary</li> </ul>
<b>Committee of Permanent Representatives Consultative Meetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UN Environment to make more efforts to promote civil society engagement as they have substantial contributions to offer</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better social media strategy to actively engage the public especially the youth</li> <li>• UN Environment app to be updated and easier to use</li> <li>• Make registration process easy to understand</li> <li>• Improve accessibility of relevant meeting documents on the website/app</li> </ul>
<b>Morning meetings organized by the Major Groups Facilitating Committee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A report-back from the day on all meetings and contentious issues of the day should be informed on relevant UN Environment Staff or Civil Society Delegate</li> </ul>
<b>Civil Society Tent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for more space</li> <li>• Need for a diversity of delegates attending civil society side events to include Government delegates Also, a call for governments to organize side events that involve civil society</li> </ul>
<b>Commitments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep track on voluntary commitments from Governments and Stakeholders and how to robustly improve working together on the commitments</li> </ul>