Key Messages from North American Major Groups and Stakeholders Consultation

In preparation for the 15th UNEP Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF) and the First Universal Session of the UNEP United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)

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In addition to broader concerns regarding a sustainable future, the two main themes for the Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS) consultation were integrating environmental sustainability into the post-2015 development agenda and improving stakeholder engagement within UNEP.

Key points raised by participants at the Consultation are enumerated below.

These key messages reflect areas of general consensus. However, the various groups present do not necessarily endorse every conclusion.

Integrating Environmental Sustainability into the Post-2015 Agenda

Discussions on this theme revolved around the development of a new sustainability narrative. Urgency is central to the new narrative, stemming from the need to accept the physical limits to the Earth's carrying capacity. Environmental sustainability requires a global response. The new narrative should be relatable to all geographies, cultures and circumstances.

Integrating environmental sustainability into the post-2015 agenda requires an overarching narrative framework into which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are placed, and which can be used to guide the development of programs for their implementation. In an effort to limit the overall goals to a manageable number, the SDGs should feature a layered approach to the post-2015 development agenda. Environmental sustainability should be woven throughout the goals, with targets, metrics and indicators that are grounded in accepted science.

This framework should include:
- An emphasis on a rights-based approach, with a focus on human rights, but including other forms of rights, such as an intrinsic right to life for other species in their own habitat;
- An emphasis on universal responsibilities, acknowledging that sustainability will need to accommodate development in emerging economies;
- An emphasis on social and cultural values, meaning that while we are aware of economic and institutional dynamics, the post-2105 agenda is not driven by them;
- An emphasis on inclusion;
- An emphasis on well-being, which includes, but goes beyond, material well-being;

Other issues raised included ensuring that environmental sustainability was also embedded in the multilateral trade agreements that are outside the framework of UNEP, the SDGs and the post-2015 agenda.

There should be an SDG on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) with the 10 Year Framework of Programmes (10YFP) on SCP framed as the means for implementation.

Improving Stakeholder Engagement in UNEP

UNEP should seek to broaden its stakeholder engagement beyond the nine Major Groups to increase the diversity of expertise and potentially include additional sectors. UNEP should revisit the rules for accreditation and change the requirements to allow national and regional groups.

There was concern that the eleven Principles of Stakeholder Engagement drafted and approved at the 14th GMGSF were not entirely reflected in the new proposed policy.

The Regional Offices of UNEP should also expand civil society presence and participation, recognizing that civil society organizations have a responsibility to develop their own means to be present and to participate.

A civil society/MGS presence in Nairobi is necessary in order to participate fully in the work of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) on an ongoing basis. While distance technology enables some participation, physical presence is crucial in order to facilitate agenda setting as well as participation in the decisions of the CPR. UNEP should regularly inform and update civil society organizations with issues appearing before the CPR, so that those most affected have sufficient lead-time to make representations on their behalf.

Finally, civil society should be allowed and encouraged to self-organize into issues-based and regional caucuses in order to provide more focused civil society contributions to specific deliberations.