



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente
Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

联合国环境规划署



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Key Messages from North American Civil Society

Key points raised by participants in the UNEP North American Civil Society Consultation are enumerated below, structured under the following themes:

- a) International Environmental Governance (IEG),
- b) The Green Economy,
- c) The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

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

With respect to International Environmental Governance (IEG)

- **Civil society engagement in defining and participating in IEG**

Civil society plays a critical role in environmental governance at all levels. Although an Advisory Group on IEG was created in 2010 (following the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environmental Forum in February 2010 in Bali), many discussions continued to be conducted behind closed doors and did not benefit from the substantive input, resources and legitimacy which civil society actors can contribute. Civil society's representation and participation in the international environmental governance process, including in meetings of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance, should be assured.

Participants in the North American civil society consultation call on governments to adopt the following principle in relation to IEG:

“Transparency, public participation and accountability are foundational and essential elements of sound environmental governance, both at the international and domestic levels, and must be fully incorporated and realized in environmental governance systems”

- **Creation of a Forum for Dialogue on Environmental Governance Institutional Reforms**

A forum to enable dialogue including civil society should be created to facilitate information sharing, analysis and discussion on environmental governance institutional reforms.

Discussions about function (i.e., how to create an effective global environmental governance system) should precede discussions about form (i.e., whether to enhance UNEP, create a World Environment Organization, or pursue an alternative institutional arrangement). The goal is to improve global environmental protection through strengthening the role of environmental institutions and overcoming fragmentation and lack of coordination.

- **Increasing contributions to UNEP's funding base**

Regardless of the form of institutional enhancements, countries should increase contributions to UNEP as the organization's funding is currently woefully inadequate for it to fulfill its mandate.

Prioritize transparency, public participation and accountability in IEG through information sharing and an Environmental Mediation Program UNEP should develop an explicit policy on access to information as a tool for ensuring participation and engagement of civil society in its work. This policy should include provisions for providing information proactively without a request in appropriate languages and it should be made publically available.

A system should be put in place to allow for environmental complaints to be lodged, such as those found in the international trade and human rights regimes. UNEP should establish an Environmental Mediation Program to help prevent environmentally related conflicts within and between nations.

UNEP should explicitly focus on engaging academia – students and faculty alike – in developing new and innovative ideas and implementation mechanisms for international environmental governance.

- **Monitor country commitments**

UNEP should have a role in monitoring country commitments.

With respect to Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and the Green Economy

- **Defining the Green Economy**

UNEP can facilitate clarifying definitions of and guiding principles for the green economy in consultation with stakeholders including civil society and the business community, to reduce the danger that “green economy” be perceived as green-washing. Guiding principles would be used to assist in the development of definitions for “green economy” that are regionally appropriate, but common in their themes and orientations. These definitions could also identify how a transition to a green economy ties into advancing sustainable consumption and production patterns.

- **Identify a Roadmap for Guiding the Transition to a Green Economy including a Gap Analysis**

UNEP should develop a roadmap guiding the transition to a green economy, with recommended metrics and a baseline for measuring progress. This also requires undertaking a “gap analysis” to further understanding of what is needed – in terms of research, human

and financial resources, policies, institutions, models, and other areas – to achieve a green economy.

- **Facilitating the Role of Civil Society in SCP and the Green Economy**

Facilitate the role and contribution of CSOs in the transition to SCP and a green economy. Suggested initiatives would include: a global directory of CSOs active in the development of SCP and a green economy, the creation of a global forum through which SCP and green economy research, models and experiences could be shared and communicated, and capacity-building programs to empower CSO action. Civil society, for its part, should develop a statement on the green economy, organize itself, and create action programs, e.g. an annual celebration of a Low-Carbon Lifestyle Day.

- **Establish a Green Economy Working Group for Civil Society**

UNEP should support development of a civil society working group on the Green Economy as a consultative input mechanism and to involve civil society in each region in UNEP's work on this topic.

- **Develop Domestic Policy Frameworks on SCP and the Green Economy**

To accomplish a move toward the Green Economy countries need to develop a domestic policy framework, shape institutions to undertake it, as well as coordinate actions and create national sustainability strategies and a regional policy framework that includes better communication and cooperation.

- **UN leads by example in advancing SCP and the Green Economy**

The UN should lead by example in the actualization of SCP and a green economy. Suggested initiatives would include procurement by UNEP and the broader UN system through small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to promote the development of local markets and economies. UNEP RONA should promote and lead development of a North American Sustainability Plan.

With respect to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

- **Maintain a focus on all three objectives and two themes of the conference**

The official objectives are 1) Securing Political Commitment to Sustainable Development; 2) Assessing Progress Towards Internationally Agreed Commitments; and 3) New and Emerging Challenges; and the two themes are a) Green Economy in the context of Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development; and b) Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development.

- **Identifying and Supporting Specific Outcomes of the Conference**

Among possible outcomes of the conference could be adoption of specific measures to implement the green economy for sustainability (e.g., tax on financial transactions, new economic metrics beyond GDP, green accounting frameworks) and progress on governance (e.g., enhancing UNEP, clustering the international environmental conventions, transforming the UN's Trusteeship Council into a Sustainable Development Council, evaluation and

reporting on environmental sustainability, and national parliamentary action to implement environmental legislation).

Additionally, there is an opportunity to reignite the 'spirit of Rio', rebuild National Councils on Sustainable Development, and support Local Agenda 21 efforts. Other areas where action should be taken include sustainable tourism, specific activities on water, ethical considerations including animal welfare practices, toxic substances, persistent organic pollutants, remediation, habitat and species protection, fostering environmental literacy, and engagement of the business community.

Other steps might be further progress in implementing REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries), signing of a mercury protocol, endorsement of a Declaration of Mother Earth Rights, and consideration of conventions on access to information, public participation in decision making and access to justice in environmental matters, a forum for accountability for implementing agreements and actions, and corporate accountability.

- **Creation of a Global Implementation Movement**
Rio +20 provides a critical opportunity to ensure implementation of existing international environmental agreements and to build momentum for action.
- **Coordinate with other major international environmental fora planned for 2012**
Concerns regarding the proliferation of major international environmental meetings planned for 2012 could be ameliorated by demonstrable coordination of objectives and processes.