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# HANDBOOK FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AT UN ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction

For almost 50 years, civil society stakeholders have been key contributors to implementing the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment). UN Environment strives to ensure effective, broad and balanced participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders as they play a central role in providing expertise and relevant knowledge. They also channel the voices of those most likely to be directly affected by environmental matters and related policies, and call needed attention to emerging issues as they reach out to their respective communities and the public at large. Increased demand for civil society engagement is a direct outcome of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

The Rio+20 Outcome Document, “The Future We Want,” adopted in June 2012, agreed to take action on a number of far-reaching decisions towards a more equitable and sustainable world. In paragraph 88, Member States committed to strengthening the role of UN Environment as “(...) the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment,” while paragraph 88(h) requests UN Environment to “Ensure the active participation of all relevant stakeholders drawing on best practices and models from relevant multilateral institutions and exploring new mechanisms to promote transparency and the effective engagement of civil society.”

Rule 70 of the Rules of Procedure of the United Nations Environment Assembly (see below) refers to “International Non-Governmental Organizations,” reflecting the current practice in UN Environment, and, for the purposes of this Handbook, the term “Major Groups and Stakeholders” is used to address broader civil society actors and Civil Society and Major Groups and Stakeholders are therefore being used interchangeably. This practice is based on Governing Council decision SSVII.5 of 2002, which takes note of the following in its preamble: “for the purpose of this decision, civil society encompasses Major Groups, that are farmers, women, scientific and technological community, children and youth, indigenous people and their communities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, local authorities and non-governmental organizations.” The term “Major Group” is based on the definition provided in Agenda 21, which identified a set of non-state actors relevant to sustainable development (detailed in Section 2). In line with Paragraph 43 of the Rio + 20 outcome document “The Future We Want”, “stakeholders” may include local communities, volunteer groups and foundations, migrants and families, older persons, persons with disabilities and others.
Purpose and Scope of the Handbook

This Handbook aims to inform and guide Major Groups and Stakeholders by presenting in detail the currently applied rules, mechanisms and practices for Major Groups and Stakeholder’s engagement in UN Environment’s work. It is based on the Rules of Procedure of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme:

XIII. Observers of International Non-Governmental Organizations


1. International non-governmental organizations having an interest in the field of the environment, referred to in section IV, paragraph 5, of General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) from 15 December 1972, may designate representatives to sit as observers at public meetings of the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs, if any. The United Nations Environment Assembly shall from time to time adopt and revise when necessary a list of such organizations. Upon the invitation of the President or Chairperson, as the case may be, and subject to the approval of the United Nations Environment Assembly or of the subsidiary organ concerned, international non-governmental organizations may make oral statements on matters within the scope of their activities.

2. Written statements provided by international non-governmental organizations referred to in paragraph 1 above, related to items on the agenda of the United Nations Environment Assembly or of its subsidiary organs, shall be circulated by the Secretariat to members of the United Nations Environment Assembly or of the subsidiary organ concerned in the quantities and in the languages in which the statements were made available to the Secretariat for distribution.

The Handbook contains ten sections:

- **Section 1:** The United Nations Environment Assembly and Its Subsidiary Organs;
- **Section 2:** Engagement Approach;
- **Section 3:** Accreditation;
- **Section 4:** Participation in Agenda-Setting and Decision-Making Processes;
- **Section 5:** Access to Information;
- **Section 6:** Major Groups and Stakeholder’s Body – Spaces and Roles;
- **Section 7:** Expert Input and Advice, and Partnerships for Implementation;
- **Section 8:** Funding for Stakeholder Engagement at UN Environment;
- **Section 9:** Code of Conduct at Meetings Hosted by the UN; and
- **Section 10:** UN Environment’s Civil Society Unit.
SECTION 1:
The United Nations Environment Assembly (United Nations Environment Assembly) and Its Subsidiary Organs

Overview
Designated on 13 March 2013 by the resolution A/67/PV.67, the United Nations Environment Assembly is the governing body of UN Environment. The United Nations Environment Assembly sets the global environmental agenda and is mandated to take strategic decisions on environmental sustainability issues, particularly in terms of addressing emerging environmental challenges; to provide political guidance in the work of UN Environment; and to promote a strong science-policy interface. The UN Environment Assembly contributes substantively to intergovernmental processes and negotiations of the United Nations, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda. The Assembly has a subsidiary inter-sessional body, the Committee of Permanent Representatives, which discusses UN Environment’s latest activities and organizes Open-Ended Meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, annual subcommittees and subcommittee meetings, as well as briefings and thematic debates, held in public.
SECTION 1: The United Nations Environment Assembly and Its Subsidiary Organs

Background

The first universal session of UN Environment’s Governing Council was held in February 2013, representing an early step in implementing commitments made at Rio+20. The session also adopted a resolution endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 March 2013 (A/67/PV.67) to change the designation of UN Environment’s Governing Council to the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme.

UN Environment’s Governing Structure

The United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme

The United Nations Environment Assembly, with universal membership of 193 members, replaced the Governing Council (with 58 members) as the governing body of UN Environment. The Assembly sets the global environmental agenda and is mandated to take strategic decisions on environmental sustainability issues, particularly in terms of addressing emerging environmental challenges; provide political guidance in the work of UN Environment; and promote a strong science-policy interface. Supported by a geographically balanced 10-member Bureau, it meets biennially in Nairobi, in uneven years, and concludes with a two-day high-level segment. The first United Nations Environment Assembly session, held in June 2014, adopted 16 decisions and resolutions that encourage international action on major environmental issues.

The Assembly has formal links to the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, as well as an interface with the wider institutional framework for sustainable development, including interlinkages with the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development High-level Political Forum and the United Nations General Assembly through the Second Committee. The outcomes of the United Nations Environment Assembly are compiled into a report presenting proceedings, submitted to the Economic and Social Council, and the UN Environment Assembly President reports on the outcome of the Assembly to sessions of the High-level Political Forum. The Assembly can recommend draft resolutions for adoption at the UN General Assembly for UN system-wide implementation and contributes substantively to intergovernmental processes and negotiations of the United Nations, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda.

Preparation of the Assembly sessions is overseen by the United Nations Environment Assembly Bureau. In line with the relevant Rule of Procedure, it has ten members, aiming at equal representation.
of all regions. Members serve for two years and are elected during the first day of the Assembly.

Committee of Permanent Representatives

The Committee of Permanent Representatives is a subsidiary inter-sessional body of the United Nations Environment Assembly, composed of all accredited Permanent Representatives to UN Environment. It meets on a quarterly basis to discuss UN Environment’s latest activities and organizes briefings and thematic debates as necessary to consider particular issues in depth. It is overseen by the five-member Committee of Permanent Representatives Bureau,¹ which has representatives of all regions and is elected biennially by the Committee.

It performs the following functions:

- Contributes to the preparation of the agenda of its governing body;
- Provides advice to its governing body on policy matters;
- Prepares decisions for adoption by its governing body and oversees their implementation;
- Convenes thematic and/or programmatic debates;
- Promotes effective ways and means to facilitate participation of the non-resident members of the Committee; and
- Performs any other functions delegated to it by its governing body.

Open-ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

The Open-ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives functions as a preparatory meeting for the United Nations Environment Assembly, provides policy advice, contributes to the preparation of the agenda and decisions to be adopted by the Assembly, and oversees their implementation. The Open-ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives meets for a period of five days in Nairobi, prior to the United Nations Environment Assembly session. Capital-based delegates also participate in the Open-ended Meeting.

Subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

An annual subcommittee of Committee of Permanent Representatives meets for a period of five days annually in Nairobi to review the medium-term strategy and Programme of Work as well as Budget. Additional subcommittee meetings are organized on an as needed basis throughout the year and deal with specific issues, as announced in the Committee of Permanent Representatives calendar that is made available to accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders, and through the Committee website.

¹ Committee of Permanent Representative Bureau members are elected every two years on July 1.
Committee of Permanent Representatives briefings

Committee of Permanent Representatives briefings are organized as needed and in response to requests from Member States, with the goal of providing in-depth information on selected topics. They also provide an opportunity for participants, including Major Groups and Stakeholders to provide comments and share expertise, including through an improved online communication platform which provides an enhanced exchange for all stakeholders and hence adds transparency through increased participation.

Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in the above-mentioned bodies

In line with Paragraph 67 of the Rules of Procedure (see below), meetings of the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs the Committee of Permanent Representatives, its subcommittees, as well as Committee of Permanent Representatives briefings are held in public, allowing for the participation of accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders, unless decided otherwise by the Committee of Permanent Representatives. Major Groups and Stakeholders have the opportunity to provide written and oral input into these meetings. Through UN Environment’s Governance Affairs Office, accredited organizations receive relevant information and documents – on par with Member States.

Committee of Permanent Representatives Bureau and UN Environment

X. Public and Private Meetings

The meetings of the United Nations Environment Assembly, its sessional committees and working parties and subsidiary organs, if any, shall be held in public unless the body concerned decides otherwise. If possible, such proceedings shall be broadcast to the wider public through electronic means.
Assembly Bureau

The Committee of Permanent Representatives Bureau, as well as the United Nations Environment Assembly Bureau, may call for informal meetings with representatives of Major Groups and Stakeholders. Major Groups and Stakeholders can approach the Bureaus for such meetings through the Committee of Permanent Representatives Chair or the United Nations Environment Assembly President. More detailed information on the functioning of United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs, as well as opportunities for Major Groups and Stakeholders to participate in agenda-setting and decision-making processes of the United Nations Environment Assembly, is found in Section 4.
SECTION 2: Engagement Approach

Overview

The United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) strives to ensure effective, broad and balanced participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders (Major Groups and Stakeholders) as they play a central role in providing expertise and scientific knowledge, informing governments of local needs and opinions, as well as identifying the “on the ground“ realities of policy decisions.

Based upon guiding principles, UN Environment recognizes and engages with nine categories of stakeholders represented by not-for-profit and non-governmental organizations, namely Farmers; Women; Scientific and technological community; Children and Youth; Indigenous Peoples and their Communities; Workers and Trade Unions; Business and industry; Non-governmental Organizations; and Local Authorities.
Inclusive stakeholder engagement

The United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) strives to ensure effective, broad and balanced participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders as they play a central role in providing expertise and scientific knowledge, informing governments of local needs and opinions, as well as identifying the “on the ground” realities of policy decisions. Furthermore, stakeholder participation adds legitimacy to decisions taken at UN Environment.

Guiding principles for engagement

Since its inception, UN Environment has been guided by the following principles in terms of stakeholder engagement:

a. Acknowledgement of the intergovernmental nature of UN Environment processes: decision-making within UN Environment remains the prerogative of Member States;

b. Participation in decision-making processes: In line with the Rules of Procedures, UN Environment will grant participation and access privileges to all accredited stakeholders;

c. Access to information: acknowledging the critical importance of disseminating and making accessible information concerning UN Environment’s work or information generated through its programme as widely as possible, in line with its Access to Information Policy;

d. Transparency and accountability for mutual benefit: engagement with Major Groups and Stakeholders is based on the premise of mutual trust and benefit, transparency, responsibility and accountability;

e. Respect for diversity of views and self-organization: UN Environment acknowledges the diversity of views among its stakeholders and, in striving for greater openness and with a view to embracing the full spectrum of civil society actors, will ensure that those differing voices are heard, including those outside the nine Major Groups;

f. Improvements to current engagement practices: UN Environment will promote continuous improvement of its current practices.
The stakeholder categories

UN Environment applies the nine Major Groups approach (as outlined in Agenda 21), recognizing the following categories of stakeholders, represented by not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations:

The nine Major Groups

1. **Farmers**
   - including small-scale farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and foresters

2. **Women**

3. **Scientific and technological community**
   - including research and academia

4. **Children and Youth**

5. **Indigenous Peoples and their Communities**

6. **Workers and Trade Unions**

7. **Business and industry**

8. **Non-governmental Organizations**

9. **Local Authorities**
Other Stakeholders

Recognizing that since Agenda 21, the stakeholder landscape has become more diverse and in line with Paragraph 43 of “The Future We Want”, UN Environment cooperates also with non-governmental organizations that are not covered under the nine Major Groups, including foundations. For accreditation purposes these are however requested to accredit themselves under the NGO Major Group or under another of the nine Major Groups that is closest to their area of activity.

Engaging with the Private Sector

While private sector associations that are registered as NGOs are covered under the Business and Industry Major Group, UN Environment’s cooperation with individual companies is not covered under this Handbook. In 2017, UN Environment has established a dedicated Private Sector Unit responsible of engaging private sector entities into the work of UN Environment.
SECTION 3: Accreditation

Overview

For stakeholders to participate in the governance of the United Nations Environment Programme, they must be accredited to UN Environment. For engaging with UN Environment in project implementation or outside the governing bodies, accreditation is recommended but not mandatory. Non-governmental organizations must successfully meet the requirements of the accreditation process before being granted with observer status to the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs.
SECTION 3: Accreditation

Observer status to United Nation Environment Assembly

For stakeholders to participate in the work and governance of the United Nations Environment Programme, they must be accredited. The purpose of accreditation is to provide non-governmental organizations with observer status to the United Nations Environment Assembly, including its subsidiary organs, in line with Rule 70 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly. Organizations that are accredited to other UN Bodies, such as the Economic and Social Council, will still need UN Environment accreditation.

The process of accreditation

The criteria for accreditation are derived from Rule 70 of the Rules of Procedure of the United Nations Environment Assembly. In order to be granted accreditation, an organization needs to:

- Be a not-for-profit non-governmental organization with an international scope of work;
- Be a legal entity in at least one country;
- Have an interest in the field of environment and/or sustainable development;
- Be in existence for at least 2 years at the time of the application.

The process of accreditation includes:

- Submission of an application: An interested international Non-Governmental Organization needs to submit a set of required documents to the Governance Affairs Office through the Civil Society Unit electronically to unenvironment-accreditation@un.org.

These documents include:

- Letter requesting accreditation and signed by head of office.
- Copy of certified constitution, charter, statues, or by-laws with all certified amendments and a list of affiliated organizations and members.
- Copy of certificate of registration. The organization needs to have been in place, registered and operational for at least 2 years. If the organization is in a country that does not require formal registration from NGOs, the organization has to provide copies of the related regulations and other types of evidences that it is operational in line with the national requirements.

- Proof of interest in the environment and/or sustainable development (annual reports, articles, work programmes, project reports, press releases, etc.).

- Account of the organization’s international scope (location of headquarters, regional and other national offices, programmes, international activities, etc.).

- Proof of not-for-profit status.

- **Review of the application:** The Civil Society Unit within the Governance Affairs Office reviews the submission and determines if any additional documents are required. If so, it notifies the applying organization.

- **Recommendation by the Secretariat Secretary:** After the review is completed, the Civil Society Unit will send the documentation and its recommendation to the office of the Secretary of Governing Bodies.

- **Approval and notification of the accreditation request:** The Governance Affairs Office reviews and notifies the organization of its decision in case of approval of the accreditation request.

- **The Civil Society Unit updates its database** of all accredited organizations with the newly accredited organization’s information, sending a confirmation e-mail to the same. The database is publicly accessible at https://goo.gl/CKctg4

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**The process takes approximately three months. Enquiries can be sent to:**
unenvironment-accreditation@un.org

**Access to the accreditation application form:**
https://goo.gl/6NHPkR

**Access to the modalities for accreditation:**
https://goo.gl/rvcsUD

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Accreditation is not a requirement for participation in the implementation of projects, programmes or partnerships with UN Environment. See Section 7 for further information on UN Environment’s Partnership Policy.

**Suspension or withdrawal of accreditation**

Organizations that have not met the requirements for observer status as set forth in Rule 70 of the Rules of Procedure risk having their accreditation suspended for up to three years or withdrawn.

Accreditation to the United Nations Environment Assembly can be suspended for up to three years or withdrawn in the following circumstances:
a. If an organization abuses its status by engaging in a pattern of acts that go against the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including aggressive or politically motivated acts against UN Member States;

b. If there is clear evidence of funding/influence resulting from internationally recognized criminal activities;

c. If, in the past three years, the organization has not made any meaningful contribution to the work of UN Environment, the United Nations or major institutions or conferences in the environment field at the international level.

d. If an organisation shows an ongoing non-constructive behaviour in interacting with fellow Major Groups and UN Environment.

The observer status of organizations is suspended or withdrawn by decision of the Secretary of Governing Bodies, based on the recommendation of the Civil Society Unit. An organization whose observer status is withdrawn may reapply for accreditation no sooner than three years after the effective date of such suspension or withdrawal. There is no formal procedure to challenge the decision of the Secretary of the Governing Bodies.

**Responsibilities and obligations of accredited stakeholders toward United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs and the Secretariat**

All accredited stakeholders must fulfill the following obligations:

a. act in accordance with the relevant rules of procedure for any meeting or session which they attend (see Section 9);

b. comply with registration requirements and seating arrangements for any meeting or session which they attend, keeping in mind that meeting and session organizers will work to ensure that enough seating is available for all nine Major Groups and Stakeholders during public sessions to facilitate participation. In situations where seating is limited, stakeholders may be asked to designate representatives to occupy the available seats. Such procedures will be developed by the UN Environment Secretariat in consultation with Major Groups and Stakeholders and their representatives/the Major Groups Facilitating Committee;
c. provide the UN Environment Secretariat at least every four years with evidence of their existence and activities, such as annual reports, project reports and copies of publications. Alternatively, accredited organisations may also choose to prepare and submit an activity report. Once accredited, organizations of Major Groups have the opportunity in the run-up to the sessions of the UN Environment Assembly to:

- Receive unedited working documents of the UN Environment Assembly first-hand and at the same time as the Committee of the Permanent Representatives, and
- Submit to UN Environment Programme written contributions to these unedited working documents
- Participate in all public meetings of the UN Environment Assembly subsidiary organs such as the Committee of Permanent Representatives
- Make oral and written contributions to these meetings.

During the sessions of the UN Environment Assembly, accredited organizations of Major Groups can:

- Participate in the Plenary, the Committee of the Whole and the Ministerial Consultations discussions as observers;
- Circulate written statements to Governments through the UN Environment Programme Secretariat; and
- Make oral statements during the discussions of the UN Environment Assembly.

Access to list of organizations accredited to UN Environment:
https://goo.gl/PpRhtq
Decision-making within the United Nations Environment Programme remains the prerogative of Member States. However, during sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs, accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders can contribute to the governance of UN Environment and participate at two levels: on agenda-setting processes, and on policy making and decision-making processes. During the Assembly opening and closing plenary, Ministerial Roundtables, United Nations Environment Assembly parallel sessions, Committee of the Whole (Committee of the Whole), informal side events, Major Groups and Stakeholders representatives are able – under certain restrictions – to make written and oral interventions, access all public sessions and meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, have designated seats, and access all public documents. Additionally, the Greenroom or civil society tent, if held, a multi-purpose venue, is reserved primarily for Major Groups and Stakeholders to organize side events, workshops and meetings.
SECTION 4: Participation in Agenda-Setting and Decision-Making Processes

Two levels of participation

Decision-making within the United Nations Environment Programme is the prerogative of Member States. However, during sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs, accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute to the governance of UN Environment and to participate at two levels: on agenda-setting processes, and on policy making and decision-making processes. At the regional level, Major Groups and Stakeholders can contribute to agenda-setting and decision-making processes during the Regional Consultative Meetings (see Section 6) and by participation in Ministerial Meetings, as well as through their Regional Facilitators.

The privileges listed below underpin Major Groups’ and Stakeholders’ participation and contribution towards agenda-setting and decision-making processes.

All accredited stakeholders enjoy the same privileges:

- Access to all public sessions and meetings of the Assembly and its subsidiary organs, including United Nations Environment Assembly plenaries, opening sessions, ministerial dialogues (when convened), leadership dialogues, multi-stakeholder dialogue, Committee of the Whole, and other sessions, in accordance with the current rules of procedure. Should participation in a particular meeting be restricted, an advance notification will be issued. Dates, venues and agenda of the meetings will be provided in a timely manner by the UN Environment Secretariat. UN Environment may have to limit the number of participating individuals per organization, due to space constraints.

- Designated seats reserved for Major Groups and Stakeholders in all public meetings of the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs. Major Groups and Stakeholders will self-organize to designate their representatives according to criteria they establish.

- Access to documents publicly available on UN Environment websites and portals, including the website of the Committee of Permanent Representatives; official documents and reports of UN Environment; and documentation related to the work of the Assembly and its subsidiary organs, including pre-session and in-session documents made available in public meetings. Access to documents will be provided in a timely manner, with accredited stakeholders granted access to relevant information portals. Input received from Major Groups and Stakeholders will be made available on the relevant web portals.

- Ability to circulate written submissions to the Assembly and its subsidiary organs, which can include contributions and recommendations for agenda items of sessions of the Assembly and its subsidiary organs as well as recommendations on draft decisions for consideration by Member States. Major Groups and Stakeholders contributions and recommendations should be submitted
to the UN Environment Secretariat for distribution to Member States allowing sufficient time for consideration by the relevant body.

- Ability to make statements during public meetings of the Assembly and its subsidiary organs, in accordance with the relevant rules of procedure. Session Presidents or Chairs can provide opportunities for accredited stakeholders to speak on topics of interest in these meetings, including as keynote speakers, panelists, facilitators and moderators.

- Ability to organize side events on issues relevant to the United Nations Environment Assembly (see information on the Greenroom below).

- Accredited stakeholders may be invited to participate in relevant regional consultations conducted by UN Environment.

- The Major Groups Facilitating Committee (see Section 6) facilitates the participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in these activities/processes.

**United Nations Environment Assembly: Opportunities for Major Groups and Stakeholders to contribute to agenda-setting and decision-making**

The United Nations Environment Assembly is the governing body of UN Environment with the following functions:

- Setting the global environmental agenda;
- Providing overarching policy guidance and defining policy responses to address emerging environmental challenges;
- Undertaking policy review, dialogue and exchange of experiences;
- Setting the strategic guidance on the future direction of UN Environment;
- Organizing a multi-stakeholder dialogue;
- Fostering partnerships for achieving environmental goals and resource mobilization.

The Assembly meets every two years, in uneven years, and consists of a Plenary, a High-level Segment and the so-called Committee of the Whole. These meetings normally run in parallel. The opening plenary is held on the first morning of the Assembly, attended and addressed by the Executive Director of UN Environment, who delivers a Policy Statement to Member States. The President of the Assembly also addresses the opening plenary. Other keynote speakers during this session may include members of Major Groups and Stakeholders, invited to speak by the United Nations Environment Assembly President. Major Groups and Stakeholders are allocated two seats per each Major Group, making a total of 18 seats. Furthermore, seats for Regional Facilitators (two per region) are provided. Often, the United Nations Environment Assembly is accompanied by Ministerial Roundtables, Symposia, Expos and other events before or after United Nations Environment Assembly give Major Groups and Stakeholders further space for discussion of relevant issues.

There are as many Ministerial Roundtables and or Leadership Dialogues as United Nations Environment Assembly themes, running in parallel. These are highly political sessions on complex issues held in the format of an open dialogue, where government delegations are represented at the ministerial level. High-level invitees – such as heads of United Nations agencies, ministers from other sectors, and Major Group and Stakeholder leaders – participate in these roundtables. Major Groups and Stakeholders can serve as keynote speakers, panelists and moderators in the ministerial plenaries. The roundtable process offers Major Groups and Stakeholders a unique way of interacting with global politicians at a high level. As such, Major Groups and Stakeholders are expected to bring participants with expert knowledge on the issues
or topics into these roundtable discussions. The agendas are already set and appear in the provisional timetable of meetings and events.

Each UN Environment Assembly features a **Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue** on a theme relevant for the Assembly. The facilitated Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue brings together representatives of Member States, Major Groups and the Private Sector and it provides a unique opportunity for Major Groups to interact with high level decision makers. In preparation for the Assembly, Major Groups are invited to propose themes for the dialogue as well as panelists/speakers.

**Rapporteurs** from plenary/panels and respective roundtables convene to synthesize messages coming from their discussions. The reports/messages from the plenary sessions and roundtables are consolidated and presented to the Assembly. The consolidated report/messages result in a conference room paper as developed by the Rapporteurs and form the basis for the draft report of the President on the Ministerial Consultations. Major Group and Stakeholder may provide the Rapporteurs with written versions of their interventions, for consideration in the reports.

The **President’s Summary** and other high-level segment outcomes, such as a **Ministerial Declaration** are presented to the final plenary meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly. They succinctly reflect the main points/messages made by delegations, including Major Groups and Stakeholders. They also contain the outcomes of the Ministerial Consultations. This is the closing session/plenary of the Assembly where the report of the Committee of the Whole and the Assembly resolutions/decisions are adopted. Like the opening plenary, Major Groups and Stakeholders have seats in a designated area of the closing plenary.

The **Committee of the Whole** is established by the opening plenary. It normally considers UN Environment’s Programme of Work and Budget and draft resolutions/decisions in accordance with the adopted agenda of the Assembly. The Committee of the Whole will often form session committees, working groups or contact groups, each discussing a specific agenda item or issue prior to the meeting. They are formed as the need arises. A drafting group can also be created to consider draft resolutions/decisions, prepared initially by the Committee of Permanent Representatives, and those which may be submitted by members of the United Nations Environment Assembly during the session. Working groups are open to observers – including Major Groups and Stakeholders – who may provide useful information relevant to the specific topics under discussion (unless otherwise decided and announced). The Committee of the Whole normally meets for the first time on the afternoon of the first day and decides on a schedule of work, as well as a schedule for the various working groups. This detailed calendar of the Committee of the Whole is made immediately available as a Conference Room Paper.

The report of the Committee of the Whole and any draft resolutions/decisions are adopted by the plenary meeting on the last day of United Nations Environment Assembly. Accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders have access to the Committee of the Whole, and Major Group representatives may give oral comments and statements at the discretion of the Chair.

Through **informal sessions**, regional groups formed by governments may select a number of key representatives from the Major Groups and Stakeholders (usually in coordination with the Major Groups Facilitating Committee) and have meetings with them. It is also understood that the Major Groups Facilitating Committee can approach the informal groups and countries, and request information meetings on par with practice from other UN meetings and conferences. Major Groups and Stakeholders may request to be invited to an informal meeting convened by the individual countries or groups of countries. Invitation to such meetings is a prerogative of the convener.

UN Environment and Member States organize **side events/special events, exhibitions and excursions** in collaboration with partners on key topical issues related to the themes of United Nations Environment Assembly. Access to these events is not restricted and details of these activities are available on the United
Nations Environment Assembly website and on the Provisional Timetable, as well as in the Daily Journal. Short announcements are also displayed on screens if available. Environmentally-focused exhibitions may be ongoing in the form of audio-visual materials and posters throughout the duration of the Assembly. A field excursion demonstrating the themes of the current Assembly may be organized for interested delegates. There are numerous social events most evenings and attendance is often by invitation only.

Daily official press conferences are held during the United Nations Environment Assembly session, in general organized by UN Environment during lunch hours and open to all. United Nations Environment Assembly documents, including general information about the forthcoming Assembly, are distributed to Major Group and Stakeholder organizations accredited to UN Environment in advance for their information. They are available on the official United Nations Environment Assembly website. United Nations Environment Assembly meetings are organized as paper smart meetings, meaning most documents are made available only in electronic format. All delegates and observers are encouraged to bring portable computers.

The UN Environment Secretariat publishes the Daily Journal to provide updates on all meetings, agendas, documents, etc. It is advisable that participants check this publication every morning for any updates and/or changes.

All documents have symbols and are often referred to by their symbols such as UNEP/GCSS.XI/I etc. during the sessions.

The Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) is an independent reporting service that provides daily information in print and electronic formats from multilateral negotiations on environment and development. It is published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development and distributed daily. Major Groups and Stakeholders may also provide them written versions of their interventions as they might be used as inputs for the Earth Negotiations Bulletin.

The Greenroom or the Civil Society Tent, a multi-purpose venue reserved primarily for participating Major Groups and Stakeholders, provides a dedicated Groups and Stakeholders space during Assembly sessions for morning debriefing sessions for all participating Major Groups and Stakeholders, led by the Groups Facilitating Committee, as well as side events, briefings, orientations, dialogues, workshop and meetings, etc. It is available for morning and evening briefings, ad-hoc meetings, press events, special events and bilateral meetings, workshops and outreach use. It can also be used by Major Group and Stakeholder organizations for their own group meetings. Over the years, this space has become a favored and alternative meeting room used by Major Groups and Stakeholders, UN Environment, regional groups, and other partners alike to organize multi-stakeholder meetings, conferences and panel discussions. This has helped ensure outreach to the relevant Major Groups and other Stakeholders audience. In addition, Major Groups and Stakeholders may also have the opportunity to partner with Member States for official side events during the United Nations Environment Assembly. For a specific session of the Assembly it might be decided not to organize a Green Room.

Major Groups and Stakeholders are invited by a special communication from the Civil Society Unit or by the Major Groups Facilitating Committee to apply for Greenroom spaces, if available. UN Environment reserves the right to reject requests.

Registration to participate in the Global Major Groups and Stakeholder Forum (see Section 6) and the United Nations Environment Assembly is opened on-line at https://reg.unog.ch/category/810/?flatlist prior to these meetings. Only Major Groups and Stakeholders accredited to UN Environment will be registered for the United Nations Environment Assembly. Registration usually opens two months prior to the meeting and at the time invitations are sent out, and it closes 15 days before the meeting. Participation in United Nations Environment Assembly and Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum is only allowed after registration is formally confirmed by UN Environment.
Participants’ badges given to Major Groups and Stakeholders are valid for the entire duration of the United Nations Environment Assembly, enabling them to access the meeting rooms and the main facilities of the conference center. There are a number of restricted areas for which a special badge is required. Such badges are usually distributed through the Major Groups Facilitating Committee. Participants that are selected to represent Major Groups and Stakeholders in the various sessions are provided with additional badges.

Committee of Permanent Representatives: Accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders can participate in all public meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. This includes the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, the annual Committee of Permanent Representatives, Committee of Permanent Representatives subcommittee and Committee of Permanent Representatives briefings. If such meetings are to be held in private, advance notice will be given. A calendar of Committee of Permanent Representatives meetings during a given year is distributed by the Civil Society Unit to accredited organizations and is also made available on the Committee of Permanent Representatives portal. See also: [https://goo.gl/zKa2wD](https://goo.gl/zKa2wD)

During these meetings, Major Groups and Stakeholders representatives have designated seats and are able to make oral interventions at the discretion of the Chair. Written interventions can be submitted through the UN Environment Secretariat. Accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders wishing to participate in any of these meetings have to inform the UN Environment Secretariat/Civil Society Unit at least two days before a given meeting, so that security arrangements to grant entry to the UN compound in Gigiri can be made. For Major Groups representatives who participate regularly in these meetings, badges for multiple access to the UN compound may be issued through the Civil Society Unit.

These meetings give Major Groups and Stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to agenda-setting and decision-making during the year. This is a key opportunity for Major Groups and Stakeholders to contribute to United Nations Environment Assembly agenda-setting.

UN Environment will ensure webcasting of above mentioned meetings.
SECTION 5: Access to Information

Overview

The United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) recognizes that it is critically important to disseminate and make accessible documentation concerning its work or information generated through its programme as widely as possible. Its Access-to-Information Policy, issued in June 2014, provides principles and procedures with reference to access to information. UN Environment also recognizes that transparency, accountability, and openness can become a catalyst for achieving a greater impact.

To enhance the effective participation of stakeholders in a cost-effective manner, UN Environment uses modern Information and Communications Technology, including webcasting of Committee of Permanent Representatives and United Nations Environment Assembly meetings, e-participation, and access to information platforms.
SECTION 5: Access to Information

Access to Information Policy

The United Nations Environment Programme recognizes that it is critically important to disseminate and make accessible documentation concerning its work or information generated through its programme as widely as possible. UN Environment also recognizes that transparency, accountability, and openness can become a catalyst for achieving a greater impact. In the context of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, it is of fundamental importance to make available relevant information to stakeholders and the public in general.

At the same time, UN Environment has an obligation to protect the confidentiality of certain information. In response to Governing Council Decision 27/2 [paragraph 17], UN Environment issued an Access-to-Information Policy in June 2014 that aims to strike an appropriate balance between the need to grant the public maximum access to information in UN Environment’s possession, and UN Environment’s obligation to respect the confidentiality of information regarding its Member States, partners, employees and other parties.

The Policy provides the principles and procedures governing access to information at UN Environment. The review process is meant to generate commentary on how the UN Environment Secretariat could further its efforts to make information on environmental matters accessible to a target community or the broader public with a view to making such information a catalyst for achieving environmental sustainability. The Policy contains six sections: Statement of the Policy; Public access to information; Exceptions; Request for information; Review and appeal process; and Access to information Panel.

Access-to-Information Policy in pdf format:
https://goo.gl/563XXk

Use of modern Information and Communication Technology to enhance stakeholder engagement

The use of modern information and communications technology, including through the webcasting of Committee of Permanent Representatives and United Nations Environment Assembly meetings, e-participation, and access to information platforms can enhance the effective participation of stakeholders in a cost-effective manner. Online participation can increase work effectiveness, save time, reduce financial and environmental costs. Specific tools to facilitate public participation and information
sharing include the use of e-mail and listservs, newsletters, Internet/websites, (mobile) telephones, tele-
and videoconferencing, cloud and supercomputing, social media and e-learning, online platforms, online
consultations and surveys, webinars, among others.

In this context, UN Environment, in line with its Access-to-Information Policy:

- strives to webcast selected meetings of the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary
  organs;
- organizes webinars;
- provides information through various websites (see for example UN Environment Live, a web-
  based platform that facilitates the exchange and sharing of data, information and knowledge);
- uses social media as a vehicle to engage a wider target audience, with a Twitter following of over
  793,000 and a strong Facebook presence. UN Environment uses social media tools to engage and
  empower diverse communities around environmental objectives. These tools allow for interactive
  two-way exchange, and the ability to raise awareness, share ideas, collaborate and connect people
  from all over the world.

It is recognized that the use of Information and Communication Technology cannot always replace the
physical presence of stakeholders in meetings, which is deemed of crucial importance for building relations
and trust, fostering consensus on specific issues while allowing a diversity of viewpoints to be expressed,
providing in-person networking opportunities and build capacity. This is particularly important for some
communities of practice where Internet connection may be limited or difficult to access, which would
exclude and marginalize some groups and individuals. A combination of both forms of participation is
therefore recommended to complement and enhance stakeholder engagement.
SECTION 6: Major Groups and Stakeholders Body – Spaces and Roles

Overview

Civil society brings added value to UN Environment’s work in several ways, helping to make the United Nations Environment Programme’s agenda relevant. To do so, Major Groups and Stakeholders must be empowered to participate effectively in UN Environment’s agenda-setting and decision-making processes, as well as implementation.

Major Groups and Stakeholders engage with UN Environment through the Major Group Facilitating Committee (MGFC) that provides guidance and facilitates the engagement of UN Environment-accredited Major Groups in the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum and annual Regional Consultative Meetings (RCMs), as well as participation in United Nations Environment Assembly. Members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee are expected to adhere to the MGS Code of Conduct.
SECTION 6: Major Groups and Stakeholders Body – Spaces and Roles

Empowerment for effective participation

For the United Nations Environment Programme's agenda to be relevant, Major Groups and Stakeholders must be empowered to participate effectively in agenda-setting, decision-making and implementation. Civil society brings added value to UN Environment’s work in a number of ways: including through democratic dialogue and inclusion; the advocacy role it plays in raising awareness on issues of concern; the technical and contextual expertise it can provide that UN Environment may not have; holding governments and international institutions to account; and their ability to bring a holistic perspective to discussions in terms of the global public interest and efforts to achieve environmental sustainability.

Major Groups and Stakeholders engage with the United Nations Environment Assembly, and more generally with UN Environment through the Major Group Facilitating Committee that also coordinates with the group of Regional Facilitators.

The Major Groups Facilitating Committee

The Major Groups Facilitating Committee is a self-organized group that facilitates Major Groups and Stakeholders engagement with UN Environment.

How is it composed?

The Major Groups Facilitating Committee is composed of representatives from Major Groups and Stakeholders accredited to UN Environment, supported by Regional Major Groups and Stakeholders Facilitators from the six UN Environment regions who have observer status (see below). Each of the nine Major Groups selects two representatives for a two-year period, as result of elections that are either organized by UN Environment or within the respective Major Group. Up to three co-chairs are elected from within the Major Groups Facilitating Committee. The Committee is supported by two Regional Facilitators from each region, 12 altogether, elected for a two-years term during the Regional Consultative Meetings or via an electronic voting process organized by UN Environment or Major Groups from a given region themselves. Members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee and the Regional Facilitators must come from accredited organizations. It is advisable that Major Groups Facilitating Committee Members come from the respective Major Group they represent in the Committee.

The work of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee falls under broad categories, including its ability to provide support on logistics and foster understanding of the process so that Major Groups and Stakeholders can maximize their presence, operating within the rules of engagement and procedure that UN Environment has set up; and providing guidance and finding expertise to develop policy positions.
representing the best contributions from the Major Groups and Stakeholders constituencies relevant to the agenda points of United Nations Environment Assembly. In doing so, the agendas of Major Groups and Stakeholders meetings will reflect those of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

**What is expected from Major Groups Facilitating Committee members?**

Members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee are expected to adhere to the obligations outlined in this Handbook and to be able to allocate enough time to their functions in the Major Groups Facilitating Committee. It is expected that their interventions and actions are based on regular and intensive interaction with their constituency (their respective Major Group). UN Environment is not able to provide any financial or other remuneration. Furthermore, Major Groups Facilitating Committee members are expected to:

- Maximize participation of representatives of its Major Group worldwide in United Nations Environment Assembly and its related meetings;
- Promote good representation of the respective Major Group at the Regional Consultative Meeting (see below), and ensure that the participants have received the necessary information relating to the agenda beforehand;
- Facilitate the involvement of Major Groups members with specific issue knowledge in UN Environment-related work, both in the local, national and regional contexts as well as at United Nations Environment Assembly;
- Foster balanced representation based on gender, focus and region;
- Mobilize knowledgeable representatives of the Major Groups to participate in United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs;
- Assist participating Major Group members in: having access to information related to the agenda for the UN Environment meetings; participating fully in United Nations Environment Assembly and its related meetings; and having free and unfettered access to delegates;
- Provide general information, training and capacity building on UN Environment processes;
- Generate broad media-interest, as well as on-going educational programmes around the world;
- Maintain a web-based information hub, issues-based listservs, as well as general informational sites;
- Disseminate issue-based information from the Major Groups and Stakeholders focusing on these issues, to others not directly involved in those issue-networks; and
- Coordinate the preparation of the Major Groups policy papers.

If a member of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee is inactive for a longer period (at least 3 months) and did repeatedly not participate in the regular teleconferences of the Committee, UN Environment may request the respective Major Group to select a replacement.

The Major Groups Facilitating Committee shall also be responsible for coordinating their activities with the regional level in cooperation with their regional networks, Regional Facilitators and with UN Environment’s Secretariat and Regional Offices. Each of the Major Groups’ representatives is encouraged to support the UN Environment Secretariat to:

- Foster the participation of their Major Group organizations during the Regional Consultative Meetings;
- In regions where their Major Groups are underrepresented, help to identify and involve emerging or newly-established Major Groups in the regional meetings;
Advocate for the accreditation of new organizations with UN Environment;
Promote inter-regional exchange and coordination of inputs within their Major Group;
Facilitate the integration of regional concerns into the Major Groups policy statements; and
Actively participate in identification of skilled or specialized presenters or facilitators at meetings as appropriate.

The Chairs of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee organize, with the support of the UN Environment’s Civil Society Unit, regular teleconferences that bring together members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, Regional Facilitators as observers, UN Environment’s Civil Society Unit and others as deemed necessary. These teleconferences take place at least once every two months. The draft agenda and meeting minutes are prepared by the Chairpersons of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee. Minutes are prepared by a member of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee and are distributed by the Civil Society Unit among accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders.

During the United Nations Environment Assembly, the Major Groups Facilitating Committee also organizes a daily morning briefing/debriefing and process meeting, chaired by Major Groups Facilitating Committee members on a rotational basis, to:

- Provide an overview of the official agenda for that day;
- Appoint volunteers to follow critical issues on the agenda who then report back the next day;
- Promote consensus on Major Groups’ representation during the plenaries and other relevant sessions;
- Report back to the morning meeting from the discussions held the preceding day, including sharing central and important observations and comments gathered from the United Nations Environment Assembly discussions and possibly facilitate consensus building processes to plan for the day ahead in a strategic manner, including outreach to relevant delegations or other partners;
- Promote discussions on important messages or concerns raised from any of the Major Groups;
- Make announcements and address any other relevant business.

Members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee can also facilitate the organization of caucus groups meeting to discuss specific issues, and to caucus, regroup, or nominate people to attend the various sessions.

While the Major Groups Facilitating Committee is not a decision-making body, it does provide guidance and facilitates the engagement of UN Environment-accredited Major Groups in the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (see below), serving as its steering committee. Alternatively, the Major Groups Facilitating Committee can decide to entrust an organization accredited to UN Environment with the organization of the Forum.

In addition, the Major Groups Facilitating Committee often serves as the body facilitating Major Groups and Stakeholders representation in meetings, such as with the United Nations Environment Assembly President.

**Elections of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee**

Every two years the members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee should be replaced. This is either done by an election organized by and within the specific Major Groups or by UN Environment. New
members are identified through a nomination and election process among accredited organizations, ensuring gender- and regional balance. It is recommended that members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee do not serve more than two terms. The selected candidates are to be endorsed by the UN Environment Secretariat and it is advisable that they come from the specific Major Groups they represent.

To begin the process, UN Environment or the current Major Groups Facilitating Committee members representing each Major Group, will reach out to the accredited organizations belonging to the respective Major Group with instructions on how organizations can nominate candidates for potential new Major Groups Facilitating Committee members and how the election of candidates is undertaken. Only representatives of accredited organizations may be elected as members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee. Generally, the election process and rules differ slightly depending on whether it is the Major Group that is holding the elections by themselves or whether UN environment is helping the major group conduct the elections. If UN Environment is conducting the elections, only accredited organization that belong to the particular Major Group take part in the elections. Because there are two seats in the Major Group Facilitating Committee for each Major Group, a maximum of two votes are allowed per organization, with two votes being for two different candidates. If an organization casts more than one vote for the same candidate, the organizations vote will be invalid.

**Major Groups and Stakeholders Code of Conduct**

Members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee are expected to adhere to the following:

1. No member of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee shall be considered, in any respect, as agents or staff members of UN Environment. They are not entitled to introduce themselves, act, and/or speak on behalf of, or for UN Environment. With regards to the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, Major Groups and Stakeholders representatives must ensure that they highlight their functions as Facilitators/Participants/Members of such bodies to UN Environment in an appropriate manner that avoids misunderstandings. They are expected to always present their organizational affiliation, and clearly indicate that the respective person represents its constituents to UN Environment, and not the other way around. Thus, formulations such as “Representative for UN Environment…, Representative of UN Environment…” are not legitimate. Members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, for example, should describe themselves as: “Children and Youth Representative to UN Environment’s Major Groups Facilitating Committee.” Regional Facilitators should describe themselves as: “Regional Facilitators of Major Groups and Stakeholders, Name of the Region.”

2. No organization or individual is authorized to use UN Environment’s name for the promotion, advertisement or marketing of its personal interests, products, services, views or ideas, without prior written approval of UN Environment. Major Group and Stakeholder representatives, such as members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee and/or Regional Facilitators, shall only use the UN Environment name, logo and emblem with prior express and written consent of UN Environment, in line with UN Environment’s policy on the use of its logo.

Under no circumstances will the UN Environment name or emblem, or any abbreviation thereof, be granted for commercial purposes.

Specifically, the following uses are not permitted:

- any use of the logo suggesting or implying a certification or seal of approval for activities, services and/or products;
- any use of UN Environment’s logo on business cards;
• any use of the logo as a component of an organization’s own logo, trademark or other branding elements, including their websites;
• any use of the logo for the promotion or advertising of products, services and other activities intended to solicit business;
• any use of the logo as a permanent graphical element of stationery, business cards, or other variably utilized print materials;
• the use of the UN Environment brand in a way that might prejudice the UN Environment brand and/or the reputation and credibility of UN Environment.

In any case, for all proposed uses of the UN Environment logo, permission must be sought in advance from the UN Environment Secretariat.

3. Representatives of Major Groups and Stakeholders should not expect to receive any funding or remuneration either in cash or kind from UN Environment, nor should they represent to anyone that they receive any kind of funding or remuneration by virtue of their being a Major Group and Stakeholder representative.

In its cooperation with Major Groups and Stakeholders, in particular in the context of United Nations Environment Assembly, UN Environment will strive to involve the Major Groups Facilitating Committee. However, UN Environment does not oblige itself to work exclusively through the Major Groups Facilitating Committee in involving Major Groups and Stakeholders in its work on policy and programmatic matters. If deemed necessary, UN Environment reserves the right to directly approach Major Groups and Stakeholders. At the same time, Major Groups and Stakeholders are not obliged to work exclusively through the Major Groups Facilitating Committee or Regional Facilitators.

**Major Groups and Stakeholders coordination meetings prior to the Open-Ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives**

The Open-Ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives may be preceded by a Major Groups and Stakeholders coordination meeting that is self-organized by the Major Groups through the Major Groups Facilitating Committee and facilitated by the Civil Society Unit. This meeting allows Major Groups and Stakeholders to discuss their input and positions towards the Open-Ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. Dependent on available funding, the participation of members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, Regional Facilitators, speakers and resource persons, and Major Groups and Stakeholders from developing countries can be financially supported by UN Environment.

**The Global Major Groups and Stakeholder Forum**

The Global Major Groups and Stakeholder Forum takes place every two years prior to United Nations Environment Assembly and is the main entry point for civil society participation at the highest level of UN Environment and serves as a Major Groups and Stakeholders preparatory meeting to United Nations Environment Assembly.

The Forum is either organized by the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, or by an accredited organization that has been entrusted by the Committee with this task (Facilitating Organization).

The Forum benefits from the outcomes of the Regional Consultative Meetings, which in turn provide Major
Groups and Stakeholders inputs for United Nations Environment Assembly. The Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum seeks to facilitate civil society participation in the Assembly and associated meetings, identifies important themes and decisions under consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly, and provides a platform for an exchange of views and expertise on these themes between governments and civil society. Traditionally, the Forum also features an open dialogue between UN Environment’s Executive Director and Major Groups and Stakeholders ahead of United Nations Environment Assembly.

**How does the Forum enhance civil society’s contribution to the United Nations Environment Assembly?**

For civil society to influence the process, the Forum plays a coordinating role in presenting civil society speakers with relevant expertise to engage in discussions on the high-level themes, draft decisions/resolutions, and operational issues relevant to UN Environment. It also convenes expert panel discussions and facilitates the drafting of common statements, including organizing Major Groups and Stakeholders across thematic clusters – not based on constituencies but on expertise of those interested to provide the most specialized expertise. Thematic clusters do not replace the Major Groups structure; instead they facilitate cross-sector discussions along the subject themes of United Nations Environment Assembly. It is the role of the thematic cluster facilitator to facilitate development of Major Groups and Stakeholders statements, track the discussions and report back to the larger group. There is no expectation for consensus within the clusters; they seek rather to preserve the diversity of views, while facilitating in-depth discussions along a theme.

Accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders are automatically invited to the Forum. Representatives of governments and international organizations may participate in the Forum as observers.

Major Group and Stakeholder statements have to be cleared by the President via the Secretary to United Nations Environment Assembly before they are submitted to all delegates as official United Nations Environment Assembly documents and potentially read out in the relevant meetings, if given the floor by the respective Chair of the session.

Information on previous Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Fora is available at https://goo.gl/PtXthn

**Regional Consultative Meetings and Regional Facilitators**

The role of UN Environment’s six regional offices was enhanced by a decision of the Governing Council (Governing Council22/14) that requested UN Environment to establish and strengthen partnership at the regional and sub-regional level with other UN bodies, development banks and other institutions, including Major Groups and Stakeholders, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of development and delivery of its programme of work in the regions.

The six UN Environment regions include: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and West Asia.

Given their work at the national and regional level, Major Groups and Stakeholders are well placed to participate in the implementation of UN Environment’s work through co-operation with the regional offices. The Regional Facilitators, previously known as “Regional Representatives”, provide varied views from both the global North and South; these geographically diverse perspectives complement the Major Groups and Stakeholders model, allowing civil society to substantively contribute to UN Environment processes.
The above-mentioned Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum is built around six annual Regional Consultative Meetings. Major Group and Stakeholder representatives are invited to a one- to three-day multi-stakeholder consultation meetings in each region prior to United Nations Environment Assembly. Each region engages in a substantive dialogue on environmental issues that will be discussed during the next United Nations Environment Assembly and produces a regional statement or key messages.

The Regional Consultative Meetings constitute the main platform for the Major Groups to engage with the Regional Offices of UN Environment on an annual basis. While allowing Major Groups and Stakeholders to prepare for United Nations Environment Assembly, Regional Consultative Meetings also serve as capacity-building and networking exercises for the Major Groups in the regions.

The Regional Consultative Meetings are initiated by the Regional Offices and held, whenever possible, prior to, or in conjunction with, relevant major regional meetings or events, including at the ministerial level. They are dedicated to discussing relevant programme issues and possible cooperative actions, and/or preparing of the Major Groups’ inputs to United Nations Environment Assembly, including United Nations Environment Assembly’s themes.

The date, the agenda and the selection of organizations to be invited to the Regional Consultative Meetings are agreed upon between Regional Offices and the respective Regional Facilitators who are expected to reach out for this to their constituents. In this context, UN Environment prefers a high degree of self-organization of these meetings by accredited organizations. Regional Offices may choose to request an accredited organization to take responsibility for organizing and conducting the meeting. Invited organizations include all accredited organizations from the respective region but are not limited to them and it is recommended that the meetings are multi-stakeholder meetings in nature.

**Role and Selection of Regional Facilitators**

Two Regional Facilitators per region are selected by accredited organizations from the respective region during the six Regional Consultative Meetings where participants are asked to nominate and elect two Regional Facilitators, with attention to gender and sub-regional balance, to attend the United Nations Environment Assembly, and who have the relevant expert knowledge of the thematic issues to be dealt with at the upcoming session. Alternatively, Regional Facilitators can be selected as a result of an electronic nomination and voting process self-organized by accredited organisations or – on request – by UN Environment. Regional Facilitators must come from organizations accredited to UN Environment. They normally serve a two-year term – or until the next Regional Meeting – and participate as observers on the Major Groups Facilitating Committee.

Regional Facilitators are expected to adhere to the Code of Conduct presented above in the section on the Major Groups Facilitating Committee. They may use the title: “Regional Facilitators of Major Groups and Stakeholders, Name of the Region.”

In addition:

- Regional Facilitators play a purely facilitating and expert role and have no mandate to represent their region or Major Groups and Stakeholders from their region.
- They may present agreed positions emerging from Regional Consultative Meetings as well as from other consultation mechanisms developed during their period.
- They are specifically selected to ensure agreed Major Groups and Stakeholders’ regional views are
presented to the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs, as well as in other meetings that may be convened.

In the absence of positions agreed among Major Groups from a specific region, Regional Facilitators are not entitled to make official statements on behalf of their regions.
SECTION 7:
Expert Input and Advice,
and Partnerships for
Implementation

Overview

A principal mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) is to monitor the world environmental situation to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration by governments. In doing so, UN Environment implements partnerships to catalyze and channel the vast knowledge and expertise of the scientific community, academia as well as indigenous and traditional knowledge holders such as Indigenous Peoples and their communities, through a number of processes, including the International Resource Panel; the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Science-Policy Forum and the Sustainable Innovation Expo held prior to or during the UN Environment Assembly, and the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) process to name a few. UN Environment’s Partnership Policy gives recognition to the important role played by various partners in addressing global, regional and sub regional environmental challenges.
SECTION 7: Expert Input and Advice, and Partnerships for Implementation

Expert input and advice

A principal mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme is to monitor the world environmental situation to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration by governments. By tapping into the vast knowledge and expertise of the scientific community and academia as well as traditional knowledge holders, UN Environment has managed to keep the world informed of emerging environmental issues.

UN Environment receives, and channels scientific and civil society input through a number of processes, including the International Resource Panel; the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Science-Policy Forum and the Sustainable Innovation Expo held prior to the UN Environment Assembly, and the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) process, just to name a few. See also https://www.unenvironment.org/global-environment-outlook

UN Environment’s role in assessments consists of catalyzing the efforts of the scientific community and other knowledge holders around environmental topics.

Partnerships

Over the past decades, increased recognition has been given to the important role played by partnerships in addressing global, regional and sub regional challenges, bringing together non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector, among others, to contribute to the realization of internationally agreed development goals. Most of UN Environment’s activities at the programmatic level are implemented in partnerships with non-governmental organizations.

Major Groups and Stakeholders can:

- provide input to the development of the medium-term strategy and the programme of work (PoW), this is done usually through the Major Groups and Stakeholders, Civil Society Unit, in close cooperation with the relevant Division or Office; and

- participate in project implementation.

These opportunities are not limited to accredited organizations. See also Section 3.
UN Environment and Indigenous Peoples: A Partnership in Caring for the Environment – Policy Guidance

Within its approach towards Major Groups and Stakeholders, UN Environment considers Indigenous Peoples as an important partner at the strategic, political and programmatic level to achieve sustainable development in a holistic and integrated manner. Each community and group of Indigenous Peoples has developed over the millennia a unique relationship with its traditional land, territory, and related natural resources as well as with the ecosystems they inhabit. In this regard, UN Environment has developed a Policy Guidance to enhance and reinforce its engagement with Indigenous Peoples. See: https://goo.gl/HdLCXL

The purpose of the Guidance Document is to assist UN Environment, its partners as well as Indigenous Peoples in facilitating:

1. Partnerships between UN Environment and Indigenous Peoples that will strengthen Indigenous Peoples’ participation in environmental development, policy-making and programme and project implementation;

2. A better understanding among UN Environment’s staff regarding the situation of Indigenous Peoples, with the aim of enhancing engagement of UN Environment with Indigenous Peoples, drawing out their key concerns and priorities;

3. Strengthened institutional interaction between UN Environment and Indigenous Peoples to tap into Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge, expertise and experiences, for the benefit of environmental decision-making processes;

4. Increased Indigenous Peoples’ participation in policy development and decision-making and implementation that could contribute to improved international and national environmental governance.

Access to the Partnership Policy online: https://goo.gl/rTkfas
Other important aspects in relationship to partnerships are governed by the following policies:

- Gender Policy [https://goo.gl/WJzwmp]
- Safeguards Policy [https://goo.gl/LPSMx3]
- Partnership Policy 2011 [https://goo.gl/vp17f4]
- Guidelines for Engaging the Private Sector [https://goo.gl/TwL3nJ]
Funding for some stakeholder participation is included in UN Environment’s programme of work and budget. UN Environment makes it a priority to mobilize adequate funding, including through extra-budgetary resources, to support stakeholder participation, particularly stakeholders from developing countries. However, UN Environment is not able to commit itself to financial support to Major Groups and Stakeholders for participation in meetings or activities. If funding is available, UN Environment may support the travel of Major Groups and Stakeholders to participate in the Open-Ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives and the United Nations Environment Assembly, focusing on members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, Regional Facilitators, speakers and resource persons, and representatives from developing countries.
SECTION 9:
Code of Conduct at Meetings Hosted by the United Nations

Overview

When attending meetings at the United Nations, participants should comply with requirements regarding registration, badges, security instructions, behavior, use and access to facilities, occupation of seats, use of symbols, right to speak and make statements, etc.
SECTION 9: Code of Conduct at Meetings Hosted by the United Nations

- Only representatives whose names have been communicated to the Secretariat through the designated contact are admitted to sessions of the Conference and shall be registered and receive a badge.
- Badges issued at registration shall always be worn visibly.
- Participants shall be prepared to have their identity verified upon the request of United Nations officials or security staff.
- Observers from accredited organizations shall normally be at least 18 years of age. Younger representatives, e.g. from the Children and Youth Major Group, may be registered at the discretion of the Secretariat, if accompanied by a chaperone.
- Representatives of civil society admitted to sessions shall cooperate and comply with requests and instructions from United Nations officials and security staff regarding the use of facilities and access to and conduct within the venues.
- No participant shall harass or threaten any other participant.
- Interfering with the movement of participants at any time or location within the venues is not permitted.
- The flags and any officially recognized symbols of the United Nations and of its Member States shall not be treated with disrespect.
- Observers may only use assigned seats to Member States.
- Observers are not allowed to occupy seats behind Government signs, unless they are part of official delegations or unless they are invited by the specific Member State to do so.
- To indicate a request to speak, observers should push the “speak” button on the console with the microphone in front of them. The request will go into a queue which is managed by the Chair/President and is visible on each console. The right to speak is given by the Chair/President of the meeting, who will consider protocol requirements. When it is one’s turn to speak, the red light on the microphone will light and one is visible on the big screen.
- Statements that are read in the sessions must be submitted to the UN Environment Secretariat for documentation and recording purposes.
- Written statements that were not read out publicly can be submitted for online upload and sharing purposes.
- Demonstrations or any other assemblies are only permitted with prior approval of
UN Environment. Demonstrations that are held without such approval might result in eviction from the UN compound and lifetime loss of the right to enter any UN compound.
UN Environment’s Civil Society Unit

Overview

UN Environment’s Civil Society Unit is part of the Governance Affairs Office and facilitates the coordination of stakeholders’ inputs into UN Environment’s work. The mandate of the Unit, which provides a range of services, is to cooperate with Major Groups and Stakeholders and facilitate their fair representation and efficient engagement in UN Environment/UN environmental policy-making and implementation, as well as engaging them at the intergovernmental level.

The Unit focuses its activities on the nine Major Groups but also works with a multitude of other relevant non-governmental stakeholders who share the same purpose, including through catalyzing action and through enhanced engagement and collaboration.
SECTION 10: UN Environment’s Civil Society Unit

The mandate

UN Environment’s Civil Society Unit was put in place in response to demands from Major Groups and Stakeholders and Governments to further improve coordination of stakeholder input into UN Environment’s work. The mandate of the Unit is to cooperate with Major Groups and Stakeholders and facilitate their fair representation and efficient engagement in UN Environment/UN environmental policy-making and implementation, including through catalyzing action to protect the environment through enhanced engagement and collaboration with the multitude of Major Group actors who share the same purpose around the world; and engaging them at the policy level to take into account their expertise and views at the intergovernmental level and in the implementation of UN Environment’s work programme. In 2013 the Unit, previously the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch, became part of the Secretariat of Governing Bodies (now Governance Affairs Office).

The Unit provides the following range of services to Major Groups and Stakeholders:

- promoting and facilitating the active participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in the work of UN Environment and its governing bodies, at policy level, thus implementing UN Environment’s Stakeholder Engagement Policy and strengthening decision-making processes at UN Environment through the expertise of relevant Major Groups and Stakeholders.

- convening of regional and international consultations that relate to United Nations Environment Assembly themes and strategic objectives of UN Environment; such consultations are also held to involve Major Groups and Stakeholders organizations that are not accredited to UN Environment.

- facilitating the organization of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholder Forum (prior to United Nations Environment Assembly) and coordinating and facilitating Major Groups and Stakeholders participation and inputs in the work of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, the Committee of Permanent Representatives Bureau and the United Nations Environment Assembly Bureau, including a Major Groups and Stakeholders coordination meeting before the Open-Ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives and back to back with Bureau meetings. In addition, the organization of the Greenroom during United Nations Environment Assembly is facilitated by the Unit.

- providing advice and services to UN Environment Divisions, Regional and Outposted Offices and partners with respect to
engaging and partnering with Major Groups and Stakeholders.

- promoting and facilitating the active participation and contributions of Major Groups and Stakeholders in the work of UN Environment at programmatic level.

- supporting the development of strategic partnerships and coalitions that involve Major Groups and Stakeholders to support thematic work and/or sub-programmes.

- facilitating UN Environment’s communication with Major Groups and Stakeholders, including through the Major Groups Facilitating Committee and elected Regional Facilitators.

- servicing Major Groups and Stakeholders by:
  - providing concise information to Major Groups and Stakeholders on latest developments in UN Environment with regards to United Nations Environment Assembly processes and deliberations, including through the Publication series “Perspectives” and a dedicated website;
  - answering individual information requests and inquiries;
  - providing advice on opportunities to engage with other UN processes and events;
  - organizing targeted meetings and consultations at global and regional levels;
  - accreditation of international non-governmental organizations;
  - enhancing the participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders from developing countries.

- implementing specific projects under UN Environment’s Programme of Work that relate to Major Groups and Stakeholders engagement.

- inter-agency coordination and contribution to strengthen multi-stakeholder dialogue and alliance-building on Major Groups and Stakeholders and UN related issues, activities and reports.

The Unit also acts as an advocate for Major Groups and Stakeholders participation and oversees UN Environment’s engagement with them. The Unit focuses its activities on the nine Major Groups as defined in Agenda 21 but also works with all other relevant non-governmental stakeholders. Internally, the Unit cooperates closely with UN Environment Divisions on information dissemination and youth related issues, UN Environment Regional Offices, and relevant offices and units of similar nature in UN sister organizations.
Useful Resources

Civil Society Unit website:
https://goo.gl/yyK9Vv

Committee of Permanent Representatives website:
https://goo.gl/eRNqmk

UN Environment Assembly stakeholder participation homepage:
https://goo.gl/xyw2q2

UN Environment Assembly homepage:
https://goo.gl/hMm6Vj

UN Environment Homepage:
www.unenvironment.org

For accreditation:
https://goo.gl/RxQvjH

Regional Offices:
https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/africa
https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/asia-and-pacific
https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/europe
https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/latin-america-and-caribbean
https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/north-america
https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/west-asia

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This Handbook aims to inform and guide Major Groups and Stakeholders by presenting in detail the currently applied rules, mechanisms and practices for MGS engagement in UNEP’s work. It is based on the Rules of Procedure of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) of the United Nations Environment Programme:

XIII. Observers of International Non-Governmental Organizations


1. International non-governmental organizations having an interest in the field of the environment, referred to in section IV, paragraph 5, of General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) from 15 December 1972, may designate representatives to sit as observers at public meetings of the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs, if any. The United Nations Environment Assembly shall from time to time adopt and revise when necessary a list of such organizations. Upon the invitation of the President or Chairperson, as the case may be, and subject to the approval of the United Nations Environment Assembly or of the subsidiary organ concerned, international non-governmental organizations may make oral statements on matters within the scope of their activities.

2. Written statements provided by international non-governmental organizations referred to in paragraph 1 above, related to items on the agenda of the United Nations Environment Assembly or of its subsidiary organs, shall be circulated by the Secretariat to members of the United Nations Environment Assembly or of the subsidiary organ concerned in the quantities and in the languages in which the statements were made available to the Secretariat for distribution.

The Handbook complements the Guidelines for Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in Policy Design at UNEP and other related documents.