

Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS) Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) Discovery Session on 17 August 2020

Summary prepared by the Civil Society Unit, UNEP, 3 September 2020

Background:

The Programme and Policy Division (PPD) and the Civil Society Unit of the Governance Affairs Office (CSU/GAO) organized this discovery session to collect ideas from UNEP-accredited organizations under the 8 Major Groups, namely:

- NGO,
- Farmers,
- Indigenous Peoples and their Communities,
- Local Authorities, Women,
- Scientific and Technological Community,
- Business and Industry,
- Workers and Trade Unions

On UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2022-2025.

49 participants registered and 36 participants joined the meeting. List of participants can be found at the end of this document.

Summary:

1. What systemic changes do you see necessary to enable your group/organization to engage in transformational societal shifts towards more sustainable outcomes?

Questions, challenges:

- Concerns were raised about whether the MTS was genuinely new, or just repackaged. Also, about how realistic it was to make transformational change, given UNEP's small size and limited resources.
- To overcome these limitations, **the importance of the environmental agenda needs to be stressed and understood**, and effectively spread through the UN system as a whole, and through other organizations, governments and local governments, and other stakeholders, including civil society.
- A major problem was that transformational change was seen as an enormous and amorphous concept, which caused fears and barriers. Something that "only a mission to the moon could achieve". What was needed to overcome this **was a clear vision of the desired future, and clarity of the steps to get there.**

Partnership:

- One way of supporting this was to carry out **joint pilot projects for roll out**. With **partners** such as various UN agencies, national and local government, and MGS (including NGOs). Pilot projects would be properly monitored and evaluated, and included in "best practice" databases, for roll out. Collect and incorporate positive social and economic/livelihoods evidence on these projects.
- Need to better work from the local level to the international scene. Issues such as the overuse of pesticides or people breaking lead-acid batteries polluting communities are systemic market level

failures. Need for more regulation, level-playing field for businesses, and to work more with the whole value chain, including the informal sector and SMEs.

- **Strengthen multi-stakeholders communications** on the UNEP platform, beyond States.
- Stronger interaction with UNEP scientists/staff for expedition, could have more impact in outreach to local governments in awareness raising.
- Mapping of UNEP relationship with different CSO groups, need for feedback mechanism: to identify gaps, to bring stronger relationship with UNEP to deliver the MTS, i.e., partnership forum.

Finance:

- A systemic change in society is a substantial change in society and we felt that our discussion was not meant to address big structural changes in society. We focused on possible systemic change in UNEP and in the structure of non-state stakeholders, often referred to as the major groups or simply NGOs. NGOs accredited to UNEP are often good at engaging in the deliberations taking place at UNEA, but not as effective at translating UNEA outcomes into concrete action at national and subnational levels. A change was needed in the operative systems of many NGOs. Partnerships are referred to as a key modality to implement the 2030 Agenda. Can NGOs really contribute concretely to that implementation, or are NGOs/civil society only committed to be watch-dogs and assume a supervisory position? Activating action for systemic change, transformational shifts and sustainable outcomes could be introduced to NGOs by providing **dedicated financial and other support** to UNEP's Civil Society Unit. An important task for that unit should be to carry out strategic outreach throughout the year based on decisions taken at UNEA including the MTS, mapping of non-state stakeholders geographically and thematically and subsequently engaging them consistently, also with financial support where feasible. That way, CSOs and other non-state organisations could create additional impact as UNEP's extended networks in support of the MTS objectives.
- To achieve systemic change in society, we need a refocus on the world of finance. **Designing a finance system promoting sustainable development** is hugely important. UNEP's Finance Initiative is imperative in this regard. But as long as finance is primarily profit driven it remains more of a problem rather than representing a solution. This work must therefore be imbued with work-streams that emphasize connection and respect for nature including human and environmental rights. Civil society has also been reluctant to engage in the financial fields, and **UNEP should increase its efforts to engage the NGO world in this area.**

Political will, governance, leadership:

- There needed to be a significant shift in **political will** to achieve transformative change. For example, in the battle to transform food systems. UNEP should effectively influence to build political will.
- There were also gaps in **effective governance and leadership** on some issues, especially emerging and contentious issues (e.g. biotechnology, technologies such as carbon removal etc.).
- Good and functional governance is at the basis of a societal change. One of the four elements of UNEP's proposed 'Enabling and Foundational Programme' is environmental governance. UNEP pioneered work on the environment and international law, resulting in the MEAs. Traditionally, justice has been tied to peace, rights and law. In addition, justice must also be tied to the environment including ecological matters. There is a need for **an increased attention to good, functional and just environmental and ecological governance.**

SCP:

- **Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)** was seen a vital issue. UNEP could provide leadership, but this needed to go beyond the UN, with national policies, local government etc.
- There are less than ten years to 2030, the year we are supposed to have implemented the 2030 Agenda. UNEP is the environment unit of the UN family and as such has a prime responsibility for the SDGs that are key to the environment. The environment-related SDGs (6, 13, 14 15) are arguably those most off-track to be met by 2030. They all need a boost. UNEP has been mandated to **focus on SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production (SCP)**. This SDG is an entry point for work on policy coherence, behavioural change and circular and regenerative patterns, perhaps some of the most challenging and difficult issues to deal with to reach systemic change.

Pollution:

- Good that **pollution** is a key pillar and it was a UNEA3 focus. We are not yet at the place where its impact on the environment and the interconnected relationship are well seen. **Systemic change needed: integrate the prevention of pollution** in the daily life, it underpins sustainability. What's needed: **Leadership** to understand that the environment is an imperative of planetary sustainability and pollution is part of it; More **integrated agenda** and political leadership within the pollution cluster, which still has silos; **Donor agencies** to include pollution in their development agenda.

Human and nature relationship:

- There is a need to shift people's understanding of the **relationship between humanity and nature**. This may be considered a prerequisite to engender a process leading to systemic societal change. It is necessary to recognize how important our narratives and myths are in terms of influencing the understanding of this relationship. Culture as an expression of humanity's' collective wisdom and understanding is often ignored. There is a need to begin focussing on culture and society and the ways in which cultures have created realities that are based on more wholesome and respectful approaches to the human/nature relationships than the currently dominant narrative of nature as resource. Nature and ecosystems sustain all life on the planet. UNEP has among the oldest histories within the UN system in working with science. We need to work with all types of science and bring traditional knowledge in dialogue with science and see how we can create transformational societal shifts. **Science should not always cater to improve technologies**. We therefore welcome the introductory statements by the Director of UNEP's Governance Affairs Office, Mr. Jorge Laguna-Celis, and the fact that he pointed to the nine planetary boundaries as elements which we must respect and understand.
- To accomplish societal systemic change, transformational shifts and sustainable outcomes, people must be educated to **live in harmony with nature**. To accomplish and understand how to employ nature-based solutions, people need to **acquire ecological literacy**. Focussing on education to promote ecological literacy for youth should be a prioritised area for UNEP and UNEP should develop such literacy as an integral component of SDG/Environment outreach programmes and do so through interagency systems at the UN, and in particular collaborate with UNESCO on such matters. UNEP should in this regard initiate research on natural and nature sciences and with this provide methodologies for evidence-based environment programmes that are attractive to young people and in this way facilitate the transfer of knowledge to the coming generations.

Green GDP:

- There is a need to dedicate resources and work focus on good practices on alternative measures of progress that take into account human and environmental health and not just economic/financial performance. Developing **green GDP and other such indicators and using a different approach to economic development** can contribute to transformational change from a macro systemic perspective.
- The environment is a public good, how to motivate all moving pieces to sustain that common? There's carbon footprint, can we set up standards for footprints on biodiversity and pollution? The continued drive to push for integrated reporting would be well received and address Business & Industry's (B&I) "reporting fatigue".
- Develop a value proposition so B&I can understand how to integrate the SDGs. Businesses need to make clear that the value proposition of doing "something" to support the SDGs equals "something". Need more regulation to give clear guidance.

Technology:

- Overcoming **language barrier** to allow more to access and engage with UNEP.
- Medium/long term impacts of pandemic: how to adapt, avoid pitfalls of believing that digital tech is the solution for everything; **digital divide** must be addressed.
- Global mechanism for tech assessment building on UNEP's technology foresight work, to guide decisions of countries on deployment of technological solutions to environmental challenges.

Other:

- Behavioral changes, **education** is key (i.e., Education Alliance).
 - Legal institution or mechanism that could regulate/sanction/ reward environmental actions (may or may not be within UNEP).
 - Concern was expressed about future work on **conflicts** – which had been moved from a primary pillar to a cross-cutting issue. UNEP needed to clarify what would be done in practice, to ensure that the environment is not left behind in conflict situations.
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2. What would you expect from UNEP to contribute to that shift?

Finance:

- We have seen that UNEP's Civil Society Unit can be effective when its work is supplied by ample **financial** resources. When that is the case, the unit can develop and monitor good outreach programmes and be an incubator for new operational programmes with NGOs based on the MTS. The **budget** of the Civil Society Unit has been cut back consistently ever since the start of the millennium. If UNEP is going to contribute to the shift (as spelled out in question 1), and do so in collaboration with the global NGO community, there should be predictable, increased and consistent resources for the Civil Society Unit to enable it to actively do outreach into regions and countries and activate CSOs working on creating impacts in the areas of UNEP's work.

Partnership:

- **Addressing the disconnect between what is decided at UNEA and what happens (or does not happen) at national and local levels** is another aspect of this issue. Keeping NGOs engaged in programme delivery (of the MTS) between the UNEAs necessitates resources to follow-up, monitor

and assist the implementation. A strategy and plan should be developed for UNEP's Civil Society Unit to be able to fulfil this role, a role which is impossible to carry out without resources.

- UNEP has traditionally been strong on normative work informed by science. However, no matter how good, reliable and credible the science is, few countries are really listening and making use of this scientific output. The question is - **how to increase UNEP's impact in all member states?** One way could be to **strengthen networks and partnerships** and establish systems of implementing agents around the world making use of UNEP's work on environmental science and governance, including several of the ideas outlined above. Non-state stakeholders being integrated and active members of such networks, could then lobby their national authorities to implement the MTS as well as the 2030 Agenda.
- Closer and clearer relationships with local governments and NGOs.
- Strategic and systems thinking is needed to ensure that MGS partnerships are **effective and action-orientated**, so these truly contribute to transformational change. UNEP as a facilitator and incubator of transformational change through its networks.
- More strategic and forward-looking relationships with **other UN agencies**, MEAs and other relevant organizations. COVID-19 has shown the need to work across policy streams, and not just in response.
- Work with both UN agencies and national governments to understand how they want to develop the environmental interface in their countries (so UN systems work is relevant and viable).
- Work with the user community to **ensure that actions are achievable, sustainable**, supporting livelihoods in the social and economic perspective, and **fit for purpose**, with a clear rationale, based on scientific data.
- Could strengthen collaboration with UNEP even virtual connection, i.e. with marine debris experts.
- More engagement with CSOs.
- Creating network /partnerships of orgs/govts working on the 3 pillars of UNEP: to pool cases, best practices and experiences.

Communication:

- UNEP **science-based information** needs to be **translated** into a value proposition that anyone can use. Publications are not usually distributed to those who can make use of them (e.g. on the circular economy). Need to **deliver impactful pieces** of information **that cause change**. Executives have only little time and need to know what to take out for their company as best practice.
- UNEP study on list of solutions, best practices and actions, scientific data – useful, should be shared.

Technology:

- Raising awareness and disseminating **technology foresight** reports to inform govts and CSOs on what technologies are coming up.
- Mechanism to receive inputs from CSOs/MGs on impacts of and alternatives to **new and emerging technologies** on the environment, including traditional/indigenous knowledge.

Science, business, policy interface:

- UNEP's work on the science policy interface is important and needs to continue. A challenge is to see how **nature-based solutions**, the SDGs and science can strengthen each other and identify emerging issues. Some commented though that this work-stream is now entitled "**science business**

policy interface”. There is doubt among the CSOs whether connecting science and business is going to contribute to systemic change within society or whether it will enable business as usual to continue. **Will for instance what looks like a corporate capture of UNEP’s science platform compromise its scientific objectivity?** This issue needs to be checked and examined by the MGoS.

- The **science-policy interface** would be strengthened with more involvement – akin to **citizen science**, but involving all stakeholders. Local governments have access to information, civil society has grassroots etc.

Impact:

- MTS is very good and has all needed elements. What’s missing to achieve it? We have many right questions and people at the table, industry was at UNEA, the policy is aligning on climate, pollution, etc. How to **take this to the larger UN system and beyond, to the larger world?**
- IPBES, agenda for action.

Rights and rule of law:

- UNEP needs to incorporate **human rights dimensions** (HR Declaration, the HR Covenants) throughout its many work streams. The work of the special rapporteur on Human Rights and Environment contributes valuable normative work, but it seems to have **limited policy implications**. This needs to change and to achieve systemic change, the human rights and environmental rights dimensions need to be a strong part of the environmental governance and other crosscutting work programmes. **The Global Pact for the Environment (A/Res/73/333)** initiative may serve as a bridge between traditional UNEP work and what must be addressed during this decade.
- On a related note, under the work on environmental governance and the MEAs, UNEP should focus even more on **environmental rights**. There is a need to examine and highlight how countries whose constitutions include environmental rights have arranged this – examples include New Zealand, Bolivia and others. In this regard, there is a need to raise awareness of its positive systemic impacts.
- Related to the previous point, and relevant especially for UNEP’s MTS and its proposed focus on pollution, there is a need for UNEP to bolster its work to advise **governments’ executive and legislative powers to counterbalance the marketization of sustainable development**. Work on law, regulations, sanctions and bans of illegal activities and enforcement of environmental law needs to be emphasized.

SCP:

- Leadership in SCP, including with national governments.
- Use of social science & behavioral economics in its science programme, to guide SCP work.

Pollution:

- **Pollution** is under the health goals of SDGs (Goal 3.9) but is implicit in others. There aren’t indicators that take pollution into account as a whole. **UNEP could advocate for some particular indicators to tackle pollution better**, e.g. on the burden of disease data which mentions pollution; on soil pollution there are not good indicators yet. (suggestion: blood lead levels could be help track this).

COVID-19:

- Moving transformation around COVID-19, and prevention of pandemics. Thinking forward. The problems caused, and solutions and opportunities. COVID-19 has impacted the finances of many MGS, including NGOs.
 - On behavioral change: We have a lot of data and key core messages. Need to look at humans as behavioral objects: we can see short term threats (like COVID-19) and stop the economy. Why are decisions not made yet to ensure our planet's sustainability? UNEP can do high-level thinking, how to engage with businesses on where's the bottom line, flip change and make decisions.
 - COVID-19 showed the world can pivot, as we recover we have a chance to reposition the SDGs in the value proposition they can bring. Fresh approach UNEP can take in the recovery to put the SDGs at the center.
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- **Other:** Using UNEP's talented and committed staff more strategically, so they were not spread too thinly, and wasting their talents.

3. How could your organization work with UNEP to contribute to that shift?

Partnership and communication:

- On **chemicals & waste**: the global alliance on health and pollution can encourage dialogue on connected issues (circular economy, health, air pollution) **breaking down the silos**, create **science-based research**, advocate through the **network** and be a **hub for stakeholders** (e.g. Pure Earth and UNIDO have projects to convene different ministries engaged in pollution (Health, Environment, Mining and Industry) as well as donor agencies, UNEP, and civil society). Need to involve more the private sector to work jointly together to raise the profile of pollution, in the **collaborative** nature of SDGs.
- We can make **stakeholders aware of opportunities to provide feedback**, ensure science is looked at, facilitate providing information from some of the stakeholders to UNEP.
- We need to have **better communication from the B&I Major Group** (what we can participate in, what funds can come from the private sector to impactful project for long-term sustainability and value for the SDGs). Some companies are in crisis for COVID-19, but those who are doing well can **give back to society**. We need to **show them a value proposition** to allow them to give back on.
- Do people have **dynamic ways to share best practices** that can be transferred to other countries and geographic locations for all our networks?
- Co-hosting webinars with UNEP in local language; challenge: how to do this simultaneously. (only Zoom allows different channels for interpretation; Interpretify also has this feature)
- Joint projects – UNEP, Govt. MGS.
- Public awareness/education.
- Including local communities and grassroots partners.
- Advocacy - political will.
- Contribute CSO tech assessment outcomes to UNEP to feed on evidence-based decision making.
- Inputs to UNEP science-policy interface discussions from indigenous/traditional knowledge systems.

Technology and capacity building:

- To address digital divide: thru blended learning (hybrid mode).
- Scoping, review of decisions/actions.

- Organizing webinars.

Mechanism:

- We need to be in the system – MoUs, partnerships, catalytic funding etc.
- Plus – need real consultation – yielding positive and agreed action points. Not just token consultation. Developing joint actions and projects.

List of participants:

(36 participants from below joined the session)

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