

Comments of the Women Major Group on Private Sector Engagement

The Women's Major Group to UNEP (WMG-UNEA) would like to comment on the report prepared for consideration at the 142nd meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, held on 10 May 2018.

Firstly, we are concerned by the shift that the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has been undergoing in over the past 10 years, from being a lead global environmental authority, with a workplan based on science input, member state engagement and balanced interaction with civil society and other major groups and stakeholders, to now more and more a sort of 'broker' for businesses in the environment sector.

The proposed UNEP Private Sector engagement document clearly demonstrates how the private sector is being set above all other sectors and stakeholders in engaging with UNEP thus also giving the private sector more influence over-shaping of the political agenda for global environmental governance. Hence, the WMG has concerns that handing over so much power to a sector that has been historically responsible for environmental depletion and degradation could well backfire and not achieve the results intended. For example, the document makes reference to the UN Global Compact, but the many years of experience demonstrate that it is far too permissive and lacks proper safeguards and guidelines for human and environmental rights including women's rights, and others related to unsustainable businesses practices (see below for recommendations). The increasingly close collaboration by UNEP with the private sector calls for a fuller investigation and analysis of concerns over conflicts of interest, and certainly calls for stronger guidelines beyond the UN Compact.

Secondly, the fact that big businesses including large multinationals, are placed in the same category as SMEs demonstrates a lack of consideration for maintaining an equitable balance between the different actors. In this sense, we wonder whether within the structure of the 9 Major Groups we should still include 'Business & Industry', especially considering that private sector entity International Organization of Employers recently has obtained observer status in the UN, meaning they have more space and voice at the UN than civil society does. To ensure balance, the Major Group for Business & Industry should be reserved for SMEs that are at their core environmentally sustainable, and which do not have the power which the International Organisation of Employers has, that is dominated by multinational corporations.

UNEP's stakeholder focus is shifting more and more towards private sector partnerships, engagement and participation. A good example is the fact that in the last round of UNEA (3), Major Groups didn't get the usual core funding for participation, whilst at the same time UNEP did provide financing to a joint VOLVO campaign.

In addition, during the last UNEA cycle, an unbalanced amount of private sector events took place while MGs/civil society events didn't even benefit from the usual 'green room' that had been granted in previous cycles. The WMG-UNEA therefore calls on UNEP to go back to the Science & Policy Forum format, and to leave any other dedicated Business fair/event to a different timing, so not back-to-back to UNEA.

We remain very concerned over UNEP's promotion of Genetically Modified Organisms, first by awarding a GMO promoter an important 'Women in Science' award during UNEA-2, and now by its inclusion of 'climate smart rice' (as mentioned in the private sector engagement document). UNEP's mandate should not allow these recent developments and, by all means, we need to avoid UNEP becoming a green-washer for the GMO industry, and beyond for any other environmentally harmful business sector e.g. oil and other extractive industries.

Hence, in the view of stronger commitments from the private sector, the WMG offer the following recommendations:

Private Sector donors that engage in or tolerate the following shall be excluded from consideration for any type of Partnership where they can benefit from the UN Environment logo:

- Manufacture, sell, transport, trade or distribute products that are dangerous to the environment or animals;
- Engage in any processes, production or activities which detrimentally impact the environment or animals;
- A lack of willingness to change their manufacturing/distribution processes;
- Are implicated in human rights violations;
- Use systematic and sustained forced or compulsory labor or child labor;
- Sell, trade, transport or manufacture anti-personnel mines or components;
- Appear on the Consolidated United Nations Security Council Sanctions List, including an individual named on a sanctions list; and
- Operate in countries subject to United Nations sanctions.
- Are a parent or subsidiary of companies responsible for substantive fossil fuel emissions, including extractives that have caused irreparable environmental damage and/or played a role in fuelling conflict, such as in the Niger Delta or in Papua New Guinea

Each time UNEP accepts money, it should have to produce an explanation of the donation against their criteria for CPR review, and the CPR should have the ability to approve or deny the donation after close review.

It should always be remembered that power plays a critical role in society, and we must not give one stakeholder – private sector – greater power than the governments that we elect, or indeed any other single stakeholder.

The WMG look forward to further discussing this with the CPR members and UNEP.

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