



Women's Major Group reflections of the 3rd United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-3)

Intro

The Women's Major Group to United Nations Environment (UNEP), forwards the following reflections from its engagement at UNEA-3 with an intent to improve future UNEAs in terms of civil society participation, organization and planning. We hope these suggestions will be useful and considered in the UNEP's working plans.

Role of CS Unit/ Civil Society Engagement

- UNEP's CS Unit must count with a core budget to ensure that the Major Groups and Regional focal points can continue to properly attend the GMGSF, OECPR, UNEA and its related events. We remain concerned that the lack of core budget becoming a regular situation will have detrimental impacts on our work¹.
- Likewise, the CS Unit can channel its fundraising efforts towards other key matters pertinent to the GMGSF, OECPR and UNEA, etc.
- CS Unit should continue to organize consultations especially around the working paper on UNEP's policy for environment defenders and its safeguards policy with Special Rapporteurs (like the SR on Environment) and international human rights groups. CS Unit could facilitate working together on proposals to the governing bodies of UNEP on how to strengthen the civil society program and ensure core funding from member states, as well as how to ensure the better implementation of existing policy guidelines on environmental and human rights safeguards and gender equality.
- UNEP must enhance efforts for closing the gap between the ED and civil society; we suggest a preparatory meeting with MGs representatives in order to depict each of the MGs work and functions in the different environmental and sustainable development related fora.
- The Units help and support was invaluable.
- But could more be done well in advance of UNEA4 with the MGS committee liaising to negotiate budgets, and requesting speaking slots, full website coverage of MGS statements and positions, meeting rooms etc.?
- It was difficult to keep up with all the preparatory meetings, we suggest for updates/reviews periodically from the CS Unit.
- Timing of MGS: Advocate to hold the Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS) Forum directly before UNEA, as happened for UNEA 2. This will help civil society to be able to attend throughout.

¹ UNEA-3 has set a very worrying precedent aggravated by the fact that UNEP's Executive Director, at some point, failed to understand what our role is and apparently undervalues it.



MGS Composition:

- Perhaps longer-term advocacy should begin to make the case for MGS to represent civil society, and not business. Business should make its own private-interest case separately. It has more than ample opportunity, and it is not acceptable that it constantly weakens and dilutes civil society's public interest and voice.

MGS Meeting/UNEA Timetables:

- We would appreciate if future MGS morning meetings be timetabled so there is separate time scheduled for MGs to meet amongst themselves, and feed into the MGS proceedings. Some members of both the NGO group and the Women's Group, wanted to attend the MGS morning briefings, and there were a number of occasions when timetabling clashed, and two meetings were simultaneously receiving updates and planning actions. During UNEA itself, this could be assisted if, for example, the early morning briefings were left for MGS meetings in an allocated venue, with other meeting rooms made available for MG meetings at a separate time – perhaps 8 rooms, available for 2 hours over the lunch break (permitting two 1-hour MG meetings in each, permitting all MGS to meet, if needed).

Freedom of Information/MGS Documentation

- Statements by Major Groups and Stakeholders were placed on the UNEP website for UNEA2. See: <http://web.unep.org/about/majorgroups/events/un-environment-assembly-unea/unea-2> there are no signs of this happening for UNEA3. The secretariat needs to ensure that this always happen, in the interests of Freedom of Information and transparency.

Women Ministers and Leaders Breakfast

- This important event needs further support from UNEP, the CS Unit and other departments in order to ensure its realization every upcoming session of UNEA.
- We are glad that during this session, the ED committed to no more Manels (Male-Only Panels), to end all sexual harassment at UNEP, and to bring parity also at the highest levels of UNEP. We reiterate our capacity to provide support and work in hand to achieve expected outcomes.
- Outcomes from the breakfast meeting include: A call to UNEA to strengthen support for member states in developing programs in four key areas:



1. Policies: Support for development of gender-responsive policies and programs to address pollution based on precautionary and human rights principles through application of gender equality and safeguard measures;
2. Actors: Engage grassroots gender-oriented organizations and women entrepreneurs in the design and implementation of pollution reduction programs, in developing alternative practices and in applying safeguard policies;
3. Information: Improve access to information related to gender and chemical safety and support studies with gender disaggregated data on exposures and impacts of chemicals on women and men. There is a need to develop data on the cost of inaction to increase political will to act.
4. Actions: Support for quick-win pollution prevention efforts, such as phasing out of single-use plastics, eliminating harmful chemicals in products and personal hygiene materials (like menstrual products), will bring us further.

Science-Policy-Business Forum

- The Science and Policy Forum should remain as such. If there is interest for a Business Forum, it should be held completely independent from UNEA since business interests predominated, panels were one-sided and heavily pro-industry, and timing organised so panellists took the bulk of the time (sharing their own perspectives) with very little time for questions. This led to misinformation and warped perspectives.
- We remain concerned that too many international corporations that have not seriously committed to environmental sustainability and human rights, and have a clear conflict of interest (for example pesticide industries), had a major role to play in the Forum.
- This new format of the Forum at UNEA-3 seems to have become a 'marketplace' for UNEP departments to develop funding applications with business partners while the original goals of the science & policy forum traditionally led by UNEP, seem to have been completely lost.

Resolutions

- Civil society participation at Committee of Permanent Representative (CPR) meetings need to be made easier/ more meaningful. Those of us joining remotely have had experiences of raising our hand, never to be called. Even being able to type questions, which are passed to Chair for consideration would help.
- Proactive advocacy could include policy work with sympathetic governments/ permanent representatives on resolutions to be tabled (i.e. not just commenting when drafted, but influencing subjects and content).
- We welcome the online platform provided for accessing Resolutions and being able to provide comments; this best practice should continue at future sessions.



Other Actions and events

- We appreciate the provision of a Green Tent but we were disappointed that the selected side events were only a few. For us civil society organizations, side events constitute one of our most important tools for advocacy and we strongly demand that there is a space ensured for diverse voices.
- We welcome the initiative for a draft policy process on how UNEP can help protect Environmental Defenders and wish to collaborate with UNEP by providing some related proposals.
- The WMG with support of other MGs, were happy to organize an action/ tribute to the 200 women environmental and human rights defenders who have been murdered in the last year. We had some grassroots indigenous peoples with us on the delegation, whose lives are at risk from large infrastructure projects and agro-industrial forest and plantation companies. They have now gone back home, but we fear for their safety.
- It would be important for UNEP to keep on providing us with the space to carry out such actions and cooperate with us.
- The Global Forum of Major Groups and Stakeholders set up an important precedent by inviting the RCEM team from Asia to help with the organization of the event. We hope that something similar can be done for UNEA4.