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UNEP AND CIVIL SOCIETY: AN EXCHANGE

A NEW LANDSCAPE FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN UNEP?

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1. Introduction

This issue of “Perspectives” presents a discourse between Mark Halle and Felix Dodds on the past and future role of civil society organisations and Major Groups and Stakeholders in the context of the United Nations Environment Programme. It is not meant to give the ultimate answer to how UNEP can best engage with non-state actors but is rather a primer to initiate and enrich a discussion on this topic among interested stakeholders, including in the context of the newly established United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). UNEP invites others to comment and to provide further views on this subject by writing to civil.society@unep.org.

2. Mark Halle:

When the late Maurice Strong assumed his duties as the first Executive Director of the new United Nations Environment Programme, he had a clear vision for the fledgling organization: one that would break through the confines of traditional bureaucracies and operate in an entirely new manner.

The new Agenda thus embodies a pact between developed and developing countries that all will take appropriate and relevant domestic action to contribute in different ways to achieving global sustainability. Both sides of this pact are equally important.

Taking a leaf from John F Kennedy’s book, his idea was to gather a small team of “the best and the brightest” to develop bold new ideas and to seed these throughout the UN family, fertilizing these seeds with tactical doses from the Environment Fund¹.

¹ The Environment Fund is the main source of funding for UNEP to implement its Programme of Work and Medium Term Strategy. It leverages Member States’ investments into pooled resources to ensure delivery of results of environmental initiatives across national boundaries and specific thematic issues. Contributions are voluntary and all Member States of the United Nations are expected to make adequate and timely payments.

A UNEP publication series that presents views from Major Groups and Stakeholders of Civil Society or about issues that are relevant for them. PERSPECTIVES is coordinated by UNEP’s Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch. The presented views are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNEP.

Strong understood that the environment is not a sector of activity, interacting with others such as industry, agriculture, or urban development: it is, instead, an integral part of all of these. As Albert Einstein once said, “the environment is everything that is not me”. When environment is viewed as a sector, not only is its reach confined to a limited range, such as pollution or toxic waste, but it becomes the junior partner in relation to all of the other sectors it seeks to influence.

Strong also understood that the environment needs all the friends it can get. He set up an Industry and Environment Office to interact with the private sector and gave space to the Environmental Liaison Centre (ELC) – a mechanism to facilitate the involvement of civil society in UNEP’s work – and generally held UNEP open to good ideas wherever they might arise.

Sadly, Strong liked to set things up but not to run them for long and he soon departed in the quest for other creative initiatives. His successor, Mostafa Tolba, took UNEP in a different direction – he focused almost exclusively on governments, orchestrating the creation of a public sector constituency of environmental ministries and agencies. ELC faded and eventually closed down as UNEP fought with its UN sister agencies for influence and funding.

Tolba’s successes are undeniable – he can justly be credited with putting in place much of the existing international legal infrastructure on environment, and the growth of UNEP under his 16-year tenure was impressive. However, it is hard not to conclude that he played to a world that has now radically changed, and the hard wall he built between government, business, and the rest of the community has limited UNEP’s range ever since.

The Earth Summit in Rio, towards the end of Tolba’s tenure, recognized very clearly that integrating environment and development would require the mobilization of the full range of players in government, civil society, and the private sector. Indeed, it cemented in place a very broad definition of who those players were, crystallizing around a set of nine “major groups and stakeholders”. Representatives of these nine then reconfigured into an organized movement to interact with UNEP and to channel to it the voice and ideas of civil society. Did this development, now in place for over 20 years, break down the silos and take us back towards Maurice Strong’s founding vision?

I will argue that, in its essence, UNEP’s current way of engaging with civil society through accredited representatives of the nine Major Groups, and the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum² is closer to Tolba’s vision and that it is ripe for a reassessment. I will focus principally on the NGO major group, though the comments broadly apply to the others. It is clear that the NGOs wishing to interact with UNEP are self-selecting – they are, overwhelmingly, those whose mandates encompass international cooperation for the environment and address cross-border issues. This is a tiny sub-set of the global NGO community. The vast majority of civil society activity is local or, at most, national, and the vast majority of NGOs have nothing to do with UNEP and do not aspire to, except to the extent that UNEP can give profile to the issues they care about. Only those NGOs seeking to address international environmental issues will have any significant interest in interacting with UNEP especially because, unlike most UN agencies, it is hardly present at the national level.

For internationally-inclined NGOs, there are broadly three approaches to cooperation with UNEP, although variations are possible. **The first is the utilitarian approach.** NGOs have their own missions and goals and, in pursuing these, they might conclude that UNEP can be helpful to them, for example, by pressing the environment ministry in their home country to join an international initiative, or by giving international profile to an issue that corresponds to their own agenda. This form of relationship is not organic and requires no particular organizational structure. Should WWF, for example, wish to link forces with UNEP for a particular purpose, such as reducing the accumulation of plastics in the oceans, then nothing prevents them from

2 The Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF), a two days meeting prior to UNEA, facilitates Major Groups and Stakeholders’ participation in the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) of UNEP and associated meetings. I served as main space for Major Groups to get together before UNEA, exchange views, and consolidate their positions. Participation is mainly limited to Major Groups accredited to UNEP.



suggesting it. And while accredited Major Groups may help to broker the deal, they play no fundamental role.

Furthermore, any NGO that wishes to partner with UNEP in any way that involves contractual obligations and transfers of funding soon encounters another major obstacle – the mind-bending bureaucracy which, as with Gulliver's giant, ties it down. There can be few if any of UNEP's partners who have not lived through traumatic experiences with its bureaucracy. The more reasonable ones understand that UNEP labours under UN-wide administrative systems and that even the Executive Director is powerless to change these or even to make them markedly better. For those who have made several attempts to work with UNEP, it does not take long to find the prospect of having nothing to do with UNEP's contracting and administrative services increasingly attractive. And if the Executive Director can make no dent on this scandal, it is highly unlikely that Major Groups and Stakeholders and its secretariat support can help.

The **second, increasingly common, approach** is for NGOs to ignore UNEP, for which there are many reasons. Many NGOs have their own strengths, budgets, channels of influence, and reputations and do not sincerely believe that UNEP can add much to their arsenal. The Nature Conservancy³, for example, deploys a budget and staff much larger than UNEP's and does not, frankly, need UNEP to achieve its purpose. Furthermore, many NGOs believe that the governments that make up UNEP's formal constituency are a significant part of the global environmental problem and that UNEP, in accepting the designated government departments as a given, and following the UN culture of "*omertà*" in refusing to engage in any direct, public criticism of them, thereby amplifies this problem. A government department may be clear-cutting large swaths of forest, turning a blind eye to over-fishing, issuing illegal mining licenses, and blithely ignoring its own laws, regulations and international commitments. However, it can sleep peacefully reassured by one certainty – UNEP will not be among the chorus of critics that point a finger at it.

This emasculation of UNEP and – to a considerable extent – all of its intergovernmental peers sets them apart from the environmental NGOs who, in large part, exist because governments are failing to live up to the public trust. For those NGOs that exist to point out and correct public sector shortcomings, UNEP is not only of no help – it is part of the problem.

We all know, of course, that there is a lot UNEP can do indirectly or behind the scenes, and it does indeed do a great deal. UNEP routinely disseminates public information that is awkward for governments and that NGOs can use to good effect. And what the UNEP Executive Director tells ministers in private is, of course, not known. But the overwhelming assessment of activist NGOs is that UNEP should, if anything, be a target, not a partner.

In respect of this second approach chosen by NGOs, it is unclear whether there is much of a role for the platforms civil society use to engage with UNEP, such as the Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum. As a platform for encouraging and organizing UNEP's interaction with NGOs and others, it appears that the Forum cannot do much in the case of NGOs which choose, by and large, not to work with UNEP or which decide that UNEP is to be classed with the enemy.

There is, of course, **the third way**: the route that takes UNEP seriously and seeks to influence both the secretariat and its governance mechanisms. NGOs that follow this route believe in the importance of UNEP strategies and plans and similarly believe that they must find ways to contribute to and secure a place for their ideas and proposals in the decision making structures of UNEP – principally its Governing Council and presumably, now, the new UN Environment Assembly for which UNEP has responsibility. For these NGOs, it makes sense to seek UNEP accreditation and to engage, for instance, in the Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum.

For these NGOs, the central question becomes this: in their effort to reach their goals and fulfil their missions, what is the trade-off between the effort and expense of influencing UNEP and the reward measured in progress towards that mission? NGOs that actively engage with UNEP, seek election to seats in the Major Groups and Stakeholders Facilitating Committee (MGFC),

3 TNC's expenditures in 2014 were over \$800 million, while UNEP's were around \$630 million. TNC's staff is many times larger than UNEP's.



and devote days to meeting in conclave prior to major UNEP governing sessions demonstrably believe that there is a reward commensurate with their investment of time and money in the process.

Seen from the outside (and this may well be a partial view), such NGOs aim at influencing UNEP in two ways: seeking space to present their views in the plenary of UNEP's governing bodies; and influencing the language of outcome documents by adding, eliminating, or amending text that would otherwise be adopted. The former – NGO statements – are usually added near to the bottom of formal statements by delegations in plenary or its equivalent (the Committee of the Whole) and, though they may have symbolic value, they have no more significance than the formal statements of minor delegations. These plenary bodies almost never vote because decisions are taken by consensus that is hammered out in group meetings from which NGOs are often excluded. Furthermore, the lobbying of individual delegations by NGOs usually has little practical effect.

As to influencing the language of the outcome documents of the governing bodies, the question is whether such documents carry much weight in terms of what UNEP actually does. It might be convincingly argued that UNEP's impact comes more from the Executive Director's political skills and the projects for which he or she is able to raise funding. In any event, it is likely that the small changes secured by NGOs have little more than symbolic importance.

The question must be asked: "if the stakeholders who collaborate most closely with UNEP are having little influence on the course of UNEP's affairs, how might things be different?"

NGOs represent a veritable force for environmental action, a fact demonstrated repeatedly in many fields, from divestment movements to green trade and the treaty on anti-personnel mines. What we should all, surely, be aiming for is the optimal way for UNEP's impressive force and influence to be combined with the equally impressive force and influence of the NGOs in order genuinely to change reality for the better. In other words, we should be looking to forge partnerships that genuinely represent the optimal combination of forces to reach a given end.

UNEP has, over almost all NGOs, formal access to governments at the highest levels. Furthermore, it represents a gravity and authority to which most NGOs can only aspire. NGOs, in turn, have flexibility and a freedom to tell things as they are, move quickly, and adapt, unencumbered by the deadening weight of the UN's bureaucracy or the political constraints imposed on intergovernmental organizations. They are not obliged to maintain the polite fiction that it is the governments that take all the decisions that count, that allocate priority and funding to global action, or that in some way represent what is acceptable. In important ways, this is no longer the whole truth: in many cases, it is not the truth at all.

In late June 2015, UNEP and IUCN convened the CEOs of major environmental NGOs to discuss new forms of partnership. Interestingly, virtually none of those present places much weight on the Major Groups approach employed by UNEP, nor in general do they devote time or resources to UNEP governance structures. The main question asked at this convening was about imagining what sort of partnership might be of interest, and how it might play out.

What resulted was a clear interest in new partnerships, articulated around clear, time-bound, and specific change targets where a combination of UNEP and NGO partners could achieve what neither could achieve on its own. Examples could include the elimination of subsidies to fossil fuels, a campaign against illegal fishing, or even divestment of coal-related investments. A clear sign of this could be opening up the UNEA to sessions organized jointly by UNEP and its NGO partners.

Evidently, this approach is very far from the "fan club" behaviour of UNEP's Major Groups and Stakeholders. It implies a fresh approach both by UNEP and by the NGOs. It is also, interestingly, a "back to the future" return to the original vision for UNEP crafted by its founder, Maurice Strong, and a recognition that, for all his success, Mostafa Tolba was wedded to a "governments first" vision that has lost its meaning in the 21st century.

Can the NGOs make the change?



3. Felix Dodds:

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to exchange views on the engagement of stakeholders with UNEP and on what might be a path for the future.

I concur with your initial statements regarding Maurice Strong's vision. Here I underscore what Mark says about UNEP "to develop bold new ideas and to seed them throughout the UN family, fertilizing these seeds with tactical doses from the Environment Fund." I also agree that Mostafa Tolba took UNEP down a different path where the Environment Fund no longer funded other and programmes to mainstream environment but brought it all under UNEP Agencies and Programmes. It is also interesting, although perhaps not surprising, that Maurice Strong's Deputy for the Earth Summit in 1992, Nitin Desai, who became the Under-Secretary-General for the newly established UN Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (1993)⁴, took a very similar position to Maurice in 1972 when the UN Division for Sustainable Development was set up in 1992: namely, it should be a small division of highly competent people led by the wonderful Joke Waller Hunter in its first few years. The approach to the UN system was also to mainstream the delivery of Agenda 21. This was through assigning responsibilities for different chapters of Agenda 21 to the different UN Agencies and Programmes and then meeting together under the Inter-Agency Committee for Sustainable Development (IACSD). The IACSD's mandate was to identify major policy issues and follow-up to the Earth Summit to ensure effective co-operation and coordination of the UN system in the implementation of Agenda 21.⁵

There is a kind of symmetry with UNEP in that: within 10 years, the IACSD was shut down in the UN reforms of the 1990s; and in the second 10 years of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the UN system reduced its engagement with the body set up to review Agenda 21 implementation and sustainable development like environment became siloes.

But let's return to the main issue here which is what is and should be the engagement strategy of "stakeholders" with UNEP. To answer this, I am going to return to the logic that Maurice had in 1992 for the Major Groups. Prior to 1992, all stakeholders were grouped under the term "NGOs" by the UN system, and if they wanted to differentiate, then it tended to be between the "private sector" and the "others" (now often termed "civil society"). What Maurice and his team very clearly recognised was something that did not speak to the reality of how organizations saw themselves. Not only was that the case, but there was also a great opportunity through Agenda 21 to engage these other sectors of society as a catalyst for implementing Agenda 21. Therefore, similar to empowering different parts of the UN system to help implement Agenda 21, the nine chapters of Agenda 21 could do the same with what we now know to be the Major Groups. What was the result?

Local authorities: Maurice recognised that local and sub-national government could play a significant role. He encouraged local governments to establish ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) in 1990 with 200 local governments convening for the 1st World Congress of Local Governments for a Sustainable Future at the UN headquarters in New York. The first programme of ICLEI, Local Agenda 21, promoted participatory governance and local sustainable development planning⁶. By 2002, there were well over 6,000 local authorities who had developed their own 'local agenda 21s' with the engagement of their local communities.

Workers and trade unions: The trade union movement changed, in many cases, from opposing sustainable development issues to becoming a partner at the workplace and helping companies introduce environmental issues initially through the health and safety lens.

Indigenous Peoples: The Earth Summit significantly increased the space for Indigenous Peoples to engage in the UN. It paved the way for the role they have played – especially in the

4 In 1997, this was merged with the Department for Development Support and Management Services and the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis to form the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

5 United Nations (2012) Mandate of the Inter-Agency Committee for Sustainable Development. Available online at: <https://www.unsceb.org/content/inter-agency-committee-sustainable-development-iacsd>.

6 ICLEI (2015) Who is ICLEI? Available online at: <http://www.iclei.org/about/who-is-iclei.html>.



Convention on Biological Diversity and in the creation of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) which is an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Science and Technology Community: The science community was engaged in the writing of the first Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report (1990). At the same time, it also supported UN preparation for the Earth Summit through the International Council for Scientific Union (ICSU) by helping to write some of the original drafts of the Agenda 21 chapters.

Children and Youth: Designating space for children and youth increased opportunities for the next generation has the chance to challenge the current generation on their pace and perspectives as we move toward a more sustainable way of living on this planet.

Women: In 1991, the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) was established in preparation for the 1992 Earth Summit, thereby ensuring that a gender perspective was reflected in Agenda 21.

Farmers: A voice for farmers – small farmers, in particular – to ensure that policies on agriculture are in line with a move to sustainable production and finally industry.

Business and Industry: Again, Maurice helped establish what was to become the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) when he invited the Swiss business man Mr. Stephan Schmidheiny to coordinate the participation of the business sector. The Council now represents a constructive business voice in the UN and has developed tools and policies within the business community to address sustainable development.

NGOs: Regarding organizations that Mark focused on above, NGOs are a mixed bag, but the Major Group process has led to some simplification. The process has removed the above sectors, leaving perhaps three groups in its place: advocacy and monitoring NGOs, the implementation NGOs, and think-tank NGOs.

The Major Group approach, having been successful for the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), has also now been applied to the Rio Conventions, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) through the Food Security Committee, and UNEP, to mention a few.

UNEP and Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS): In 2004, UNEP changed the name of its unit dealing with non-state actors (NGOs and civil society) to Major Groups and Stakeholders, recognising that UNEP may want to engage with a group of stakeholders wider than those covered under Agenda 21. One of the clear advantages of such a "stakeholder approach" is the ability to target work with different stakeholder groups. Toward this end, UNEP has been very successful in organizing targeted events and publications:

Trade Unions: Following the successful organisation of the Trade Union Assembly in 2006, UNEP and the International Labour Foundation for Sustainable Development, in partnership with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and its affiliates, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the World Health Organization (WHO), launched a two-year project on "Strengthening trade union participation in international environmental processes". It aimed to improve engagement of workers and trade unions in the development and implementation of environmental policy and was implemented in four regions, namely Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. It focuses on topics such as Climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the need for alternative methods of production and just transition; Sound and sustainable management of chemicals and how to integrate just employment into environmental policy design. There have been a number of publications as well as training materials produced with Trade Unions to increase understanding of the role they can play in the workplace including: *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World* and the important publication *Labour and the Environment: A Natural Synergy*.



Women: UNEP supported a number of initiatives for female ministers and organizations. For example, the *Women and the Environment* publication exposed gender-related aspects of land, water, and biodiversity conservation and management. UNEP hopes that *Women and the Environment* will inspire the environmental and sustainable development community to better understand the importance of gender and to integrate a gender perspective across all of its work. Meanwhile UNEP has a Gender and Environment mainstreaming programme which is being implemented across all divisions and offices.

Indigenous Peoples: UNEP has a dedicated part-time Focal Point on indigenous issues since 2004 who is the main liaison officer for Indigenous Peoples and on indigenous issues. A specific policy of engagement with indigenous peoples was endorsed in 2012 by UNEP to guide UNEP's work by supporting staff to understand the synergies and linkages between Indigenous Peoples and the environment, informing decisions in policy development and implementation as well as inspiring potential partnerships. This was followed by the Environmental, Social and Economic Safeguards framework 3 years later introducing a dedicated approach on Indigenous Issues in project related work. The systematic training of staff and application of the policies is yet to be fully implemented though.

UNEP produced *African Indigenous Peoples and the UNEP Green Economy Initiative*, a publication developed through a workshop with African indigenous leaders from nine countries. The workshop goals were to: study the content of the Green Economy Initiative; develop a critical understanding of its recommendations, assumptions, and purpose; articulate a response; and issue a formal statement and response document for submission to UNEP. UNEP in collaboration with IUCN prepared a publication entitled "Pastoralism and the Green Economy: a natural nexus?". The study focuses on pastoralism's current and future potential for securing sustainable management and green economy outcomes from the world's rangelands. The report gives practical examples from different regions and shows the system's inherent characteristics for adaptive sustainability and some of the key opportunities and challenges for promoting development in rangelands.

Children and Youth: For over 10 years, UNEP's support for children and youth was the Tunza programme which developed activities in the areas of capacity building, environmental awareness, and information exchange with a vision to foster a generation of environmentally-conscious citizens who are capable of positive action. Important by-products of this strategy included the annual Tunza International Youth Conference. In the last year, UNEP has evaluated this work in order to take stock of the achievements and challenges and to consider new steps towards adding unique value to the global youth environmental movement, supporting but hopefully not duplicating the efforts of others.

Business and Industry: The Division of Technology, Industry and Economics is the main office that works with business and industry. It also coordinates the work of the Ten-Year Programme on Sustainable Consumption and Production which engages relevant stakeholders.

NGOs: As noted above, there are three groups of NGOs engaged in different ways with UNEP. Many of the think-tanks and more academic NGOs engage with UNEP through the Global Environmental Outlook Reports, UNEP's Division for Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA), or the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch. Implementing NGOs, such as IUCN and WWF, have projects with different sections of UNEP. Advocacy NGOs will engage with UNEP when they believe UNEP has a focus on their advocacy work: recent examples here include the Super Cop in chemicals in Bali in 2007, the Mercury negotiations which started in 2009, and the Rio+20 process (2009-2012). Around Rio+20, UNEP meetings played a significant role in both of the major areas under negotiations: (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development poverty eradication; and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development. For the Sustainable Development Goals, UNEP did not play a significant role nor did it seek to engage stakeholders in the process to the extent it had done for Rio+20: a mistake, I think.

UNEP's mistake to be elitist: As you point out, UNEP and IUCN convened the CEOs of major international NGOs to discuss new forms of partnership. This kind of elitism is not a good way for any UN body to go forward. One of the strengths of a Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS)



approach is that it enables smaller and, in particular, developing country NGOs and other stakeholders to have a structure they can engage in. If there is a policy discussion, then they do not have to travel to Nairobi, but can engage with it through social media. An approach limited to talking to major international NGOs excludes many organizations and predominately supports northern-based organizations. I was therefore somewhat shocked that this meeting, mentioned by you, happened at all. UNEP does not engage with a larger stakeholder constituency by focusing on big NGOs. It also does not recognise that other stakeholders, as mentioned above, have a vital role to play for UNEP.

The Way Forward: I wanted to comment on the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF) and also add some recommendations from my previous organization, the Stakeholder Forum, which produced a very good report which, unfortunately, was not significantly followed by action.

The **first** suggestion was in the area of Knowledge Management and Internal Communication. We suggested that, for implementation of projects and other activities with partners to be relevant with lasting impacts, UNEP must prioritize and invest in internal knowledge management systems that allow for communication, lesson-learning, and the exchange of best practices among staff and between UNEP divisions. This would enhance the coherence of working with partners across UNEP.

The **second** was that MGS are well-placed to communicate UNEP's valuable work to wider audiences. Too often, UNEP produces high-quality and useful work which lacks a concomitant communication strategy to ensure wide impact. Communication strategies should be drawn up and relevant partners identified at the programmatic concept stage. Emphasis should be placed on tailoring messages to relevant MGS, establishing partnerships with educational institutions to access children and youth, and exploring the role of UNEP National Committees in disseminating information.

The **third** was the critical area of UNEP forming Strategic Partnerships with MGS. Here strategic partnerships should be established at a sub-programmatic level which can then form the overarching direction for projects and activities. This will avoid the fragmentation inherent in the establishment of hundreds of uncoordinated partnerships across UNEP, and enhance UNEP's impact through aligning partnerships to a clear vision. Strategic implementing partners should further contribute to policy and governance discussions based on their experience and lessons learned.

The **fourth** was enhancing MGS involvement in project preparation at the Country Level. Strategic partners at the country level should be identified through robust stakeholder mapping exercises that consider the role of each of the Major Groups. While the relevance of Major Groups will necessarily vary according to context, it is important for UNEP that a Major Groups "framework" is mainstreamed into the development of strategic and country-level partnerships.

The **fifth**, particularly in light of the SDGs, is for UNEP to develop partnerships with a diverse range of MGS. If an MGS approach is to be mainstreamed into UNEP, it is important that there is evidence of engagement of a range of MGS in implementation and a certain consistency throughout UNEP in its approach to civil society. At the same time, across-the-board representation remains a challenge.

The **sixth** is making engagement with MGS more relevant to the programmatic implementation of UNEP's work. The process of engaging MGS as partners should be clearly focused on the strategic objectives of the Programme of Work to avoid fragmentation. UNEP should align its engagement with MGS to correspond more closely to programme implementation – currently, there is too often a disconnect between those representatives of MGS who contribute at a policy level, and those who act as implementing partners or who have technical expertise in the area. Narrowing the gap between these two groups will ensure that policy better reflects lessons learned.



The **seventh** is the role of MGS Partnerships. UNEP adds significant value where it can play the role of convenor of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Bringing a range of MGS “around the table” to discuss, exchange knowledge, and develop initiatives is critical for the success of the Programme of Work, as it raises awareness and disseminates information to a wider audience.

The **eighth** area is generating ownership and providing guidelines for working with different Major Groups. Partnerships with MGS must, as far as possible, be of equal value to both UNEP and the external partner. UNEP should establish guidelines for working in partnership with MGS. In addition, existing guidelines on working with businesses should be disseminated more widely. UNEP’s Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch would be well-placed to coordinate the production and dissemination of such guidelines in consultation with UNEP staff.

Finally, the GMGSF prior to UNEP: one of the vital roles that a new and improved GMGSF can play is bringing implementers and policy-focused stakeholders together. UNEP should use an enlarged GMGSF to host a partnership forum where partnerships that UNEP with stakeholders would be engaged in to deliver the SDGs and the UNEP Programme of Work should meet for two days prior to the UNEA on the Friday and Saturday and on Sunday the GMGSF would discuss recommendations from the two days to feed into the UNEA. Policy discussions would then be informed by the experience of partnerships and the decisions hopefully would be better decisions.

4. Mark Halle:

Felix makes the case – convincingly and eloquently – that there is something to show for twenty years of interaction between civil society and UNEP. Publications have been issued, meetings have been held, and new institutional vehicles have been born. The “officials” in UNEP have learned to speak with the “masses”. In view of the way governance has changed worldwide in the past two decades, anything less would have been remarkable.

And clearly we should take comfort at some of these changes. There is more space for civil society – in its many guises – to sit at the table with the public sector and to offer ideas. The world, with prominent exceptions, is a more transparent and participatory place than it was at the time of Rio.

Yet the questions remain: in terms of advancing sustainable development over this period, has the approach favoured for engaging with UNEP worked better than the traditional approaches used by the different stakeholder groups? Are our successes the result of this form of investment? And are we confident that this form of engagement paid more dividends than other approaches might have?

Against most parameters, sustainable development has regressed since Rio in 1992. Our atmosphere is warmer and more unstable; biodiversity loss has accelerated; environmental degradation has triggered mass movements of migrants; fish stocks continue to be plundered; the catalogue is, unfortunately, a long one. This is happening because the enthusiasm of our governments to adopt master plans, strategies, conventions, and protocols is not matched by their enthusiasm for putting these into practice.

As a citizen, I am appalled. I want my trade unions agitating for employment-friendly policies. I want the NGOs to be mounting divestment campaigns against carbon assets. I want the youth to reject the world that is being handed to them. And I want businesses to stop peddling heart-warming anecdotes and accept addressing the recalcitrant among them based on enforceable standards of behaviour.

Paper promises we have by the ship-load. Agenda 21 was a perfectly adequate plan, though most of it was never implemented. Should our efforts really be devoted to producing more documents, holding more meetings, and establishing more platforms? Or is our global predicament such that we need to search for more successful ways of bringing about transformative change? This need not exclude UNEP – indeed, it is important that UNEP be very much included, but in a format where each player does what it does best. UNEP can provide a framework and seek to rally the environment ministries in support, or at least, to run



interference. Within that framework, the Major Groups can deploy their particular strengths, focusing on how they – the leaders in their communities – can bring others around.

The New York dialogue in June 2015 – which you characterize as elitist because it gathered mostly large and powerful NGOs – should be the first of many such dialogues – certainly with the other Major Groups, but with the aim to identify pathways forward that will give us a better chance of finally securing the shift to sustainable forms of development. We have an overall framework now with the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Let's show some creativity in working out the form and content of partnerships that will deliver the goals within the time allotted.

I seriously doubt that, as it currently functions, UNEP's approach to engage through the nine Major Groups and the GMGFS will be of much help.

5. Felix Dodds:

I would point out that sustainable development does not happen in a vacuum but instead must contend with global events. Agenda 21 was meant to be implemented with the "peace dividend" from the breakup of the Soviet bloc. Instead, much of the money and effort that could have implemented Agenda 21 was sucked up to help stabilize the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe. We had a similar problem after Stockholm when oil prices went up considerably for most of the 1970s due to the Yom Kippur War and subsequent oil embargo. The success or failure of sustainable development efforts must be evaluated in the broader global context. We address a lot of this in the book *Only One Earth* which looks back over the last 40 years and was the last book to which Maurice Strong contributed.

I would contend that, without the involvement of stakeholders, the present state of affairs at UNEP and elsewhere would be much worse. An easy and recent example of this is the partnership UNEP had with stakeholders in the highlighting and negotiating of the Mercury Convention. There are many examples which I could provide if space allowed.

I would also like to deal with the last point regarding implementation. I have made some substantive suggestions in my previous response on what the future functions of the Major Groups and Stakeholder work should include. I have tried to show how both advocacy and implementation stakeholders – and those that do both – all have a role to play. In the past, the link between UNEP's work on the ground with implementing stakeholders seldom found its way into political forums; as a result, the unique knowledge and experience they could have contributed was lost in the process. This must change for the implementation of the SDGs.

Partnerships are not THE answer but they are part of the answer and I hope very soon to be sharing a further development of the paper on partnerships I did earlier for UNDESA (http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf15/2015partnerships_background_note.pdf). There is great work being done to outline how governments can be held accountable for doing their part in implementation and I would draw readers to several works in particular. There is a very good paper by Alessandro Motter for the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development government group entitled *Parliament's possible role in monitoring the implementation of the new development goals* (<http://friendsofgovernance.org/index.php/paper-4-3-parliaments-role-in-monitoring-the-implementation-of-the-sdgs/>). The paper refers to a new agenda that, for the first time, calls for an increased role for parliaments and this is a very important stakeholder group which can hold executive branches accountable. The book *Governance for Sustainable Development: Ideas for the Post 2015 Agenda*, produced by the above Friends group, has a lot of great ideas and should be required reading for anyone interested in implementation (<http://friendsofgovernance.org/index.php/books/>). Finally, there is a very good paper, by Farooq Ullah, Derek Osborn and Jack Cornforth, on the role that National Councils or Commissions on SDGs could play (<http://friendsofgovernance.org/index.php/paper-4-1-national-councils-for-sustainable-development-lessons-from-the-past-and-present/>).

On the issue of MGS accountability, I am in agreement with Mark that this needs to be introduced. I have suggested that we should look back at the nine chapters of Agenda 21 for sections related to the Major Groups and produce equivalent materials for the relevant



stakeholders around the SDGs. Enhanced engagement by stakeholders in the decision making process should be balanced with responsibility for reporting what they are doing to implement the new agenda.

This is an exciting time to be engaged in the sustainable development agenda and it is vital that THIS time we do in fact implement what has been agreed.



The authors:

Mark Halle

Mark Halle lectures, writes, and publishes frequently on issues relating to sustainable development. He has worked for the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) as its European Representative and as its Director for Trade and Investment. In this capacity, he supervises a team of some 30 professionals based in Europe and around the world.

He began his career in the field of international negotiations, serving in the diplomatic secretariat of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. In that capacity, he was associated with the negotiation of the Barcelona Convention on the Mediterranean Environment, one of the first regional environmental conventions ever adopted.

He then spent five years with UNEP, starting in the Policy Planning Unit and then working on the global State of the Environment report published 10 years after UNEP's establishment. From UNEP, he worked with WWF and IUCN in writing the World Conservation Strategy, a document which fundamentally changed the way in which conservation of nature was approached, namely by abandoning the earlier notion that conservation and development were necessarily in opposition to one another and embracing the notion that they are essential components of sustainable development.

Halle then moved to WWF International, serving for three years as conservation assistant to HRH The Prince Phillip (a past president of WWF) and helping to establish and direct the WWF program in China.

He moved to IUCN in 1984 to establish the Conservation for Development Centre, IUCN's first move to involvement with the developing countries. For seven years, he worked in, and directed, this Centre, establishing the foundation for what is now an extensive worldwide IUCN presence. Halle then spent a further three years setting up IUCN's fundraising system, and a final four years establishing its Global Policy and Partnerships program.

Halle was born in the United States and grew up in Switzerland.

Felix Dodds

Felix Dodds is an author, futurist, and activist. He has been instrumental in developing new modes of stakeholder engagement with the United Nations, particularly within the field of sustainable development. Mr. Dodds was the Executive Director of the Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future from 1992–2012. He is probably best known as the author of *How to Lobby at Intergovernmental Meetings: Mine is a Café Latte*, written with co-author Michael Strauss.

Dodds' most recent book is: *The Water, Food, Energy and Climate Nexus: Challenges and an Agenda for Action (May 2016)* he is also working on a companion to: *From Rio+20 to the New Development Agenda*, written with Jorge Laguna-Celis and Liz Thompson, and *Only One Earth – The Long Road via Rio to Sustainable Development*, written with Michael Strauss and Maurice Strong. *This is Negotiating the Sustainable Development Goals: A transformational agenda for an insecure world with Ambassador David Donoghue and Jimena Leiva Roesch*. The books look at the sustainable development process and outcomes of the last forty years and challenges for the future.

His previous books include *Biodiversity and Ecosystem Insecurity*, edited with Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, UN Convention on Biological Diversity Executive Secretary.

He is an International Ambassador for the City of Bonn and Senior Fellow at the Global Research Institute and Senior Affiliate at the Water Institute at the University of North Carolina. He is also an Associate Fellow at the Tellus Institute in Boston.

In 2010, Green Eco Services listed him as one of the 25 environmentalists ahead of their time, and Wikipedia listed him in their list of 49 Green thinkers.

His two children are Robin Dodds and Merri Dodds.

