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Environment Programme**



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**POLICY ISSUES: COORDINATION AND COOPERATION
WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS**

Proposal for a future strategy document in the field of the
environment as a successor to the System-wide Medium-term
Environment Programme (SWMTEP)

Addendum

Inter-Agency Environment Coordination Group (IAEG)

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report outlines developments relating to the establishment of the Inter-Agency Environment Coordination Group (IAEG), pursuant to Governing Council decision 17/9, which endorsed the course of action proposed to the Governing Council at its seventeenth session by the Executive Director in document UNEP/GC.17/12/Add.1, "to enable the Executive Director to discharge effectively the coordinating role required of UNEP by various legislative authorities". Following United Nations system-wide consultations and in order to take fully into account the working of the post-United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) arrangements at the intergovernmental and inter-agency levels, the Executive Director in August 1994 informed executive heads of United Nations agencies and organizations of her proposals concerning the future discharge of UNEP's coordination mandate. Executive heads were informed that, subject to their concurrence and as mandated by the Governing Council, she would be convening a meeting of the IAEG in the third quarter of 1994. Subsequently, the Executive Director chaired the first IAEG meeting in Geneva from 31 October to 1 November 1994. The IAEG had before it for its consideration background documents containing, *inter alia*, a proposal for the role and functioning of the IAEG. The present document outlines developments relating to the establishment of the IAEG and its role and functioning and summarizes the views of UNEP's partners as expressed at the first IAEG meeting.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

- (a) Take note of the report of the Executive Director on the Inter-Agency Environment Coordination Group (IAEG);

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(b) Support the establishment of the IAEG as a flexible consultative and advisory body, meeting as and when required, to enable UNEP to discharge effectively its coordination mandate;

(c) Decide that the IAEG should focus on assisting the Executive Director in coordinating the activities of the United Nations system in addressing the major challenges, as contained in the programme for the utilization of the resources of the Environment Fund;

(d) Stress that, in determining the terms of reference and future activities of the IAEG, full account be taken of the role, responsibilities and work of the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) and its task - managing system, with a view to avoiding duplication of efforts and making the coordinating role and work of UNEP compatible with and complementary to that of IACSD;

(e) Encourage the further clarification of the IAEG's terms of reference, especially with reference to the role and functioning of IACSD;

(f) Request the Executive Director to report to the Governing Council at its regular session in 1997 on progress made in the work of the IAEG.

Inter-agency Environment Coordination Group (IAEG)

1. With the establishment of the institutional arrangements following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) UNEP undertook a review and refocusing of its functional coordination role. The resulting proposals for "Arrangements for system-wide cooperation and coordination in the field of the environment" (UNEP/GC.17/12/Add.1), submitted to the Governing Council at its seventeenth session, were made in the context of the reform of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) subsidiary structure and the report of the ACC Task Force on the UNCED follow-up that led to the establishment of the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD). The Task Force, inter alia, recommended that "the ACC invite the Executive Director of UNEP to submit specific proposal on system-wide cooperation and coordination in the field of the environment". The Executive Director proposed, inter alia, the establishment of the IAEG to meet when required to address policy issues, emerging issues in the field of environment and any issues of a system-wide nature emanating from coordination at the programme level that require to be addressed at the policy level.

2. The background document provided to IAEG members contained a proposal on the role and functioning of the IAEG and outlined the background to and rationale for the IAEG, in view of UNEP's reaffirmed policy guidance and coordination mandate, as provided in Agenda 21, chapter 38.21, and of the assessment that there was a continuing need for UNEP, in collaboration with partners in the United Nations system, to have an effective forum to coordinate approaches to policy matters in the field of the environment, especially the 14 priority areas for UNEP leadership outlined in Agenda 21, chapter 38.22. The proposal took into account the mandate and work of IACSD and contained an assessment of IACSD's capacity to deal with policy issues and emerging issues in the field of the environment. The following terms of reference for the IAEG's functioning were proposed:

(a) Advise the Executive Director of UNEP, in preparing reports for the Governing Council of UNEP, on the discharge of its system-wide policy guidance role, informing the Council of environmental trends and emerging policy issues;

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(b) Assist the Executive Director of UNEP in the selection of topics and the substantive preparation of the ACC report to the UNEP Governing Council, for which she is responsible to the ACC;

(c) Provide a forum for the exchange of information on important new initiatives in the field of the environment and, in particular, those that may be of relevance to the programmes and mandates of UNEP and other member institutions;

(d) Provide a forum for the discussion of the policy implications of new and emerging environmental issues that would require a coordinated response by the United Nations system;

(e) Provide a forum for discussion and play an advisory role for the Executive Director of UNEP concerning the development of a system-wide policy and strategy in the field of the environment and assist in the preparation of relevant reports to the Governing Council of UNEP. This would include the follow-up to UNEP Governing Council decisions on the System-wide Medium-term Environment Programme (SWMTEP);

(f) Assist the Executive Director of UNEP in the development of biennial programmes of work for submission to the Governing Council, including the review of the impact of UNEP's work and funding on the activities of the United Nations system.

3. A new IAEG would thus have to reflect a refocusing of UNEP's functional coordination arrangements and be designed as a flexible mechanism, meeting when required, to complement and reinforce more regular coordination activities at the programme manager level. Therefore, the following criteria were proposed to guide the IAEG's functioning and enhance and maintain its relevance and utility: cost effectiveness; flexibility; value-added; complementarity; and partnership. The first meeting of the IAEG (Geneva, 31 October - 1 November 1994) was attended by 14 concerned United Nations organizations and addressed the role and functioning of the IAEG; proposals for a future strategy and planning document in the field of the environment as a successor document to SWMTEP; the ACC report to the UNEP Governing Council; and the preparation for the 1996-1997 UNEP programme and the role of United Nations agencies and programmes therein.

4. The IAEG meeting revealed a general consensus on the potential usefulness of a flexible coordinating mechanism on environmental matters. An IAEG should form coherent positions and facilitate UNEP's catalytic and coordinating role, supplementing the coordination responsibility of UNEP programme managers at the programme level and it should, as a precondition, have distinct terms of reference which would ensure complementarity with the work and mandate of IACSD, in order to avoid duplication of effort. Such terms of reference should, therefore, initially focus explicitly on the areas of Agenda 21 designated for UNEP's leadership, which all contain significant areas for collaboration with other United Nations organizations. It was emphasized that IAEG is not an ACC subsidiary, but a consultative and advisory body, and that a functional relationship to IACSD should be established.

5. The IAEG was also viewed as an advisory body to UNEP's Executive Director, to indicate gaps and assess the effectiveness of UNEP's catalytic and coordinating role in the United Nations system and to provide access for members to UNEP's Executive Director. It was emphasized that the IAEG should be a true partnership, which should be reflected in concrete outputs. There was a general feeling that IAEG should initially operate and meet on an ad hoc basis, evolving with experience to distinguish it from IACSD and stressing the value of an informal and flexible forum, without strict institutional requirements. Hence,

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the agenda should be agreed on an ad hoc basis, with the meeting based on well-prepared documentation with clear points for decision. Others felt that, while a highly institutionalized body should be avoided, certain issues were of a recurrent nature and proposals for IAEG's functions should not be too broad. The proposed criteria to guide IAEG were generally agreeable.

6. The IAEG would also facilitate the flow of information on ongoing and proposed environmental programmes and the related needs of UNEP and partner organizations as a two-way communication process. UNEP could offer guidance to partner organizations in certain areas and, in turn, would be provided with feedback on new environmental thinking within United Nations organizations. Discussions on UNEP's programming were considered particularly important, in order to provide information on how UNEP views its evolving role and to define the dialogue on joint programming. The IAEG would also be used to decide collectively on topics for future ACC reports to the UNEP Governing Council, reflecting what executive heads wish to bring to Governing Council's attention. In future, the IAEG would consider how to improve coordination at the regional and country levels and possibly coordinate environmental inputs into United Nations conferences where necessary.

Recommendations

7. The system-wide views expressed at the meeting of the IAEG reveal that there may be a case for establishing an IAEG, meeting as and when required and with terms of reference which would ensure complementarity with the work and mandate of IACSD.

8. It follows that, in considering the matter, the Governing Council should take into account the fact that the mandates of the Council and of the Executive Director of UNEP in the field of policy guidance and coordination of the environmental activities of the United Nations system show signs of overlap with the mandate and evolving practice of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and IACSD, respectively, to provide for policy guidance and, through the system of task managers, coordinate the activities of the United Nations system in the field of sustainable development.

9. The Governing Council may further take into account that, partly as a consequence of the above, the Executive Director proposes that the Council adopt a focused issue-oriented Fund programme, concentrating on major challenges in the field of the environment and taking into account the priority tasks assigned to UNEP by Agenda 21. Rather than financially supporting activities of other parts of the United Nations system, the resources of the UNEP Fund will be used to implement and seek partnership in implementing the proposed UNEP programme of activities. In discharging her mandate to coordinate the environmental activities of the United Nations system, keep them under review and assess their effectiveness, the Executive Director will focus on UNEP's role as task manager in the implementation of Agenda 21, so as to avoid duplication of efforts.

10. Coordination of the environmental activities of the United Nations system should be seen and pursued against the background of the changing role and responsibilities of UNEP and its relationship with CSD. It would follow that, in discharging her coordination mandate, the Executive Director would principally focus on the major challenges contained in the proposed UNEP Fund programme, while taking full account of the role, responsibilities and work of IACSD and its task manager system with a view to avoiding duplication of efforts and making the coordinating role and work of UNEP serve both the interests of UNEP and those of CSD and IACSD.

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11. Against this background, UNEP should:

(a) Continue to clarify the IAEG's functional linkages and legal relationship to IACSD. On the basis of this clarification and opinions voiced at the first IAEG meeting, UNEP should draw up revised terms of reference for the IAEG, to be submitted to the IAEG members for their approval;

(b) Coordination and consultation at the programmatic level should be primarily the responsibility of programme managers and would be complemented by the work of the IAEG at the policy level;

(c) The IAEG should play a key role in assisting the Executive Director in preparing for the ACC's consideration of environmental matters and for the Governing Council's consideration of matters relating to system-wide environment coordination;

(d) The IAEG would function as a flexible mechanism, meeting as required.
