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**United Nations Environment Assembly of the
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Items 5 and 6 of the provisional agenda*

Policy issues

**Follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of
United Nations summits, in particular the United Nations
Conference on Sustainable Development, and major
intergovernmental meetings of relevance to the
United Nations Environment Assembly**

Progress on the Eye on Earth initiative

Note by the secretariat**

Summary

The present note, to which reference is made in the reports of the Executive Director on the implementation of Governing Council decision 27/2 (UNEP/EA.1/2/Add.1) and on the state of the environment (UNEP/EA.1/4), describes the progress made since the twenty-seventh session of the Governing Council in follow-up to the outcomes of the Eye on Earth summit, held in Abu Dhabi in December 2011, and continuing efforts to build the Eye on Earth alliance and network referred to in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, “The future we want”. The alliance and network will also underpin the implementation of the UNEP Live platform by establishing the institutional framework for the delivery of data and information. The draft provisional agenda and preparatory process for the 2015 Eye on Earth summit, to be held in Abu Dhabi, are also outlined along with the expected outcomes of the summit.

* UNEP/EA.1/1.

** Issued without formal editing.

I. Background

1. The Eye on Earth Summit (Abu Dhabi, 11-15 December 2011), sponsored by the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi (EAD), facilitated by the Abu Dhabi Global Environment Data Initiative (AGEDI)¹ and organized in partnership with UNEP, brought together over 900 stakeholders from all sectors, including civil society, to address the issue of access to environmental and societal data to advance the sustainable development agenda. The Summit convened the nucleus of a global, multi-stakeholder network which is evolving and expanding.
2. The Summit endorsed the Eye on Earth Declaration² and approved eight special initiatives covering the following priority areas: oceans and blue carbon, disaster management, water security, community sustainability and resiliency, and biodiversity. These five thematic special initiatives are underpinned by three cross-cutting initiatives on a Global Network of Networks (GNON), environmental education and access to information (termed Access for All). Technology support and capacity-building for developing countries is mainstreamed into all eight special initiatives.
3. With the exception of water security, all the special initiatives are being implemented through a set of integrated projects. Each project is being managed by a lead institution in partnership with various institutions working in the respective subject area.
4. Detailed progress reports³ on Eye on Earth were presented to the 12th Special Session and the 27th Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. Further information about Eye on Earth is available on the website <http://www.eoesummit.org/>.

II. Common agenda for Eye on Earth

5. Understanding the evidence of unprecedented environmental challenges at all levels, including possible irreversible changes with potentially negative implications for economic and social development, especially for the poor and vulnerable groups in society; and conscious of the cooperation needed among a wide array of disparate organizations for the exchange and access to timely, credible and relevant data and information as a critical part of the science-policy interface needed for advancing development, implementation and decision making in support of sustainable development goals.
6. As cited in para 76 (g) of “The future we want”, one important aspect of strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development is to promote and facilitate access to reliable, relevant and timely data in areas related to the three dimensions of sustainable development. Paragraph 274 highlights the role of the Eye on Earth Network and Global Earth Observing System of Systems (GEOSS) in developing environmental monitoring systems. However, the Eye on Earth Network as a ‘network of networks’ is an evolving special initiative labelled GNON (Global Network of Networks) that currently has a small core set of stakeholders
7. The Eye on Earth User Conference (Dublin, 4-6 March 2013) organized by the European Environment Agency in collaboration with UNEP and AGEDI adopted the Dublin Eye on Earth Network Statement,⁴ which defined the niche role of Eye on Earth as being:

To facilitate the sharing of environmental, societal and economic data and information, provided by the diversity of knowledge communities, to support sustainable development.

III. Eye on Earth Alliance and Network

8. The Dublin conference was also agreed to establish the Eye on Earth Alliance comprising institutional stakeholders that subscribe to the principles enshrined in the 2011 Eye on Earth Summit Declaration and share a common agenda centred on the achievement of the goal articulated in the niche statement. The Alliance will drive the formation of the broader Eye on Earth Network referenced in para 274 of the Rio+20 outcome document.
9. The Eye on Earth Alliance is essentially a partnership building initiative that aims to convene a broad set of stakeholders across environmental, social and economic sectors to converge and collaborate around a set of key foundational and thematic issues to collectively address sustainable

¹ The Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI) was established at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 as a Type II partnership.

² Eye on Earth Declaration: <http://www.eyeonearthsummit.org/sign>.

³ See information documents UNEP/GCSS.XII/INF/6 and UNEP/GC.27/INF/11.

⁴ <http://www.eoesummit.org/news/eye-earth-network-%E2%80%93-dublin-statement>.

development goals. This includes a focus on data and information infrastructure including the methodology, tools, policies and institutional mechanisms to apply these resources effectively. Participating in the Alliance allows members to contribute to the common agenda and related outcomes and be part of a global stakeholder community and collaborative environment that collectively targets key needs and gaps that has the potential to provide transformative impact.

A. Guiding principles for the Alliance and Network

10. The Eye on Earth Alliance will engage a community of stakeholder organizations and existing networks to work towards a common agenda to collectively increase the availability and accessibility, as defined in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, of integrated and scientifically-based information that is relevant, usable and provides impact within a developed and developing country context. The Alliance will facilitate a broad stakeholder engagement process that is regionally relevant and convenes, converges and collaborates around this common agenda to deliver collective impact. With a focus on the data and information needs and gaps required for more effective decision making towards sustainable development, this catalytic and niche role of the Eye on Earth Alliance will be based on a number of guiding principles:

- (a) Improve equitable access to information;
- (b) Develop adequate institutional and legislative enabling conditions for further implementation of Principle 10;
- (c) Further advance upon existing interoperability standards and mechanisms for information exchange and management;
- (d) Make credible, relevant and timely information more available;
- (e) Keep information management close to the source;
- (f) Provide effective mechanisms for collection of environmental, economic and social information and avoid unnecessary duplication in data collection;
- (g) Information supports reporting obligations and decision-making;
- (h) Address information gaps from both the demand and supply perspectives;
- (i) Integrates economic, environmental and social information to advance sustainable development issues;
- (j) Foster collaboration among communities, networks, systems, institutions and technology providers;
- (k) Further strengthen existing initiatives and supports development of networks and regional cooperation;
- (l) Strengthen capacity building and technology support for developing and transitioning countries;
- (m) Enhance efforts on incorporating environmental information and programs into education curriculum;
- (n) Further develop public private partnerships for use of information and communication technology (ICT).

B. Benefits of Alliance membership

11. Stakeholders that become members of the Eye on Earth Alliance will benefit derive the following benefits:

- (a) Access to a forum that promotes and facilitates interaction among the full range of environmental, economic and societal interests – Government, intergovernmental, UN system, non-governmental, private sector, academia, multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and foundations – in all parts of the world;
- (b) Access to engage with stakeholders, initiatives and projects that one may not have had visibility or access to previously;
- (c) Synergies gained through systemic, interdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder involvement;
- (d) Involvement in a global movement that aims to improve information availability and accessibility to support policy and decision-making for safeguarding a more sustainable environment in the future;

- (e) Involvement with technology support and capacity building in developing countries with an emphasis on the integration of environmental, societal and economic data and information networking to support informed decision making;
 - (f) Synergies fostered by the Eye on Earth movement among various communities that mitigate against duplication and fragmentation, and help promote good practice;
 - (g) Access to funding mechanisms that enables the Alliance to demonstrate transformative change.
12. In addition, opportunities will exist for:
- (a) Developing networks and partnerships;
 - (b) Addressing common needs for content development;
 - (c) Sharing tools, technology and infrastructure;
 - (d) Adding value to your current projects through incorporation of new ideas;
 - (e) Accessing national, regional and global sound practices, protocols and standards;
 - (f) Participating in pilot activities;
 - (g) Replicating successful outcomes in other countries and regions;
 - (h) Identifying and accessing new funding opportunities.

C. Establishing and mobilizing the Alliance

13. In establishing the Alliance, the plan is to start with the existing core group of institutions who are already engaged with Eye on Earth and who have a global mandate centred around the issue of access to data and information, and then expand across geographic and thematic dimensions through the inclusion of relevant stakeholders that have a shared interest in the common agenda.
14. The establishment of the Alliance, and ultimately the Network, will be tightly coupled with the development of UNEP Live⁵. The delivery of data services to UNEP Live must be underpinned by an effective institutional network of data and information providers. A series of regional and sub-regional environmental information network meetings to be organized in 2014 and 2015 will convene the relevant stakeholders for multiple purposes:
- (a) GEO-6 regional assessment process;
 - (b) UNEP Live data services delivery;
 - (c) Eye on Earth Alliance building;
 - (d) Capacity building for the GEO assessments and UNEP Live data and analysis platform.
15. Tentative dates for these network meetings are: Latin America and the Caribbean (2014); West Asia (2014); Asia and the Pacific (2015); Africa (2015); Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (2015), North America (2015) and, ideally, they will be planned to coincide with key meetings of the relevant environmental information and observation networks.
16. Membership of the Alliance will include the following categories of stakeholders:⁶
- (a) **Governmental:** Governments are providers of official data and statistics which in the interests of cost effectiveness and efficiency should be collected once and made available for multiple purposes serving different target groups both nationally and internationally. Through participation in the Alliance, staff in Government ministries and agencies will have the opportunity to share information, expertise and experience on critical issues such as data collection, integration and management across the three dimensions of sustainable development, information infrastructure and technology developments, common standards and protocols, and new tools. Alliance membership will provide such staff with access to a broad network of collaborators and specialized knowledge repositories that can be tapped into to support local projects and programs.
 - (b) **Civil Society:** Civil society is a key constituency for the Eye on Earth Alliance mission at all levels including issues related to access, capacity building, regional representation, developing countries and understanding environmental, societal and economic data and information from a

⁵ See UNEP/EA.1/4/Add.1.

⁶ Note that an organization, based on the type of work it conducts, can belong to more than one of the categories listed.

demand side perspective for sustainable development. Outcomes from initiatives and activities implemented through the Alliance should enhance the application of Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration and benefit the general public. Therefore, having an organization that can provide this perspective as well as provide direction on how to better engage these organizations and population will support the common agenda of the Alliance.

(c) **Intergovernmental:** Intergovernmental organizations such as United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and various regional organisations such as the EEA, ASEAN, etc work with member states on data collection and integration to produce regional and global analyses on the state and trends of the environment and sustainable development to inform policy-making. The Alliance provides a channel for international cooperation to achieve common objectives while avoiding duplication of activities and, at the same time, identifying and filling information gaps.

(d) **Technical:** Technical organizations can benefit from tapping into technological resources, methods, tools and information available through the Alliance community. They can also participate in projects and programs funded through the Alliance, or team with other members with complementary capabilities to pursue funding opportunities beyond those offered directly through the Alliance. Cross-promotion of projects that exemplify Eye on Earth principles can provide positive visibility to a broad audience.

(e) **Academic and Research:** The scientific and technical community is also a valuable source of data and information arising from research activities and citizen science initiatives. The Eye on Earth Alliance aims for innovative methods to drive transformational change. Participating in the Alliance will provide opportunities to network with other academic and research institutions to share experiences and lessons learned, but to also develop partnerships and coordinated approaches towards solving some of the core data and information issues related to sustainable development. Since education and capacity building is a foundational issue within the Alliance, academic and research institutes will be able to offer their expertise to a broad set of constituents, while also identifying other practices, gaps and needs that benefit their area of work.

(f) **Private Sector:** Given the global range of the Eye on Earth Alliance and the various complexities this offers, one solution does not necessarily fit all. Therefore, there is a great opportunity for private sector organizations to introduce technology, methods, tools, and services that address specific needs. While the Alliance will stay neutral to the array of solutions available and participation in the Alliance should not be space for soliciting business, collectively and collaboratively, there will be opportunities for the private sector to learn the needs of the community, which should support public-private partnerships and offer prospects for applying solutions. The private sector is often at the leading edge of driving innovation, and because stakeholders from all types of organizations will be part of the community, a well-rounded view of user needs will be made available.

(g) **Donors:** The Alliance will provide a platform for donors to strategically align their funding and capacity building interests with the principles identified in the Alliance Common Agenda, the Special Initiatives and the 2015 Eye on Earth Summit. The Alliance will also provide opportunities for direct participation with bilateral, multilateral, foundation, private sector and sovereign fund donors to create dynamic new public – private models for funding sustainable development projects. The Alliance's focus on integrating environmental, societal and economic data and information technologies, systems and networks will help these donor networks more cost-effectively identify, align, design, finance, implement, monitor and evaluate their sustainable development projects. The Alliance will provide further value by challenging and engaging with these donor networks to establish the new funding policies and public-private partnerships that will be required to mobilize and leverage the massive capital needed to meet the challenges expressed in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at global, regional, national and local levels. The Eye on Earth Alliance funding strategy will provide opportunities for donor organizations to directly contribute to the capitalization of an Eye on Earth Fund and/or provide donor-advised matching grants, investments, technical assistance and capacity building support for specific Special Initiative projects and to showcase their participation and programmes at the Summit. The Alliance will also explore methods to institutionalize investments in data and information as a critical policy requirement in donor organizations.

IV. Eye on Earth Alliance Summit 2015

17. The Eye on Earth Alliance Summit will take place in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates from 6-8 October 2015. The tagline for the Summit will be “Sharing knowledge for the future we want”.
18. The tentative agenda items for the Summit are as follows:
- (a) Showcasing impact of progress from the Special Initiatives endorsed at the 2011 Summit.
 - (b) Strengthening the Eye on Earth Alliance.
 - (c) Demonstrating the role of Eye on Earth in the post Rio+20 process.
 - (d) Promoting principle 10.
 - (e) Supporting the data and information gaps of the SDGs.
 - (f) Policy framework for investment in information infrastructure and repatriation of data.
 - (g) Networking & exchanging of ideas, innovation and knowledge.
 - (h) Citizen science and environmental monitoring.
 - (i) Launching projects and identifying emerging issues.
 - (j) Establishment of the Eye on Earth Trust Fund/Mechanism.
 - (k) Commitment to Action and ownership of Eye on Earth.
19. The expected outcomes of the Summit are:
- (a) Enhanced availability and accessibility of data and information across the three pillars of sustainable development;
 - (b) Fully operational Eye on Earth Alliance and a strengthened Network;
 - (c) Better understanding of the logistic and technical challenges in delivering data to compute indicators that will measure progress towards the achievement of targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
 - (d) Enhanced role of citizen science for environmental observation and monitoring;
 - (e) Enhanced implementation and awareness of Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development;
 - (f) Improved delivery of data and information to UNEP Live through a global network of data and information providers.
20. An Executive Advisory Team will provide overall strategic guidance in framing and supporting the organisation of the Summit. A Summit Organizational Committee will be responsible for all organizational aspects related to the Summit and its preparatory process. Due regard will be given to equitable regional representation on any committees and task forces that will be established to support the preparatory process for the Summit.
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