

Background Paper

General Assembly Thematic Debate, 11 and 12 February 2008

“Addressing Climate Change: The United Nations and the World at Work”

A. Introduction

1. Climate change has risen to the very top of the international policy agenda. The Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that global warming is “unequivocally” the result of human activities. The scientific consensus is clear, now we need to focus on what to do about it.
2. The General Assembly is the appropriate forum to discuss the climate change challenge in a comprehensive way and thereby can support the ongoing negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Member States will have the opportunity to provide policy guidance for UN system activities to address climate change. The objective of the debate is to consider how best the United Nations system in collaboration with Member States, the private sector and civil society can collectively address climate change. The questions at the end of the sections are intended to stimulate the discussion.
3. The General Debate of the General Assembly, in September 2007, and the High-Level Event on Climate Change, convened by the Secretary-General clearly signalled Member States’ commitment to effectively tackle climate change. The subsequent Bali conference delivered the Bali Action Plan – the crucial mandate to launch negotiations for the achievement of a comprehensive global agreement by the end of 2009. The plan affirmed that the key areas for action are adaptation, mitigation, technology, and financing, as well deforestation. While the overall assessment of adaptation needs vary, there is agreement that resources need to be dramatically scaled up in the future framework.
4. Climate change is a sustainable development challenge. Unless it is addressed effectively it will have dramatic and adverse consequences on the environment, and on economic and social development. Addressing climate change demands the full and effective integration of the four key areas for action into national sustainable development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Climate change has also serious implications on international peace and security, including migration, resource shortages and humanitarian crises.

B. Partnerships on climate change

5. Partnerships between the private sector, non-governmental organisations, the media, parliaments, the scientific community, the United Nations system, international organisations and Member States are essential to make progress to address climate change, both on adaptation and mitigation. The nature of these partnerships and cooperative efforts vary widely: some partnerships and joint ventures are primarily driven by governments, while others have roots in civil society and the private sector. The challenges of climate

change are re-drawing the traditional dividing lines and creating new — previously unlikely — alliances, for instance between energy companies and environmental groups. Alliances also range in size and scope, from small grassroots projects to initiatives of international corporations.

6. Cooperation and partnership have long been at the core of the scientific research that defines our understanding of climate change and informs policies on mitigation and adaptation. International networks of scientists and researchers underpin systematic observation of the climate system, improving seasonal forecasting and the long-term modelling of climate change.

7. Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are joining the business community in partnerships at local, national, regional and international levels. Innovative partnerships aim at reducing emissions from key global economic sectors and unlocking cost-effective, near-term opportunities for mitigation. Across the world, in developed and developing countries alike, local authorities are complementing national actions on climate change, by adopting policies and implementing measures to achieve reductions in local greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and enhance urban living. Increasing urbanisation - from 47 per cent in 2005 to a projected 60 per cent in 2030 – especially in developing countries, makes cities crucial sites for tackling climate change.

8. The role of the business sector as a source of solutions on climate change is widely recognized. The private sector has the practical know-how, technology and financial resources to help transform climate problems into business opportunities. Action to address climate change can then drive economic growth in the clean technologies and related services required to make the transition to low-carbon economies.

9. Despite recent progress, the current framework supporting the transfer, deployment and diffusion of technology remains insufficient. International technology partnerships and transfers could pave the way for wide-ranging win-win scenarios to promote sustainable development and climate change mitigation. For example, US\$20 trillion of investment in the energy sector expected by 2030 could be of central importance for mitigating climate change and for the transition to low-carbon economies. A vast number of international partnerships have also been formed with the aim of addressing emissions from the energy sector by promoting cleaner energy technologies, such as energy efficiency, renewables and carbon capture and storage.

10. Partnerships and cooperative action by all stakeholders are vital to advancing the global effort to combat climate change. Facilitating engagement and partnership with civil society and the private sector has become an important feature of the UN system's contribution toward the global response to climate change. However, tackling this collective concern requires solutions at all levels, including cooperation and linkages across traditional boundaries that separate government, NGOs, business and other civil society actors.

Questions for discussion

1. *How can we expand the reach and effectiveness of partnerships and cooperative ventures?*

2. *How can partnerships support and strengthen cooperation among developing countries?*
3. *What are the critical elements of effective public- private partnerships?*
4. *How can partnerships contribute to designing and implementing innovative financing mechanisms for climate change adaptation and mitigation activities?*

C. Overview of the United Nations activities on climate change

11. The Secretary-General has made it a priority to ensure that the UN “Delivers as One” in supporting the global response to climate change. The Secretary-General’s report¹ will contain a comprehensive overview of UN system activities on climate change, drawing on work already undertaken by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).

12. The current inter-governmental negotiations, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), are evolving around four key areas: adaptation, mitigation, technology and finance. A large number of UN entities assist countries in implementing the decisions adopted by UNFCCC Parties, for instance with respect to capacity building and financing. Entities of the UN system play a central role in providing scientific and technical information enabling evidence based policy and decision making, for instance through the IPCC.

13. At the national level, the UN system makes available analytical and operational capacities to support countries as they determine their national priorities, their strategies and policies for mitigation and adaptation, as well as their sector policy options to integrated sustainable development. Coordination of the UN system at the national level has become all the more important to ensure effective and coherent support.

14. The UN system both leads – and strives to create conditions for – partnerships and cooperative efforts, through partnership networks, such as the CSD Sustainable Development Partnerships and cooperative efforts, such as the UN Global Compact. At the intergovernmental level, civil society has a platform in meetings of the UNFCCC, as well as in other forums dealing with climate change and related themes, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development and the UN Forum on Forests.

Adaptation

15. The impacts of climate change risk undermining Member States national sustainable development and poverty eradication strategies. The UN system promotes and supports the development of national strategies on adaptation to address both short and long-term needs, policy decisions and operational programmes in relevant sectors. For example, by building the capacity of local communities to manage water resources and increase resilience to droughts and floods. Action is also being taken to collect, analyse and disseminate good practices and knowledge, based on lessons learned and pilot projects.

¹ General Assembly resolution 62/8 of 19 November 2007 requests that the Secretary-General provide the report by 25th January 2008.

The UN system also supports integrated policy making and effective early warning systems, based on improved vulnerability analysis with respect to both natural disasters and other climate risks.

Mitigation

16. The collective response to climate change requires contributions by all Member States, with developed countries taking the lead. The UN system assists developing countries in identifying and implementing national greenhouse gas mitigation strategies while promoting sustainable development. In this respect, support is provided to integrate mitigation policies into national development strategies, focusing on energy, construction, agriculture, transportation, industry, forestry and land management. Various entities of the UN system support the deployment of clean energy technologies, including, energy efficiency and renewables.

Technology

17. The UN system supports Member States to strengthen policy frameworks that can accelerate the transfer, deployment and dissemination of existing and new technological solutions. It promotes the creation of bilateral, multilateral and private-public partnerships on technology research and development. The UN system also provides technical support to developing countries in conducting technology needs assessments, as well as in transforming such assessments into bankable technology transfer projects.

Financing

18. The UN system provides support to national governments in the formulation of policies to increase investment and financial flows for adaptation and mitigation. These have given rise to the understanding that, especially for the poorest countries, increased access to public financing will be of great importance. Under the Nairobi Framework, agencies of the UN system are helping developing countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, to improve their level of participation in the Clean Development Mechanism.

Questions for discussion

- 1. What strategic objectives should the UN pursue regarding climate change?*
- 2. How can the UN best achieve these goals?*
- 3. How can the UN system improve the contribution of its activities and partnerships to climate change mitigation and adaptation, both in terms of operations as well as public advocacy/awareness?*
- 4. How can the UN system assist Member States addressing mitigation actions and policies?*
- 5. How can the UN system assist in scaling up support for adaptation?*
- 6. What steps can the UN system take to move forward from “talk about technology” to actual deployment and transfer? What scale is needed, and what can the UN realistically deliver?*