

GEF Press Brief

By D. Manuel- GEF central Focal point

The GEF-NGO Network Forum was held in the Cape Town International Convention Centre, South Africa, on 28 August 2006 as part of the GEF Third Assembly (August 28-30).

Under the theme “Turning Policy into Reality from the Ground Up”, its overall goal was to raise awareness of global environmental issues which have a negative impact on sustainable livelihoods, and poverty eradication and to stimulate a fruitful and focused dialogue and exchange amongst participants with a view to achieving the following two objectives.

First, providing an opportunity for NGOs, indigenous people’s groups and rural and urban grassroots communities to participate and contribute their knowledge and expertise to discussions on the global environment, sustainable livelihoods, and poverty eradication.

Second, bringing to the attention of governments and regional organizations, the capacity and contributions of these groups to address global environmental challenges and offering recommendations on how best to incorporate their perspectives into policies and strategies that make a difference at the local level.

The Forum’s themes included the impact of land degradation on people’s livelihoods and the environment; the climate and energy challenge; and biodiversity.

Welcoming delegates from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and host nation South Africa, ZERO Regional Environment Organization Executive Director and Central Focal Point for the GEF-NGO Network Dorothy Manuel, highlighted the NGO Forum’s role in ensuring the centrality of civil society in the GEF.

In her opening remarks, newly elected GEF CEO Monique Barbut noted that this was the first GEF Assembly to be held on the African continent and that it coincided with the International Year of Deserts and Desertification.

Acknowledging that Africa faced enormous challenges with respect to its climate, soil fertility, water and biodiversity, she noted that on the continent development and environment were inextricably interlinked.

Barbut also explained the implementation of the new Resource Allocation Framework (RAF) and urged delegates to help make it “work for the best and not for the worst”.

In his speech, Forum moderator Ambassador Rex Horoi underscored his wish to see GEF funding reaching those for whom it was intended as well as the need for grassroots communities to be engaged in policymaking. The media, he observed, played a critical

role not only in helping achieve civil society's goals but changing the mindset of the donor community.

In their presentations participants reflected on the successes and challenges of the last decade. There was a general consensus that although much had been achieved and learned, significant challenges remained. But perhaps the strongest sentiment to emerge from the Forum was the need for partnership. However, some participants expressed discomfort at the GEF new funding mechanism as embodied in the RAF, while others felt the GEF was pushing NGOs into "forced marriages" with the private sector.

The closing remarks were delivered by Achim Steiner, the new United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, who told participants that it was close to 15 years since the idea of a Global Environment Facility (GEF) was first mooted, as a social contract between North and South. And now that the GEF's coffers had been replenished, it was time to celebrate.