

# Strengthening International Environmental Governance: System-Wide Responses

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**Cover Photo:** An aerial view of Rio de Janeiro, the city that will host the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development known as Rio+20. ©Brasil2/iStockphoto.

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## **ABOUT THE RAPPORTEUR**

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## Executive Summary

On December 14, 2011, the International Peace Institute and the Nordic missions to the UN in New York, supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment, held a roundtable discussion on reform options for international environmental governance in the context of the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development known as Rio+20.

The half-day event featured presentations and discussions on the current challenges for international environmental governance, addressing system-wide frameworks and strategic engagement at the regional and country level. Participants also addressed challenges related to implementation in the field and considered how national-level concerns could be taken into account during Rio+20 negotiations later this year. With representatives from the United Nations, member states, and academia, the meeting brought together practical, political, and theoretical expertise on the subject.

This meeting report presents a synthesis of the roundtable discussions, which were conducted under the Chatham House rule of nonattribution. First, conversation around the process of reform looked toward Rio+20 and how best to ensure progress in June. In this context, two questions arose: What should states and policymakers see as ideal? And how does this relate to organizational management, in terms of both the normative and operational aspects of international environmental governance? Participants also spent much time on the subject of coherence in the international environmental governance (IEG) architecture. This tended toward coherence between IEG and broader efforts by the international system on the one hand and coherence between the global architecture and local and national implementation on the other. Finally, participants discussed the pros and cons of the consolidation of previous initiatives in the reform process, paying particular attention to finding synergies within clusters of multilateral environmental agreements.

The report demonstrates that the existing Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome provides a valuable

roadmap with regard to science and policy, coherent and predictable funding for the environment, and a coherent UN approach to environmental issues. At the same time, discussions at the meeting highlighted that much can be achieved through simple and relatively inexpensive reform efforts. The report finds that

- the proliferation of multilateral environmental agreements has created opportunities for synergies among conventions that can foster coherence and coordination;
- to ensure effective implementation, these conventions must take the national-level context into account; and
- joint agency coordination is possible and has already been successfully implemented in some cases.

Overall, IEG reforms should build on these successful examples of coherence, coordination, and consolidation and design solutions that support, as opposed to hinder, national strategies.

Rio+20 provides member states with a political mandate to recommend ways to promote key reforms of the current IEG structure. As such, the central questions for Rio should remain: Where is environmental and sustainable development governance being exercised? Is it being exercised effectively and coherently? And are the current governance platforms adequate? To deliver ambitious, system-wide reforms, delegates should keep the focus of recommendations on the governance architecture that makes up the legal and policy framework for dealing with environmental issues.

## The Road to Rio+20

In June 2012, member states will reconvene for the fourth decadal review of UN environmental activities at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, or Rio+20.<sup>1</sup> The conference will seek to secure renewed political commitment to sustainable development, assess the progress and gaps in implementation of previous agreements, and examine new and emerging challenges. One of the two main themes will be strengthening the institutional framework for

<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 64/236 (March 31, 2010), UN Doc. A/RES/64/236.



sustainable development, which covers a spectrum of bodies, organizations, networks, and arrangements across the economic, social, and environmental pillars.<sup>2</sup>

In the environmental sphere, ministers of the environment from across the globe have affirmed in a variety of settings that reform of the current international environmental governance (IEG) architecture is a necessity. Following the Belgrade Process, in which the so-called consultative group<sup>3</sup> was tasked with developing options for reforming international governance structures for the environment, five objectives for improving international environmental governance emerged:

- Create a strong, credible, and accessible science base and policy interface. Focus on providing data, information, and scientific advice, and conduct environmental assessments for early warning.
- Develop a global, authoritative, and responsive voice for environmental sustainability. Focus on agenda setting, mainstreaming the environment into other policy areas, creating and promoting best practices and principles, and monitoring accountability for agreed commitments.
- Achieve effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence within the United Nations system. Focus on coordinating policy and programs, maintaining efficient and effective administration and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, and facilitating interagency cooperation.
- Secure sufficient, predictable, and coherent funding. Focus on mobilizing funds for the environment at the global level, developing innovative financing mechanisms, and utilizing existing funding effectively and efficiently.
- Ensure a responsive and cohesive approach to meeting country needs. Focus on building the capacity of both people and institutions, providing technological and financial support, mainstreaming the environment in sustainable development practices, and facilitating coopera-

tion both between and among stakeholders of the Global South and North.<sup>4</sup>

The consultative group refined these objectives into concrete recommendations during its 2009 and 2010 meetings, and they were then put forward in the resulting Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome. This document lays out both incremental changes to be made within the current institutional structure and broader reform ideas. The group further argues that IEG reform must produce an authoritative voice and credible leadership for the international community's activities on the environment.

In terms of incremental institutional changes, the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome calls for “full and meaningful participation of [all] countries” in strengthening the science-policy interface, assisting scientific capacity building at the national level, expanding environmental assessments and information networks, and bolstering the role of the *Global Environmental Outlook* reports produced by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It suggests the development of a system-wide strategy for the environment in the UN, specifically by defining the division of labor on environmental activities within the UN system, with the involvement of both governments and civil society. Further, it encourages the discovery and development of synergies, at the institutional level in general and specifically between compatible multilateral environmental agreements. The purpose of these synergies should be to make implementation more efficient and cost-effective while remaining flexible and adaptable. The document also proposes a stronger link between policy and financing, as well as the development of a robust capacity-building framework. Finally, it recommends strengthening UNEP regional offices to offer support for implementation and coordination of multilateral environmental agreements and environmental activities.

In addition to these proposals for functional changes, the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome sets out four main options for broad institutional reform:

2 United Nations Secretary-General, *Objective and Themes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development*, UN Doc. A/CONF.216/PC/7, December 20, 2010.

3 The Consultative Group of Ministers or High-Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance was tasked with developing options for IEG reform through the Belgrade Process.

4 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), “Decision SS.XI/1: International Environmental Governance,” adopted at the eleventh special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, February 26, 2010.

- Enhance the UNEP.
- Create a new umbrella organization for environmentally and economically sustainable development.
- Create a specialized agency to coordinate environmental activities; for instance, a World Environment Organization.
- Reform both the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Commission on Sustainable Development to better deal with environmental concerns.

These reform ideas did not garner a comprehensive consensus, and it was determined that any major reforms would require further political guidance. That said, the consultative group did recommend that the reform of ECOSOC and the Commission on Sustainable Development and the creation of a new umbrella organization would best be taken up within the wider sustainable development agenda. And enhancing the UNEP, creating a new coordinating agency, and streamlining current institutions were deemed to be promising possibilities for strengthening international environmental governance.<sup>5</sup>

Against this backdrop, the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Nordic Missions to the UN organized a roundtable meeting on strengthening international environmental governance in New York in December 2011, with the support of the Nordic Council of Ministers of the Environment. The main goals of the meeting were to:

- discuss the system-wide responses identified in the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome and comprehensive and coherent options for improving IEG;
- create a better understanding of the various considerations and needs involved in IEG reform;
- promote synergies between multilateral environmental agreements;
- examine the links between policy and financing; and
- promote strategic engagement at the regional and national level.

## A Three-Pronged Approach to Reform

Over the course of the meeting at IPI, three major threads emerged from the discussion. First, conversation around **process** tended to look toward Rio+20 and how best to ensure progress in June. In this context, two questions arose: What should states and policymakers see as ideal? And how does this relate to organizational management, in terms of both the normative and operational aspects of international environmental governance? Participants also spent much time on the subject of **coherence**. This tended toward coherence between different aspects of IEG and broader efforts by the international system on the one hand and coherence between the global architecture and local and national implementation on the other. Finally, participants discussed the pros and cons of the **consolidation** of previous initiatives in the reform process, paying particular attention to finding synergies within clusters of multilateral environmental agreements. Overall, the discussions highlighted that much can be achieved through simple and relatively inexpensive reform efforts.

### PROCESS

Beginning with the Belgrade Process in 2009 and continuing with the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome in 2010, the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance has provided valuable inputs to the preparations for the Rio+20 conference. One of the responses identified in the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome is to develop a system-wide strategy for the environment. This will ideally provide the ways and means for the UN system to bring about better environmental outcomes through collective action.

This topic was also touched upon by the Informal Discussion Group on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) in New York during the fall of 2011. Elements of the IEG reform agenda will be integral to building a new international architecture for sustainable development.

5 UNEP, "Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome," adopted at the second meeting of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance in Espoo, Finland, November 23, 2010.

Whatever the outcome of the negotiations, UNEP is an important part of the environmental architecture and should be strengthened, though what that means is up for debate. The aim is to achieve an efficient, effective, and coherent governance system that is able to respond to member states' needs and is based on the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.

The Rio+20 conference presents an opportunity to move this debate forward. IEG reform is a complex process with several important and interlinked dimensions. However, participants at the IPI meeting agreed that consensus at Rio would provide guidance, support, and a strong push for more coherent UN work on sustainable development. It would help the UN strengthen its work on sustainable development by bringing focus to sometimes disparate and competing strands of UN competencies. However, to take advantage of this opportunity, member states must work together to find a common vision. In the end, Rio+20 can create the political will for a continued process and help the UN system achieve more than the sum of its parts.

## COHERENCE

Meeting participants highlighted the importance of bringing coherence to the UN's work on the environment and sustainable development but also to the UN system's work overall. This coalesced into two general threads. First, the concept of "delivering as one" at the country level should be both the focus and the starting point of discussions. Second, strengthened mechanisms for system-wide coherence should be used to support this aim. In the words of an unnamed developing nation's minister of the environment, quoted by one meeting participant, "I don't care if you are UNEP or UNDP. You are the UN and you are here to support my country."

Another representative of a UN agency mentioned that, in his experience, working coherently today may happen more in spite of the system than due to its design. At the national and regional level, initiatives like the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) offer examples for mainstreaming the environment in UN work at the country level. Indeed, the Poverty-Environment Initiative is a good example

of agencies leveraging complementary core competencies through partnership. In both of these examples, however, the central tension between sustainable environmental management on the one hand and rapid poverty reduction on the other remains.

One of the central challenges, aside from sheer capacity to keep all the balls in the air, is to find the right mix of incentives for maximum national buy-in. To this end, the UN can simplify the tasks required by functioning as a "broker" and offering support to countries on investments, knowledge, and operational activities. At the regional level as well as the national level, participants suggested that the key is to design incentives that would encourage closer cooperation within the UN system.

At the global level, the problem of overall systemic coherence remains. There is a multitude of overlapping mandates and unclear divisions of labor within the UN system's work, particularly in the fields of environment and development. It is necessary to better equip the agencies that manage the process to meet needs as they arise. Additionally, reform needs to address the widespread phenomena of turf battles, silos, and unsound competition for funding.

On the issue of funding, participants suggested that the linkages between finance and policy need to be stronger in order to fill the implementation gaps. Financing needs to be sufficient, predictable, and coherent with the rest of the UN's funding strategies. This can help to increase transparency, enhance efficiency, and improve coordination and management of financial flows. The discussion highlighted that current funding structures fulfill none of these requirements. However, key questions remain: What is a sufficient funding level? And how do we better assess the interplay of the various actors working on environmental issues?

While it is tempting to approach environmental issues in a strictly programmatic way to ensure concrete outcomes, there is a risk of losing the big picture. On the other hand, systemic approaches tend to be long term in nature and so are very hard to reorient to quickly changing facts on the ground. Additionally, it is sometimes difficult to get national buy-in without the concrete outcomes



offered by a programmatic approach. This tension between the systemic and programmatic needs to be addressed.

Ultimately, UNDP, UNEP, and other international agencies need to elaborate a joint vision for sustainable development and the environment. This would help to clarify roles, responsibilities, tasks, and synergies, both among agencies and between national, regional, and global levels. For system-wide coordination it is also important to examine and improve existing mechanisms, such as the Environment Management Group, system-wide frameworks like the UNDAF, and the role of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). While it is a relatively common view that UNEP should play a central role in this process, there is not yet clarity as to what type of enhancements member states should propose. Finally, the current system is vague when it comes to implications of reform for governance structures. A joint vision would help member states addressing shifting environmental and development challenges to coordinate with managerial organizations and agencies that implement these decisions and mandates.

## CONSOLIDATION

Multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), which relate to a number of different environmental issues, form the core of the IEG architecture. The current gaps in implementation could be addressed by consolidating these instruments. This would require cooperation between states and between secretariats. In this respect, the meeting dialogue focused mainly on the topics of global management and country-level compliance burdens.

Most pressing is the fragmentation of MEAs across the international system. Over the past four decades, there has been a proliferation of secretariats and agendas, as well as associated meetings, that drain capacity for even the most resourceful countries. According to the background paper for the 2010 consultative group, “There are

now more than 500 international treaties and other agreements related to the environment, of which...302 date from the period between 1972 and the early 2000s.”<sup>6</sup> For developing countries, this often presents a serious challenge of balancing compliance and implementation of MEAs with national development plans. At the very least, practices such as shared accounting and reporting can considerably lighten the burden and free up resources for more effective implementation at the country level.

Rio+20 presents an opportunity to further develop and broaden efforts to enhance synergies among related MEAs. The member-state driven consolidation that has taken place in the chemical and waste cluster may be one promising development. This process has led to the administrative joining of three separate conventions on the topic: Basel, Stockholm, and Rotterdam.<sup>7</sup> While these three conventions’ secretariats were housed in the same building, they had independent decision-making processes and administrative capacity. Over the course of three years, the conventions have managed to merge much of the administrative functions and have appointed an interim joint head. While program coordination and joint decision making have not been instituted yet, the hope is that this will soon follow. The common registry of MEAs and sustainable development commitments that will be proposed at Rio+20 could further this synergistic process.

Participants expressed hope that the lessons learned here can also be applied in part to the six biodiversity conventions.<sup>8</sup> This will be a difficult undertaking, however, as these conventions are administered by three agencies with very different mandates,<sup>9</sup> have separate reporting requirements, and need to be coordinated for efficient implementation.

As the chemical conventions process has shown, the guiding principles for finding MEA synergies should be member-state driven, with the autonomy of the convention being respected. Whatever

6 UNEP, *Environment in the United Nations System*, report to the twenty-sixth session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, UN Doc. UNEP/GC.26/INF/23, January 28, 2011, p. 7, para. 5.

7 The Basel, Stockholm, and Rotterdam conventions deal with toxic waste, hazardous chemicals, and persistent organic pollutants, respectively.

8 The *Convention on Biodiversity*, *Convention International Trade in Endangered Species*, *Convention on Migratory Species*, *International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources*, *Ramsar Convention on Wetlands*, and *World Heritage Convention*.

9 Namely, UNEP; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

synergies can be found, they will most likely come incrementally, as MEAs are slowly brought together. This consolidation will likely be easier in some areas than others—for example, in technical work as opposed to politically charged issues. Three major areas for synergies among MEAs have been identified: the interface between science and policy, the national-level implementation of action plans, and national reporting. Regardless, during any process of consolidation, participants suggested that future MEAs must be taken into account to ensure that the problem of fragmentation does not worsen.

## Sustainable Development and Governance

Developing a more coherent institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD) remains a highly complex challenge due to the many interlocking institutions that work on sustainable development issues, the plethora of MEAs, and the sheer enormity of the issue. To encourage concrete outcomes from Rio+20, discussions on IFSD have been narrowed to three pillars: economic, social, and environmental; so IEG makes up a large portion of this framework. The first session of the roundtable meeting focused on the current status of IFSD and the reform of international environmental governance. Speakers discussed progress made within the framework of the Informal Discussion Group on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD), initiated by the governments of Indonesia, Kenya, and Mexico to create a coherent agenda for the topic in advance of the Rio+20 meetings. Additionally, the Belgrade Process and Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome were discussed in the context of maintaining momentum through to the Rio+20 conference in order to achieve the wider IEG reform agenda.

Through the informal discussion group, consensus has already begun to build around a couple of issues. First, IEG is an important and integral part of the effort that must be undertaken to build a new architecture for sustainable development. This is reflected in the way that attention has shifted from the 1992 Earth Summit's narrow focus on the environment to the full spectrum of sustainable development being considered at Rio+20 in

2012. Second, when strengthening the environmental pillar of sustainable development, UNEP should remain the central cog and should be strengthened along with the entire environmental pillar.

However, differences still remain. For instance, the definition of “strengthening” the environmental pillar of sustainable development or UNEP specifically can have different meanings and implications depending on whom one talks to. Additionally, though some participants in the informal discussion group expressed the belief that the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) may have run its course, this is far from agreed upon. Even among those that do agree, questions remain as to how to carry out the functions currently handled by the CSD. Suggestions coming out of the informal discussion group included feeding these functions back into ECOSOC or another institutional mechanism of IEG.

Lastly, there were a few specifics advanced on how to move forward. Options on strengthening UNEP ranged from transforming it into a specialized agency to creating a new institution—a World Environment Organization (WEO)—to using UNDP to backstop UNEP capacity. There seems to be broad agreement that it is not ideal that discussions on sustainable development to date have mostly taken place between ministers of environment. There needs to be more open and direct communication between other ministries, finance and development for instance, as well as with civil society and the private sector.

On the topic of IEG reform specifically, discussions revolved around ways and means of enabling the IEG system to produce better environmental outcomes through collective action. This need for better functions, which could be produced through reform, has been upheld time and again: in the Cartagena package at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, in the UN's *Delivering as One* report in 2006, and in the Belgrade Process and Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome. It was also stated at the roundtable that UN actions should be first and foremost responsive to country needs. Any IEG reform should fit seamlessly into the broader IFSD and must offer facilitative support functions to countries attempting to implement agreements. In the words of the *Delivering as One* report, “The United Nations needs to overcome its

fragmentation and deliver as one through a stronger commitment to working together on implementation of one strategy, in the pursuit of one set of goals.”<sup>10</sup>

It was noted that many of the functions in the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome already exist to a greater or lesser extent within the current IEG architecture, but they still need to be stitched together. For instance, when examining the science-policy interface, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the International Resource Panel fill this gap but are not held together by an overarching framework.

## Systemic Strategies, Frameworks, and Synergies

The second session focused on concrete steps toward IEG reform. Speakers addressed both the history and future of system-wide strategies and frameworks for the environment and the link between policymaking, finance, and MEA synergies. As in the previous session, participants stressed that the UN system needs to deliver as one in support of nationally determined priorities.

The session began with a historical overview, showing how UNEP, its governing council, and the UN system actually took a very programmatic and systemic approach to environmental activities within the UN system in the decade following the 1972 Stockholm Conference. But as the complexity, size, and depth of UN activities increased, member states decided to move away from this approach, as it was not a practical steering tool and lacked the necessary authority to enable non-UNEP entities to implement necessary activities. Instead, environmental governance moved toward a much more issue-based approach, as with the Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements introduced by Kofi Annan, for example.<sup>11</sup> This issue-based approach enabled the UN to better engage in results-oriented and time-bound activities with concrete outcomes. Unfortunately, using an issue-based approach has tended to come at the expense of big-picture, system-wide strategic thinking. The current IEG reform movement aims to fill that gap.

As stated above, there is broad consensus that the current system requires improvement. And the most fertile ground for coordinated action seems to be reform of the system as opposed to a complete overhaul. However, the devil is in the details. The challenge will be to maintain the concrete nature of the current system while creating a global vision. Participants suggested that any process for reforming the environmental system will do well to keep reform within the frame of human well-being, rather than focusing on the environment for the environment’s sake. Also, whatever system-wide strategy and framework emerges, it should have a good interface with all stakeholders, including member states, and supply a neutral body to provide multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder guidance. In the words of one participant, “When addressing any global challenge it is imperative for the UN to deliver as one...in support of nationally determined priorities.” This delivery needs to be supplemented by close coordination with large, relevant institutions like the World Bank, as well as other partners and bilateral donors. Finally, the system should try to address the tensions involved in creating a strategic framework while maintaining the agility to respond to rapidly developing environmental challenges.

A key goal for reform outlined in the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome is “to create a stronger link between global environmental policy making and financing aimed at widening and deepening the funding base for [the] environment with the goal of securing sufficient, predictable and coherent funding.”<sup>12</sup> In order to answer the question of what constitutes sufficient funding, the system must come up with a better way of determining what the existing financial resources dedicated to the environment are. One participant outlined some of the current funding distributions but noted that these are not available for policymakers in a collated format. For instance, there is around \$32 billion available per year for general climate change funding, while the Global Environment Facility amounts to about \$6 billion. The World Bank has about \$4.3 billion set aside for the environment, UNDP around \$500 million, UNEP \$217 million,

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, *Delivering as One: Report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment*, UN Doc. A/61/583, November 20, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, *Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform*, UN Doc. A/51/950, July 14, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> UNEP, “Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome.”

and MEA implementation has approximately \$2.9 billion annually. When delving into MEA implementation funds, however, it should be noted that \$2.8 billion goes to implementation of the Montreal protocol on protecting the ozone layer. In fact, the budget of UNEP and non-Montreal MEAs comes to approximately \$400 million per year.

On the subject of predictability, UNEP's Environment Fund, which makes up the core of the agency's funding, is not consistent. While there has been growth in earmarked contributions, the current budget adjusted for inflation is below that of the mid-1970s and below that of the early 1990s, before the Earth Summit. One proposal floated to bolster funding was to go back to an idea broached during the preparatory conference for the Stockholm Conference and assess contributions to the Environment Fund based on energy consumption.

Lastly, on coherence of funding, participants suggested that the primary challenge in the UN system is the lack of a clear, overarching vision for UN environmental activity and for a division of labor. This should not be confused with a call for centralization, and the distinctions between multiplicity and fractionalization should be remembered. There is a need for multiple funds and competencies to address multiple issues and priorities. However, there needs to be a systemic strategy for channeling funding and resources to the best places.

An example of a mechanism aimed at remedying this situation is the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) mechanism. This mechanism falls under the United Nations Development Group and seeks to improve interagency cooperation, clarify division of labor, and enhance coordination and effectiveness of country-level implementation. The key to MPTF success is that it provides system-wide finance coordination and transparency and a reporting mechanism designed to increase efficiency and accountability of UN operations, and it supports globally agreed or country-determined development priorities such as the MDGs, climate change, and sustainable development. The MPTF currently enables various actors within the UN system, such as UNEP and UNDP, to link policy, operations, and financing in more than eighty countries through more than forty-five funds.

An example of the MPTF in action is the UN-REDD Programme Fund. The fund involves three UN agencies (UNEP, UNDP, and the Food and Agriculture Organization, or FAO) and was launched in 2008 with funding from the government of Norway. In the subsequent four years, REDD+ has moved from a relatively unimportant part of overall climate change work to one of the success stories. There are currently twelve countries where UN agencies leverage normative and operational capacity to support nationally led REDD+ processes. This cooperation across the UN system and across the many necessary national and subnational agencies would not be possible without a common financing mechanism.

Another important piece of IEG reform is synergies between MEAs and other instruments for sustainable development. There are currently more than 500 MEAs with multiple compliance and reporting mechanisms. During discussions, participants addressed examples of synergies within three MEA clusters: hazardous waste and chemicals, biodiversity, and the Rio Conventions. Each offered some insight into the processes and possibilities of finding synergies.

## HAZARDOUS WASTE

The hazardous waste and chemicals cluster offers a case study of some consolidation already underway. The cluster is composed of three conventions:

- *Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal* (Basel)
- *Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade* (Rotterdam)
- *Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants* (Stockholm)

The process began in 2006 with a proposal from UNEP Chemicals to consolidate the secretariats of the three conventions. This was presented as an exercise in efficiency, as there is much overlap between the three and all three are actually housed in the same building in Geneva. The member state response, however, was that it would be more appropriate for the process to be member-state driven. Over the subsequent year, the parties of all three secretariats engaged in negotiations over what



a combined secretariat could offer in the form of implementation support. Due to the autonomy of the various secretariats, decisions had to be made in a time-consuming, piecemeal fashion.

These discussions resulted in the initiation of a joint synergies group composed of forty-five representatives, with fifteen members from each convention and good regional representation. The group met three times and came up with a series of proposals, which were brought back to their respective governing bodies (COPs) and were approved one by one. The result was largely administrative, with the secretariats joining services such as legal and financial. Another contentious outcome was an agreement to appoint an interim joint head of the three secretariats. Members of the conventions will decide in 2012 whether to continue this on a permanent basis. Going forward, challenges remain in further organizing secretariats for efficient cooperation. Ideally the cost savings gleaned from streamlining will be channeled toward implementation costs, though the specifics of this still need to be worked out. Additionally, there is still much to do on developing programmatic synergies. Finally, there is hope that a move toward joint decision making and joint budgeting will be made. However, all of this will take time.

## BIODIVERSITY

The biodiversity cluster represents six global biodiversity conventions that work together within the Biodiversity Liaison Group:

- *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD)
- *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES)
- *Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals* (CMS)
- *International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (ITPGRFA)
- *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat* (Ramsar Convention)
- *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (World Heritage Convention)

Despite this plethora of conventions, biodiversity continues to be lost at genetic, species, and ecosystem levels. For instance, the 2010 biodiversity

target set by the CBD was missed. This points to a need for more efficient institutions and more effective and complete implementation of current global commitments.

The international community has repeatedly voiced the idea that finding synergies would address this need—in the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome, the Belgrade Process, and many decisions of governing bodies of conventions. However, participants suggested that there are challenges to finding appropriate synergies within the biodiversity cluster. The cluster presents a very diverse set of conventions. Three are administered by UNEP, one by the FAO, one by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and one by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Additionally, the focus of these conventions vary, both in substance and in arrangements. Finally, there are many different departments and agencies (such as environment, agriculture, economic, cultural, etc.) involved in implementation at the national level.

Despite these challenges, much has been done to find synergies. There has been considerable cooperation both multilaterally and bilaterally, and initiatives such as the Biodiversity Liaison Group have brought together the heads of the secretariats of the six conventions that make up the biodiversity cluster. There has been cooperation through the Environmental Management Group, as well as thematic cooperation on issues such as bush meat and invasive alien species. Lastly, there are numerous memoranda of understanding, joint work plans, and programs shared between subsets of the various biodiversity conventions.

There were three non-administrative areas that were put forward at the roundtable where synergies might help. First, the science-policy interface could benefit, and examples of synergies have already been seen here, as with the emerging policy platform of the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services. Second, synergies could help cooperation at the international level in the implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans. The CBD adoption of a 2011–2020 strategic plan was largely seen as moving toward a system-wide strategic plan for biodiversity. Lastly, national reporting could



benefit from synergies, such as the Australian project to assist Pacific island states to develop and test a joint reporting forum for five of the six conventions.

## RIO CONVENTIONS

The Rio Conventions constitute the centerpiece of the international legal framework for the environment. They comprise three treaties:

- *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD)
- *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC)
- *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification* (UNCCD)

These conventions were products of the Rio Process, are sometimes recognized as sustainable development instruments, and address some of the most profound environmental change phenomena of our time. There is already some cooperation on the Rio Conventions through the joint liaison group, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as a common funding mechanism, and some focus on information sharing and assessments.

There are three main opportunities for synergies between the three Rio Conventions: coordination and support from the wider UN system, joint national reporting, and joint national strategies. First, synergies could help to coordinate the support of the wider UN system for goals relevant to sustainable development or the environment in particular. Under the current system, the issue of climate change is connected to the wider UN system through the working group on climate change under the Chief Executives Board's High-Level Committee on Programmes. The CBD and UNCCD are connected through the Environmental Management Group (EMG). Using a single umbrella organization, such as the EMG, could help to bring harmony to the way that the Rio Conventions interact with the wider UN system and mobilize the multi-sectoral competence of the UN system in support of implementing environmental goals. One step in this direction might be the creation of sustainable development goals, which could act as a framing device in the way that the MDGs did for international development.

The second opportunity for creating synergies lies in reducing reporting burdens for the three conventions by creating a joint national reporting

mechanism. This would be especially helpful for least developed countries and could help to coordinate focal points at the national level. To begin this process, guidelines need to be developed, though some work has been started by UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Centre and the Global Environment Facility in this regard. While joint reporting would take time to develop, it would likely provide a much better basis for determining the impacts of environmental change on development in order to tailor programmatic work.

The last opportunity would be to explore the possibility of joint national strategies and plans. Similar to joint reporting, this would reduce the planning burden, especially on least developed countries. It could also make it easier to link conventions to the UN Development Assistance Framework and help to channel UN system resources to long-term capacity building and institutional competence. Again, as with joint reporting, such a step would require the development of guidelines and decisions by the various convention governing bodies, or COPs, to authorize it. It would also be the type of activity that would greatly benefit from piloting.

## FURTHER SYNERGIES

There are many existing overlaps in implementation and reporting of MEAs. One way to address this at the most basic level would be to create a common registry of MEAs in the vein of the Boston University proposal of a Global Registry of Commitments on Sustainable Development. The registry would essentially be a database of exactly what states have committed to, and it would be a specific and concrete measure that parties could agree to over the course of Rio+20. And while it may not be groundbreaking, it would be something that could be built on over time. It would also begin to address accountability gaps in the current IEG and sustainable development architectures. This type of registry would not be a new idea; for instance, there was an initiative to track commitments as part of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. However, these initiatives did not have long-term funding or commitment periods. One key to overcoming past failures would be to gain high-level commitment and an implementation timeframe of at least ten years.

When engaging in synergy exercises, discussants

mentioned some guiding principles. Synergy processes should be party-driven, with ownership resting squarely with member states. The autonomy of individual conventions must be respected. Attempts to create synergies are more likely to be successful if they take an incremental approach that builds on existing cooperation. Finally, synergies are not ends in themselves; as one speaker put it, “we don’t do synergies because we like to do synergies.” They must in the end support improved national coordination to justify the effort.

## Strategic Engagement at the Regional and Country Level

The final session focused on bringing institutional analysis to the level of regional and country implementation. Speakers helped to bring to light experiences of local and regional synergy processes and collaboration among agencies, funds, and programs. Ideally, these experiences can help inform the global-level debates and vice versa. Participants shared experiences relating to the development of UNDAFs and collaboration between UNDP and UNEP on the Poverty-Environment Initiative in Africa and in Malawi in particular.

The Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI) supports governments to better integrate environmentally sustainable natural resource use into national planning, implementation, and budgeting mechanisms. PEI-Africa was piloted in 2005 with funding from the Norwegian government. After a successful pilot phase, the initiative was scaled globally in 2008. PEI-Africa represents a fully joint program, with joint management, budgeting, program documentation, and staffing, as well as pooled funding. At the global and regional levels, PEI has joint UNEP-UNDP teams. At the country level, it works through joint UNDP-government team country offices.

PEI-Africa develops specific, substantive country programs in-country, which are led by the ministries of planning and finance in a cross-government approach that views the ministry of environment as a key partner. The initiative uses concrete economic evidence to make the case that increased investment in environmental sustain-

ability can help achieve development objectives like poverty reduction and food security. This evidence is the basis for convincing key planning, finance, and sectoral decision makers to include more specific and detailed sustainability objectives in national development plans and budgets. PEI-Africa also tries to support improved cross-governmental coordination in the environment and natural resource sectors and to support longer-term increases in financial allocations from governments and country donors for investments in sustainable development. PEI tries to bring together UNEP’s normative work on the environment and UNDP’s work on poverty as a model of “one UN” in action. As examples of PEI at the country and regional levels, participants explored the cases of Malawi’s PEI country-level implementation and the United Nations Development Group’s (UNDG) regional work in Asia-Pacific.

The Poverty-Environment Initiative in Malawi began in 2008 and provides a good example of successful PEI implementation. Consistent with the goals of PEI, work in Malawi established a joint platform between UNEP and UNDP that married ecological and sustainable development perspectives. Instead of locating PEI discussions in the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Environment, PEI-Malawi put the discussion squarely in the Ministry of Development Planning and Cooperation, at a level that impacts national development plans and national budgets and helps to cement national ownership. Consistent with the broader PEI-Africa approach, PEI-Malawi has also utilized knowledge, information, and data toward policy and day-to-day decision making.

In the case of Malawi, the initial success of the PEI platform was expanded to collaborate programmatically on climate change issues with the African Adaptation Program (funded by Japan) and the existing climate change program (funded by Norway, the UK, and Ireland through the One UN Fund). In practice, this has helped the government of Malawi to view the environment, sustainable development, and climate change as overlapping issues that must be addressed together. It has also led to direct collaboration between UNDP, UNEP, and other organizations and agencies like the WFP, FAO, and World Bank. The end result is better coherence both within the UN and at the national government level. At the country level, this was

demonstrated by the inclusion of climate change, the environment, and natural resource management as an additional key priority area in the national Malawi Growth and Development Strategy proposed for 2012–2016. This puts the environment and sustainable development on a par with issues such as economic growth and HIV/AIDS. At the UN level, this enabled the evolving UNDAF to include a topic that covers climate change, the environment, and natural resource management.

There are a number of opportunities and challenges for further implementing greater coherence on the environment and sustainable development in Malawi. A major issue going forward will be the green economy—both the opportunities that it presents and the fears that growth will be slowed. There will be a need to broaden the incentives and assistance to offset the short-term costs of slowed growth incurred by the long-term strategy of smarter growth. Because of the complexity of the endeavor, governments see a large number of national institutions that have a varying degree of overlap in a very complex agenda. There is also an enormous diversity of financing mechanisms for the green economy agenda: approximately twenty-six organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund, the EU, three or four sources within the World Bank alone, the GEF, and twenty-eight UN agencies.

Because of this, and because of the relatively low institutional capacity of developing countries such as Malawi, there is a need for external actors to play a brokering role. In the case of the PEI platform, this brokering role is largely operational in nature and aimed at offering country-based policy support, advice, and assistance with the development of mitigation planning, especially at the human development level. Tools include UNDAFs, the One UN Fund, and joint programming—all of which are aimed at bringing agencies together at national and international levels. There is also a need to broker investments, such as carbon trading and the massive mitigation and adaptation investments that will be required. The World Bank will most likely fill this role. Lastly, there is a need to broker analytical and normative knowledge. This will require both conducting research and forming connections with existing knowledge bases, such as the UNFCCC in the case of climate change, and it will play an important role in policy coordination

and the formation of global standards.

At the regional level, UNDG Asia-Pacific's experiences share many similarities with those of UNEP and UNDP in Malawi. UNDG Asia-Pacific was established in 2008 to respond to the challenges facing the region in sustainable development. Specifically, after high rates of growth coupled with leaps in economic development, many countries began to question the quality of that growth, especially in the context of growing inequalities and environmental degradation. As the complexity of sustainable development for these countries increased, so too did the challenge for the UN to respond to a rapidly changing development agenda in a coherent manner.

UNDG Asia-Pacific is comprised of nineteen agencies that largely focus on country-level work and have development activities at the national level. Regional Directors of the various agencies meet regularly to discuss coordination and support to countries. Work has tended to focus on assisting UNDAF country rollout in terms of support to develop high-quality, results-based frameworks for UN assistance. This has involved the use of joint missions, particularly at the thematic or sectoral levels, which have included UNDP, FAO, UNEP, PEI, UN-REDD, and Mangroves for the Future. The goal is to develop a set of products to support countries as they engage in development. This includes packages on training, awareness raising on climate change, and mainstreaming of the UNDAFs in broader development discussions.

In the three years since the inception of UNDG Asia-Pacific, coordination has largely improved. UN country team mechanisms seem to be the key platforms at the country level. Operational and normative division of labor also seems to be working, particularly in terms of the relationships in Bangkok between the regional offices of UNDP and UNEP. One problem has been that, at times, incentives actually push agencies apart, as individual agencies are sometimes seen as contractors competing for limited funding.

The speaker at the roundtable also identified some areas for improvement. First, the regional directors should engage in more joint planning. This should not be limited to individual programs but should involve scanning the pipeline across the board to create concrete joint plans. In addition,

efforts at regional level to break down silos should be replicated at the country level and within national governments. National ownership and implementation should also be enhanced, and the orientation of funding mechanisms should reinforce this. Finally, there is demand from national governments for more integrated and customized approaches for different kinds of countries.

## Conclusion

Rio+20 provides member states with a political mandate to recommend ways to promote key reforms of the current IEG structure. The Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome provides a roadmap with regard to science and policy, coherent and predictable funding for the environment, and bringing coherence to the way that the UN deals with the environment. The proliferation of MEAs has created opportunities for synergies among conventions that can help to provide coherence and foster coordination. It is evident that seeing these conventions in the national-level context is necessary to ensure effective implementation. Additionally, as was shown through the examples of PEI and UNDG Asia-Pacific, joint agency coordination is possible and has already been successfully implemented. IEG reforms should draw on these successful examples and design solutions that support as opposed to hinder national strategies.

Going forward there are a number of options for promoting IEG reform. For instance, one meeting participant suggested convening an “Inter-governmental Working Group on Synergies Between MEAs.” Within clusters, synergies can be achieved by identifying the most workable or most important MEAs rather than approaching the entire cluster in one go. The good news from the chemical cluster, for example, is that reform and coordination can work. The bad news, however, is

that it is a long and difficult process that requires sustained energy, and it is not a silver bullet. And whatever MEA synergies do for coherence, they do not directly address issues like the weakening of UNEP.

Finally, going into Rio+20, delegates should keep the focus of recommendations on the governance architecture that makes up the legal and policy framework for dealing with environmental issues. This will be much less about secretariats of conventions and more about the way effective governance is exercised through UN General Assembly resolutions, convention negotiations, and policies enacted. The central questions for Rio should remain: Where is environmental and sustainable development governance being exercised? Is it being exercised effectively and coherently? And are the current governance platforms adequate? Effective IEG reform will not be about the bureaucracies and how they implement decisions; it will be about how these decisions are reached, how coherent they are, how strategic they are, and how clear decisions are issued as mandates. To paraphrase one participant at the meeting, the problem is not about knowing how to cooperate. Cooperation can be seen in the wide variety of conventions, fora, meetings, and outcomes. Rather, the challenge is for the UN in its current configuration to deliver scalable and credible responses to a continued erosion of the planetary ecosystem. The success of the synergies process in the chemicals cluster shifted the paradigm—setting a standard whereby for every problem, the answer is not necessarily a new international convention but a refinement of the existing system. This represents a major step toward IEG reform. However, on the big issues facing the planet, it was a small step that took three years. Now, the 2012 Rio conference needs to deliver on more ambitious, system-wide reforms.



## Annex

### Timeline: International Environmental Governance

The management of human effects on the environment has long been acknowledged by the international community as a key global challenge. Here is a list of milestones that have come to define IEG as we know it today.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Summary</u>
1972	UN Conference on the Human Environment (the Stockholm Conference), Stockholm, Sweden	The Stockholm Conference firmly established the environment and development agenda as an area for consideration within the UN General Assembly. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) was created, at least in part, as an institutional mechanism to ensure that the environmental concerns highlighted at the conference would not fall by the wayside and to follow up on the Stockholm Action Plan for the Environment, the outcome document of the Stockholm Conference. <sup>1</sup>
1982	UNEP Governing Council special session to consider ten years of implementation of the Stockholm Action Plan	The Governing Council considered a decade of implementation of the Stockholm Action Plan and determined priorities for the next decade. This review also helped to establish the World Commission of Environment and Development.
1992	UN conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	The Earth Summit resulted in many milestone achievements and documents including Agenda 21, which established a set of guiding principles on sustainable development; the <i>Rio Declaration on Environment and Development</i> (Rio Declaration), <sup>2</sup> which helped to define rights and responsibilities for member states dealing with environmental protection and sustainable development; and three landmark multilateral environmental agreements collectively known as the Rio Conventions: the <i>UN Framework Convention on Climate Change</i> (UNFCCC), the <i>Convention on Biological Diversity</i> (CBD), and the <i>UN Convention to Combat Desertification</i> (UNCCD). The preparatory committee for the Earth Summit was the precursor to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which was established shortly after the Earth Summit <sup>3</sup> and served as the preparatory committee for the third decadal review.

<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 2997 (December 15, 1972), UN Doc. A/RES/2297.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June, 1992)*, UN Doc. A/CONF.151/26.

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 191 (January 29, 1993), UN Doc. A/RES/47/191.



<u>Year</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Summary</u>
2002	World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, South Africa	Member states endorsed the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation as well as the Cartagena package of IEG reforms. <sup>4</sup> This was a set of basic requirements for a strengthened IEG architecture. It was further elaborated at the 2005 World Summit where member states explored the possibility of a more coherent institutional framework for dealing with the environment under the auspices of the UN. The World Summit led directly to the initiation of the Informal Consultative Process of the Institutional Framework for the UN's Environmental Activities, which in turn recommended further informal engagement on the issue.
2009	25 <sup>th</sup> session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF)	Member states launched the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance, which was tasked with developing options for IEG reform through the Belgrade Process. The consultative group held two meetings later in 2009. <sup>5</sup>
2010	11 <sup>th</sup> special session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF)	The options developed by the consultative group were proposed at the eleventh special session of the UNEP GC/GMEF in February 2010, who then established a second consultative group <sup>6</sup> to build on these options. The second consultative group met in July 2010 in Nairobi, Kenya, and again in November 2010 in Helsinki, Finland, and created the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome document. <sup>7</sup>
2011	26 <sup>th</sup> session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF)	The Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome was presented to the twenty-sixth session of the UNEP GC/GMEF in February 2011 as a set of recommendations going forward.
2012	United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Rio+20 will be the largest gathering of member states and NGOs in the history of environmental governance. The two main topics to be addressed are sustainable development and the green economy.

4 United Nations, *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August–4 September 2002)*, UN Doc. A/CONF.199/20, pp. 64–72.

5 UNEP, “Belgrade Process: Moving Forward with Developing a set of Options on International Environmental Governance,” co-chairs summary of the first meeting of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance, Belgrade, Serbia, June 27–28, 2009, p. 2.

6 UNEP, “Decision SS.XI/1: International Environmental Governance,” adopted at the eleventh special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, February 26, 2010.

7 UNEP, “Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome,” adopted at the second meeting of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance in Espoo, Finland, November 23, 2010.

## Agenda

### Strengthening International Environmental Governance: Exploring System-Wide Responses

Wednesday, December 14, 2011

09:00–09:10

#### Welcoming Remarks

Ambassador Morten Wetland, *Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations*

09:10–09:40

#### Opening Session

Moderated by Rio+20 Ambassador Staffan Tillander, *Sweden*

Brief summary of the work of the Informal Discussion Group on IFSD.

Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba, *Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations*, and Ambassador Yusra Khan, *Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations*

“Strengthening International Environmental Governance in Bringing Forward the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome,” Kerstin Stendahl, *Finland*

09:40–11:30

#### Session 2: System-Wide Strategies and Frameworks

Moderated by Ambassador Dessima Williams, *Grenada*

“System-Wide Strategy for the Environment,” Hossein Fadaei, *Environmental Management Group*

“System-Wide Frameworks,” Bisrat Aklilu, *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office*

“Linking Policymaking and Finance/Financial Tracking Systems,” Maria Ivanova, *University of Massachusetts Boston*

“Common Registry of MEAs and Other Instruments for Sustainable Development,” Miquel Muñoz, *Boston University*, and Jacob Scherr, *Natural Resources Defense Council*

#### Synergies and Clustering of MEAs Panel Discussion

“Chemicals,” Kerstin Stendahl, *Finland*

“Biodiversity,” Peter Herkenrath, *United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)*

“Closer Collaboration Between the Rio Conventions,” Ivar Baste, *Norway*

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11:30–11:45	Coffee Break
11:45–13:00	<p><b>Session 3: Strategic Engagement at the Regional and Country Level</b></p> <p>Moderated by Ambassador Staffan Tillander, <i>Sweden</i></p> <p>“Engagement at the Country Level and UNDAFs,” Richard Dictus and David Smith, <i>Poverty-Environment Initiative</i></p> <p>“One UN and Regional Presence,” Nicholas Rosellini, <i>United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)</i></p>
13:00–13:30	<p><b>Wrap-Up and Summary</b></p> <p>Ambassador Staffan Tillander, <i>Sweden</i></p>
13:30	Lunch

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