



## Introduction



The planet's ecosystems are facing unprecedented challenges. Climate change, atmospheric pollution, land degradation, freshwater scarcity and the loss of biological diversity on land and sea are all issues of global importance. Reversing global environmental decline demands the full and effective participation of all sectors of society.

There are two main questions that society is faced with in the endeavour to meet these challenges. One is descriptive: how does the world work? The other is prescriptive: what do we need to do? The second question requires more than a technocratic approach to policy making. Stakeholder participation is an essential ingredient in addressing this question.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit of Sustainable Development in 2002 recognizes this truth. With its clear focus on implementation, regionalization and partnership, the Plan of Implementation underscores the vital role of civil society in designing, implementing and reviewing sustainable development policies and strategies at all levels.

UNEP has the responsibility within the UN system of providing leadership and encouraging partnerships in protecting the environmental base of sustainable development. *Natural Allies* provides a clear picture of how civil society can and does work with UNEP, both benefiting from and strengthening UNEP's programme of work.

After describing UNEP's structure and role, *Natural Allies* explains how civil society can interact directly with governments, whose decisions guide UNEP's work. The book also explains how civil society can participate in UNEP activities, such as scientific assessments, the development and implementation of policy and law, raising public awareness and working with business and industry. In response to the two most frequent inquiries from civil society, two chapters also address civil society in the regions and UNEP's financial resources.

*Natural Allies* incorporates the advice of the many civil society organizations that were consulted during peer review. The book is targeted at civil society and should be read from a civil society point of view. Take, for instance, the example of a local fisherman affected by international overfishing. He needs information. What is the exact situation of fish stocks in his area? Is there any national or international law that applies to his situation? What are the policy discussions on this topic to which this local fisherman could contribute? And what about raising public awareness and undertaking a global campaign? Can this fisherman count on UNEP to engage the fishing industry in adopting a voluntary code of conduct to improve current practice? Is there a similar initiative in another region? Can UNEP provide funds to undertake a project? *Natural Allies* proposes answers to all these questions.

The example of the artisanal fisherman could apply to any sector of civil society or to any environmental topic. The purpose of *Natural Allies* is to provide answers to all your questions about UNEP. More importantly, I hope this book provokes a desire to participate in UNEP's work and enables organizations and individuals to gain the maximum benefit from UNEP's commitment to working closely with civil society. My sincere wish is that this book will contribute to helping civil society catalyze the political and social changes that are needed if we are to achieve a sustainable future.

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