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**Follow-up of General Assembly resolutions**

**Linkages among and support to environmental  
and environment-related conventions**

**Note by the Executive Director**

The present note contains information on the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme in enhancing interlinkages and synergies between multilateral environmental agreements. The text of the note has been reproduced without formal editing.

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\* UNEP/GC.22/1.

## **Introduction**

The governance of global environmental affairs is mediated by an intricate web of treaties, agreements and organizations. Although treaties and agreements on aspects of environmental management date back almost to the turn of the century, the majority of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) actually in force have been negotiated and implemented during the last 30 years, and draw their inspiration from the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment of 1972 and the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (Earth Summit) of 1992.

The growth in the existing system of multilateral environmental agreements has been largely incremental. The system has grown in response to the awareness that most environmental problems are of a transboundary nature and require concerted international actions. These agreements - global, regional and subregional - respond to broad-based environmental concerns or concerns that are issue specific. While it may be argued that this individualized ad hoc approach has given strength to each separate instrument, gaps and overlaps have been created at the same time. It is true that each agreement tends to bear the stamp of the prevailing understanding of the science and societal issues - for example the wildlife field treaties preceding the Earth Summit are much more focused on species and specific habitat protection whilst the provisions of those that came after are significantly more oriented towards a balance between the needs of biodiversity and human development and their mutual dependence.

## **Opportunities for Synergies**

There are a number of complementarities between multilateral environmental agreements. Some of them are scientific - resulting from the interlocking nature of the earth's ecosystems. Others intersect across issue areas dealt with by the multilateral environmental agreements. Examples of these include issues of climate change and other atmospheric or stratospheric phenomena (ozone depletion) linked to regional and local problems of land degradation, desertification and biodiversity loss.

Other complementarities result from the policies negotiated in various institutional forums. Some of these overlaps stretch across wide policy domains, linking environmental agreements to other legal regimes or the work programmes of various intergovernmental organizations, such as international trade and investment, food and agriculture or customs control. Complementarities may also be identified at the functional or operational level of the multilateral environmental agreements. The reference here is to the use of common tools and approaches, reporting, capacity-building and awareness-raising, technology transfer and financing mechanisms.

Together the multilateral environmental agreements constitute a loose structure of institutions and activities, addressing inter-related issues. The human and financial resources devoted to this enterprise are important, but the resources for effective application on the ground in developing countries and countries with economies in transition are still far from being sufficient. In addition the multilateral environmental agreements have not been fully incorporated into national development planning as an integral part of the quest for sustainable development in general and poverty alleviation in particular; thus making them appear at times as an additional burden that Governments have to deal with instead of being perceived as instruments at their disposal for achieving national goals.

According to the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, adopted by the Special Session of the General Assembly (23-27 June 1997), "The role of UNEP in the further development of international environmental law should be strengthened, including the development of coherent interlinkages among relevant environmental conventions in cooperation with their respective conferences of the parties or governing bodies. In performing its functions related to conventions signed at the Rio Conference or as a result of it and other relevant conventions, UNEP should strive to promote the effective implementation of these conventions in a manner consistent with the provisions of the conventions and the decisions of the conferences of the parties".

It further suggested that "the convention secretariats should give consideration to improving the scheduling of meetings, to integrating national reporting requirements and to improving the balance between sessions of the conference of the parties and sessions of their subsidiary bodies..."

The decision SS. VII/1 of the Seventh Special Session of UNEP's Governing Council on International Environmental Governance endorsed the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives on "improved coordination among and effectiveness of multilateral environmental agreements".

The World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg also endorsed this decision in its Plan of Implementation and references to the enhancement of interlinkages and synergies finds numerous references in its text.<sup>1</sup>

Improved coordination, development of synergies, harmonized approaches, and mutually supportive activities have between variously mandated in articles of the multilateral environmental conventions. They have also been supported by the decisions of their Conference of Parties (COP), as well as by other competent bodies.

### **Challenges**

The challenges before the international community vis-a-vis the MEAs are:

- Efficient use of collective resources-information, financial and expertise;
- Reduction of duplication and overlaps;
- Emphasis on programme and policy coherence;
- Averting fragmented sectoral initiatives.
- Respecting the independent mandate of the MEAs.

These must be matched by greater efforts to coordinate activities at the national level. Here the focus of implementation of multilateral agreement activities are:

- Integrating the multilateral agreement processes into national planning and budgeting;
- Obtaining the required resources and technical support for effective implementation;
- Reduction of Governments' burden of reporting under different multilateral environmental agreements;
- Assisting Governments in establishing priorities and allocating resources in an era of shrinking budgets;

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<sup>1</sup> WSSD Plan of Implementation: para 39(c) on encouraging CBD, CCD and UNFCCC to enhance synergies; para 42 © on encouraging effective synergies between CBD and other MEAs through the development of joint plans and programmes; para 42 ® on enhancing mutual supportiveness between CBD and agreements related to international trade and intellectual property rights; para 121(d): strengthening coherence, coordination and monitoring; para 121(f): increasing effectiveness and efficiency through limiting overlap and duplication of activities of international organizations, within and outside the UN system, based on their mandates and comparative advantages; para 122 (b) on strengthening collaboration within and between the UN system w.r.t the Environmental Management Group; para 122(d): full implementation of decision I on IEG at the Seventh Session of UNEP GC); para 136 on strengthening cooperation among UNEP and other United Nations bodies and specialized agencies etc; para 138 (a) on streamlining the international sustainable development meeting calendar.

- Supporting Governments in coordinating preparations or monitoring to reinforce decisions taken under various multilateral environmental agreements and intergovernmental processes.
- The system of coordination and collaboration among the MEAs should ensure effective responses to global environmental problems and sustainable development challenges at the national level in order to:
- Monitor global environmental conditions;
- Integrate the environmental concerns expressed by the multilateral environmental agreements into socio-economic development;
- Develop appropriate international policies and enforcement support systems;
- Promote optimal strategies for collective actions and leverage implementation;
- Ensure compliance and timely achievement of effective results.

### **Role of the Division of Environmental Conventions**

In consultation with the MEA secretariats, the Division of Environmental Conventions has sought to address the above issues in an integrated manner building on the understanding of the linkages between the MEAs in decision making. This is being done with the explicit recognition of the synergies and trade-offs among the policies and actions taken within the frameworks of global and regional environmental conventions and agreements that are needed to respond in an effective and integrated manner to these global environmental problems.

### **Action taken by the Division of Environmental Conventions to enhance interlinkages and synergies between MEAs**

#### **1. Scientific Synergy**

The landmark report "**Protecting our Planet, Securing our Future, Linking Environmental Issues with Human Needs: Opportunities for Strategic Interventions**" by UNEP, the World Bank and the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration explores in detail the scientific and policy synergy among the major global environmental conventions. The report was presented during the UNFCCC/COP4 in Buenos Aires in November 1998.

#### **2. Interlinkages between the Climate Change and the Ozone Layer Protection:**

Parties to two key MEAs related to Atmosphere i.e. The Montreal protocol and Kyoto Protocol in 1997 took important parallel decisions to investigate the implications of the inclusion of HFCs and PFCs in the Kyoto Protocol. UNEP facilitated, as per the decision of the Parties, the assessment of the implications through Technology and Economic Assessment Panel (TEAP) for the presentation to the Parties.

In November 2000, UNEP DTIE, UNU, MIT and Alliance for Global Sustainability jointly organised a Expert workshop in MIT-Cambridge-USA to discuss the interlinkages. It was attended by 28 experts including Maria Molina-Noble Laureate. The study report has been prepared in two parts.

The Executive Committee of the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol provided assistance to UNEP DTIE's OzonAction Programme to prepare the case studies on the technologies that are Ozone Friendly as well as that help in mitigating the Climate Change. Such case-studies are published as "Two Challenges: One solution."

GEF has provided the preparatory funding to OzonAction Programme to develop a project that provides the integrated training to the countries with economies in transition in good practices for the gasses controlled under the two Protocols.

UNEP DTIE , USEPA. METI-Japan and industry Alliance Responsible for Atmospheric Policy have entered into partnership for the responsible use of HFCs/PFCs. "

Parties to Kyoto Protocol have invited IPCC and UNEP along with others to develop a guidelines for the good practices that safe guard climate change and protect the Ozone Layer".

### **3. Consultations on the International Environmental Governance Process**

The various analytical papers prepared by the Division of Environmental Conventions in consultation with the MEA secretariats gave both a unique insight into the existing opportunities and bottlenecks vis-a-vis the enhancement of interlinkages and synergies between the MEAs. The papers prepared for the consultations covered areas such as systematic coordination between the MEAs, the clustering strategy, the overlap in the decision making processes and the unique nature of the chemicals and wastes clusters. These papers can be accessed at the web site: [www.unep.org/governance](http://www.unep.org/governance).

DEC consults with the MEA secretariats on a regular basis. This consultation is formalized through the annual UNEP Coordination Meeting with the MEA secretariats.

### **4. Harmonization of national reporting and information management for biodiversity-related conventions**

In October 2000, UNEP convened a workshop in Cambridge to review the issue of harmonization of national reporting to biodiversity-related treaties. This workshop, attended by representatives of eight countries and eight convention secretariats, discussed possible actions for achieving harmonization, and recommended a series of national pilot projects to test various approaches.

In January 2001, the Environmental Management Group (EMG) established an Issue Management Group (IMG) on harmonization of reporting for biodiversity-related treaties, and appointed UNEP as task manager. UNEP, in consultation with IMG, prepared a background paper on the issue. This paper was reviewed by EMG, which subsequently requested IMG to prepare an action plan based on the recommendations in the paper.

#### **HARMONIZATION PILOT PROJECTS:**

Pilot projects facilitated by UNEP are being carried out in four countries (Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and Seychelles) to test information management and harmonization concepts in the context of the national reporting to the five global biodiversity-related conventions (CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar and WHC), with special focus on institutional co-ordination mechanisms and interlinkages at national and international levels. The pilot projects are being coordinated by the Division of Environmental Conventions (DEC) and UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

The pilot project countries and the global biodiversity-related conventions to which they are a Party are as follows:

Country	CBD	CMS	CITES	Ramsar	WHC
<b>Ghana</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Indonesia</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Panama</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Seychelles</i> *	✓		✓		✓

Although no longer a party, Seychelles also looked at reporting requirements under the International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW).

As well as reviewing the reporting processes at the national level and delivering these reports, each pilot project has a unique task to test one of the harmonization concepts recommended by the UNEP workshop (Cambridge, October 2000):

- Ghana* assessing the possibility of linking national reporting to the State of the Environment (SoE) reporting process
- Indonesia* identifying common information modules and using this as a basis for developing a modular approach to national reporting
- Panama* exploring potential regional support mechanisms for national information management and reporting
- Seychelles* assessing the potential for producing a consolidated national report responding to the needs of several conventions

In June 2001, a harmonization website was established which incorporated a discussion forum for the project (<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/>). The website and forum facilitates communication and exchange of information among the participating countries, MEA secretariats and other interested parties.

When results of all the pilot projects become available, UNEP/DEC and UNEP-WCMC will attempt to prepare preliminary guidelines for coordinated reporting at the national level. A document outlining recommendations for consideration at the international level will also be prepared. It is envisaged that the international-level recommendations will be considered by the secretariats and eventually by the COPs of the biodiversity-related conventions.

It is premature to draw globally relevant lessons from the pilot projects. However, the Seychelles pilot project has already provided interesting recommendations. For example:

At the international level:

A significant barrier to streamlining procedures for reporting at the national level would appear to be differences in the reporting cycles of each MEA. This suggests that MEAs could consider synchronizing national reporting cycles. Potential exists for developing and implementing broader joint programmes of work between and among MEAs to tackle common themes such as international cooperation including capacity building, policies and strategies, identification and monitoring and in-situ conservation. Joint programmes in such areas could be developed, with a view to contributing to streamlining the reporting processes.

At the national level:

Creation of a central biodiversity database or national biodiversity information network will support both implementation and reporting, if appropriately established. Establishment of an operational framework for biodiversity stakeholder interaction will help ensure effective involvement of stakeholders in implementation and reporting.

Incorporation of objectively verifiable indicators which relate to convention implementation into projects will enable more rapid and accurate reporting.

While the pilot projects have been under way, UNEP has had a range of informal discussions with convention secretariats and others (including the United Nations University and regional organizations such as the European Environment Agency and ARCBC) concerning the issue of harmonization, and has been preparing the draft action plan for harmonization as requested by EMG. Consideration within this draft action plan is being given to both direct activities (such as a second phase of pilot projects) and enabling actions (such as workshops) in the following key areas:

- Testing concepts and methods for harmonization and streamlining of reporting;
- Harmonization and integration of information management at national and international levels;
- Improving institutional linkages;
- Supporting actions.

## **5. Integrated Training of Customs Officials**

The capacity building of customs officials, who are at the forefront of every country's efforts to combat illegal trade in commodities of environmental concern, is vital but also expensive and time-consuming. Training is a key component of capacity building. The World Customs Organization (WCO) offers extensive training to customs officers with the objective of ensuring the implementation and uniform application of the customs conventions that it administers. The Secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements that have trade provisions, such as the Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, have already instituted training programmes for customs officials, in cooperation with the WCO, at both the national and regional levels. Customs officer training is also anticipated to be an important element of the national implementation of the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, once these enter into force.

In UNEP Governing Council Decision 21/27 on "Compliance with and enforcement of multilateral environmental agreements", the Council expressed concern that environmental damage caused by illegal traffic in endangered species and dangerous and harmful substances and products is growing. It also recognized that continuous efforts are required to be undertaken by all countries and relevant organizations and operational agencies concerned in ensuring compliance with and enforcement of multilateral environmental agreements, such as the International Criminal Police Organization, the World Customs Organization, the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the convention Secretariats.

The Council requested the Executive Director of UNEP to continue the preparation of the draft guidelines on compliance with multilateral environmental agreements, on capacity strengthening, and on effective national environmental enforcement, in support of the ongoing developments of compliance regimes within the framework of international agreements.

A workshop on "Codes, Contraband and Cooperation: Working with Customs Authorities to Implement Environmental Treaties", convened by UNEP in Geneva in June 2001, served as a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences among treaty Secretariats, customs authorities, non-government organizations and experts on the issue of illegal trade in commodities of environmental concern. The workshop participants recognized the benefits of a coordinated approach among treaty Secretariats, and between Secretariats, implementing agencies, and the WCO in areas such as training, enforcement, exchange of information and awareness raising. Some activities that were suggested during the workshop included national and regional integrated training workshops when possible, preparation of integrated training materials where appropriate, and the development of links between MEA web-sites.

Under the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol, UNEP DTIE's OzonAction Programme has launched a world wide national customs training to monitor and control Ozone Depleting Substances. The partnership with regional customs training institutions has been established to deliver more than 40 customs training programmes in as many countries. The Secretariat of the Basel Convention is already planning to hold training workshops at its regional centers, jointly with the Secretariats of CITES and the Montreal Protocol, Interpol, the International Maritime Organization, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and UNEP. Similarly, other Secretariats are also exploring the possibilities of joint training.

On 1 October 2001, UNEP's Division of Technology, Industry and Environment (DTIE) and Division of Environmental Conventions (DEC), acting on the recommendation from the June workshop, convened a meeting in Paris with the WCO, Secretariats of the Basel, CITES, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, and the Montreal Protocol's Ozone Secretariat. The objective was to develop a plan of action to integrate the training of customs officers on several environmental treaties. The following actions were agreed.

- UNEP/DTIE was authorized to facilitate planning of integrated training for the year 2002 with the objective of completing some training by 2003. Secretariats committed to participate in the training where it was acceptable to them, and to meet their respective proportionate costs.
- UNEP/DTIE agreed to provide a Facilitator, supported financially by DTIE and DEC, initially working half-time for a six-month period, to further cooperation among Secretariats.
- The preparation of a "Green Customs manual" will be considered.
- Training workshops planned by the Secretariat of the Basel Convention and the OzonAction Programme for November 2001 in Romania and India were used as opportunities to begin to introduce the integrated training concept. These initial efforts strengthened the collaborative efforts of the Secretariats and provided valuable lessons in integrated training in regard to the approach, training content, and pedagogic issues, training methodologies and training tools.
- A pool of customs officials is to be identified to undergo specialized training to further their capacity to monitor implementation and compliance of environmental treaties in their respective countries and regions.
- Distance (remote) training techniques are to be developed simultaneously with the common training module, and incorporated into the regular curricula of customs training academies.
- The possibility of securing GEF funding to support this initiative is to be explored.
- Joint customs campaigns were suggested as a means of demonstrating that integrated training can produce results in the field. Fact-sheets on the individual training programmes of the various conventions are to be placed on the UNEP web-sites to immediately begin to link Secretariats training activities.
- Opportunities for awareness - raising among parliamentarians, finance ministers, non-government organizations, and industrial associations will be explored by UNEP and the Secretariats.
- UNEP will explore the use of the Internet to disseminate information to help combat illegal trade.
- An Inter-Secretariat Task Force has been established, coordinated by UNEP, to review progress on this initiative on a regular basis.

UNEP/DTIE will be launching a week a web site dedicated to the " Green Customs " . It will be unique site to be managed by UNEP/DTIE in close consultation with the Division of Environmental Conventions, Basel, CITES, WCO and Interpol.

## 6. Joint Work Programmes

The United Nations, its specialized agencies and the secretariats of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are already active in a number of initiatives to enhance their coordination in a number of areas. These range from the ongoing meetings of the MEA convention secretariats under the aegis of UNEP, the ongoing initiatives in harmonizing national reporting, and the implementation of joint work programmes under MOUs signed between different convention secretariats covering cross-cutting issues, among others. Yet the implementation of the collaboration initiatives have been piecemeal rather than the result of a deliberate, overarching strategic choice. A strategic vision for collaboration and coordination amongst MEAs has to take into account not only the lessons learned but also marshal limited resources -human and financial - to leverage change.

Currently, in consultation with the MEA secretariats, the Division of Environmental Conventions is working on a strategic framework document to encourage joint work programming with the MEAs on issues of common concern.

UNEP believes that joint participation by all partners in the conceptualization, design and planning of joint programming will be key to the success of the partnerships with the MEAs and other UN agencies which may have an interest in the environment. Joint development of partnership activities means more than each partner designing its own work activities and putting them together in a single plan. Rather it suggests that all partners jointly review all activities and consensus is reached about their scope, content, resource allocation and implementation.

DEC has proposed a number of issues for partnership activities/joint programming at the thematic and functional level. The designing and implementation of joint thematic and functional programming between the MEAs can serve as an important building block for the issue-based work of the Environmental Management Group (EMG). This collaboration between the MEAs on matters programmatic and the EMG can provide a model to other UN agencies for launching similar activities.

Two Divisions of UNEP – Division of Environmental Conventions and DTIE have been approached by governments to initiate the pilot projects at national level to integrate the implantation of the MEAs.

So far the existing mechanisms for enhancing coordination and policy coherence have been established mostly for the secretariats of the MEAs in the form of MOUs and in a few cases in the form of joint work plans which were later endorsed by the Conference of the Parties. Thus, the implementation of joint work programmes and partnership activities of the MEAs has so far been a bottom up approach led by the secretariats rather than a top down approach led by the Contracting Parties and the COPs. Contracting parties have been complaining about the proliferation of treaties and national reports. A strategy needs to be formulated for the COPS to address this issue and encourage, even direct the different MEAs to work together.

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