

USG Response to Questions on UN Reform In the Area of Environmental Governance

Introduction

As a vital threshold matter, it should be said that the current system, with its many treaty bodies and institutions, has several strengths: it is decentralized, specialized, relatively efficient, flexible, and responsive. Calls for abandonment of the current system in favor of a new, centralized, global superstructure may sound superficially appealing because they invoke adjectives such as “integrated,” “coherent,” and “coordinated” – which are hard to oppose. However, with such adjectives come other adjectives, such as bureaucratic, authoritarian, policy-preemptive, lacking in expertise, cumbersome, slow, wasteful, bloated, inefficient, and ineffective – not to mention costly.

On the contrary, experience dictates that, far from seeking greater centralization, we should be moving in the opposite direction – toward practical, bottom-up approaches rather than rigid top-down legal instruments that often do not get implemented. For example, in forests, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) has worked regionally with mahogany range states to address their compliance needs for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and helped to integrate CITES implementation into individual country projects funded by ITTO. While CITES itself does not have capacity building as an aspect of its work, this complementary role by ITTO is within the mandate and scope of the International Tropical Timber Agreement and addresses a real need.

In short, the notion that we should replace/swallow up the current system – with its problem-specific blend of legal instruments, non-legal instruments, and practical grass-roots approaches – within an overarching institution is one we reject. As such, our first proposal is that any serious attempt to address efficiency/effectiveness within the UN system must include recognition of the desirability of further decentralization that favors bottom-up practical approaches.

1) What are your country's specific recommendations for a better coordination and achievement of environmental goals/objectives between MEAs and the UN system? (i.e., clustering of MEAs, harmonization of activities, review of legal status, [omnibus resolution], etc.)

- To increase efficiency and effectiveness, reduce the frequency and/or duration of meetings of COPs and/or subsidiary bodies and grouping related meetings as appropriate. This would not only relieve the overcrowded international calendar, but enable better preparation for meetings and promote compliance with meeting results;
- Co-locate MEA secretariats where appropriate in a city where countries already have a diplomatic mission;
- Regarding **institutions**, rigorous examination of whether new institutions are necessary or need to be permanent, in light of institutional proliferation;
- Regarding **capacity-building and training**, focus on two or more related topics (like UNEP Green Customs Initiative which trains customs officials to identify articles in international trade that are covered by environmental conventions, such as chemicals and endangered species);
- Regarding improving MEA compliance, implementing agencies can provide capacity building to assist governments in determining the steps necessary to comply with their MEA obligations, and to carry out those steps before they become parties;
- Also regarding MEA compliance, improve MEA operating procedures by striking the right balance between the need for environmental policy to keep pace with scientific advances and the need to ensure that measures to implement policy have the true agreement of governments, with both the resources and will to implement them;
- Regarding secretariats, **audit/evaluate** secretariats to make sure they are using resources most efficiently.

- Combining the **accounting infrastructure** of similar MEA secretariats.
 - Combining **acquisition services** of co-located MEA secretariats.
 - Combining **conferencing services** of MEAs.
 - Better **calendar maintenance**
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- Finally, as a means of promoting efficiency in implementation of MEAs, we need increased **substantive coordination** at the domestic level, where the primary responsibility lies for ensuring coherence within and among environmental issues. The more individual countries ensure coordination at the national level of their MEA negotiating positions and implementation, the more coordinated international processes will be - automatically.
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- **Capacity-building** should be enhanced toward helping countries increase their ability to coordinate and implement MEAs substantively at the national level, with the goal of eventual self-sufficiency. For example, as the UNEP manual on the compliance and enforcement guidelines suggests, countries could use assistance in developing national legislation that implements related MEAs thematically; or developing national legislation that implements thematically related MEAs in a specific context; or developing national technical committees to identify synergies, inter-linkages, and ways to group MEAs for implementation purposes.
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- Poverty reduction strategies within countries should identify those areas requiring assistance; for example, clean water in urban areas requiring infrastructure support should identify the support required domestically as a priority matter for the PRSP.

2) What are your country's specific proposals for strengthening UNEP at the global, regional and sub-regional levels?

- Focus UNEP's work on areas where it has a comparative advantage in the international system such as: chemicals, regional seas, environmental monitoring and assessment – through the GRID system, and the Global Program of Action for Land-based Sources of Marine Pollution.
- Require UNEP's substantive offices and divisions to make a stronger commitment to focusing their work on capacity building and technology support. For example, a much greater share of DEWA's efforts need to be focused on building the capacity of countries to collect and analyze environmental data and use it in development planning.
- Strengthen the regional offices to facilitate work with UNDP and the UNEP substantive offices.
- Strengthen the cooperation with UNDP and other agencies, including through a greater participation of UNEP in the UNDG.
- Increase cooperation with the IFIs especially to improve national capacity to assess the environmental impacts of development and include environmental concerns in development plans and projects.
- More partnerships with the private sector including in technology support and capacity building.
- More cooperation with national academies of science and professional scientific societies.

3) What are your country's specific proposals for proper funding, scientific research, technology development and in-house capacity to address the most pressing environmental concerns? (public-private partnerships, environmental markets, innovative financial instruments, etc.)

- Funding should follow performance. Voluntary funding encourages program effectiveness, innovation and responsiveness.
- Program excellence should not be a disincentive. Core funding should not be withdrawn from programs that excel; rather, these are the programs that should be supported and expanded.
- Increase multi-stakeholder partnerships.
- Partnerships with financial institutions that manage revolving funds for environment/development.
- Greater cooperation with national laboratories and agencies facilitating cooperation between those with established procedures and experience with those that are in the process of developing new programs and procedures.
- UNEP's need for in-house capacity should be limited to expertise that will allow UNEP staff to understand issues, evaluate information and research, facilitate access to information and expertise, and manage/coordinate assistance utilizing others' expertise. In other words, UNEP should not seek to develop substantive expertise in all areas.
- UNEP cannot be a research institution.

It should partner with research institutions, academies of science and scientific societies to access research and in-depth expertise.

It can also serve as a clearing-house for best practices and facilitate access to new or topical research; for example, the wealth of research and practical experience on the use of managed or constructed wetlands for water treatment.

4. What are your country's specific proposals to render concrete results for achieving sustainable development goals (social, economic, environmental)?

a. Improve the working methods of functional commissions and other bodies to better catalyze on-the-ground implementation of existing commitments.

The UN's unique convening power should be better harnessed to translate words into action. Some bodies, such as the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), have adopted key reforms to take on this enhanced role. Best practices that could be applied to other sustainable development bodies in the UN system include:

- **Increasing the amount of “non-negotiating” time:** The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) has reduced the time spent on negotiations from several weeks per year to several days every two years. This has created valuable space for a) reviewing progress, b) identifying barriers and constraints for implementation, c) sharing lessons learned and best practices in overcoming these barriers and constraints, and d) scaling up and replicating best practices.
- **Serving as a platform for voluntary initiatives that deliver concrete results:** The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was the first major UN conference to endorse voluntary initiatives as an official outcome. WSSD delegates launched more than 200 “Partnerships for Sustainable Development” aimed at implementing Agenda 21, Rio+5, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Since WSSD, the CSD's partnerships database has grown to include more than 300 partnerships and several of these initiatives have delivered meaningful results. For example, the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles assisted in phasing out leaded gasoline in Sub-Saharan Africa at the end of 2005 and is working toward a global phase-out by the end of 2008.
- **Collecting and disseminating best practices:** Governments should be encouraged to share best practices as a means of cross-fertilization with others that may share similar problems. UN bodies should adapt their

working methods to better serve this function. The CSD has embraced this approach: the CSD Water Action and Networking Database (WAND) is a web-based tool that grew out of the 2003-2005 CSD Water Cycle and was launched at the 2005 World Water Forum. Currently, the CSD is building a CSD Matrix of policy options on energy-related issues. This Matrix contains over 120 practical solutions, with more still coming in.

- **Promote non-negotiated outputs as complement to consensus texts:** The CSD has supported two types of non-negotiated outputs – partnerships and web-based tools – that serve as a critical complement to consensus texts. In fact, with hundreds of pages of text already on the books, these non-negotiated tools can breathe new life into dialogues which have become abstract and repetitive.
 - **Provide on-site capacity building:** The CSD Learning Center, originally developed in partnership with a UNDP-Smithsonian initiative called “The Institute@...” enables conference participants to provide on-site capacity building to fellow participants. The CSD Learning Center has trained more than 2,000 people since its inception and the Learning Center/Institute@ model has been replicated by 9 international bodies, including 6 UN organizations (e.g. the Commission on the Status of Women, Convention on Biological Diversity, UN-Habitat, etc.)
 - **Priority-setting: more time on fewer issues:** By focusing on water-related issues for two years and then energy-related issues for two years, the CSD has been able to focus more in-depth on these key issues. Moreover, this priority-setting has fostered interlinkages with other bodies (e.g., World Bank, UNEP) and galvanized action (e.g. Rotary International launching water projects during CSD Water Cycle).
- b. Additional improvements could involve the following:
- **Improve cooperation between UNEP and UNDP by building on UNEP/UNDP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):** UNEP and UNDP secretariats should go through a process in which the respective roles of both UNEP and UNDP are clarified vis-à-vis sustainable development in order to reduce duplication and maximize resources for capacity building.

- **Improve utilization of the UN Development Group (UNDG):** Where UNEP is present, integrate UNEP into the UNDG. Where UNEP is not present, use UNDP as a proxy through a UNEP/UNDP MOU.
- **Utilize UNDP expertise:** UNDP has presence in a greater number of countries than UNEP. UNEP and UNDP should coordinate so UNDP could competently carry out aspects of UNEP's program in particular countries as necessary.
- **Coordinate more closely with regional commissions:** Regional commissions receive funding from UN regular budget and additional voluntary funding for technical programs and capacity building. Coordinate activities in UNEP and CSD more closely with technical programs through the regional commissions.

5) What should be exactly decided in the context of the GA? In other fora?

- It is premature to decide what the end result of these deliberations should be. It may be that the UNGA does not need to adopt a major resolution on UN reform as it relates to the environment, as opposed to encouragement of individual UN bodies to act more effectively and efficiently in the ways suggested above.
- The GA provides general direction to ECOSOC, including the CSD and the UN Forum on Forests, and the UN Regional Commissions and UN Programs e.g. UNDP and UNEP. Likewise, UNEP reports to the GA.

The GA may consider reducing the regularity of GMEF meetings to every two years.

It could encourage the various UN bodies and processes, including the MEAs, to reduce the number, frequency and duration of meetings, including subsidiary bodies. For example many two-week meetings could easily be reduced to one week, without impacting substantive discussions or results.

It could assign the keeping of a UN environment calendar to a group such as the EMG which would keep an official calendar with the express purpose of reducing scheduling conflicts.

It could encourage greater use of the electronic meetings in lieu of physical gatherings (e.g., conference calls, digital video conferencing and internet discussions, drafting or clearance processes).

It could set a limit on the length of resolutions forwarded to ECOSOC by the CSD, UNFF and other subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC, directing such bodies to focus on operative recommendations, minimize preambular text and reduce duplication within such resolutions.

	Global	Regional	Sub-Regional	National
UN Efficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce frequency of COPs • Reduce negotiation time • Reduce GMEF to biannual meetings • EMG take over calendar of UN environmental meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate or cooperate on activities among UN regional commissions, UNEP regional offices and other regional programs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work through the UN resrep to support and coordinate country-level activities
UN Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set priorities to focus on fewer issues • Improve cooperation between UNDP and UNEP and define roles • Utilize UNDG to enhance coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More work with regional commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize UNDP to implement UNEP sub-regional programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize UNDG to enhance coordination at the country level • Utilize UNDP to implement UNEP programs
UN Best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase voluntary partnerships and initiatives • Develop web-based capacity building tools to complement negotiated texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination among UNECE and UNEP regional office on environment and development • On-site capacity building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use agency presence and comparative advantage in program delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect and catalogue governments' best practices • On-site capacity building
MEA Efficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit secretariats to ensure best use of resources • Combine administrative services of MEA secretariats, including accounting infrastructure, pension administration, acquisition services and conferencing services • Co-location of MEA secretariats where appropriate • Reduce frequency of meetings and use DVCs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEA participation at other regional environmental meetings • Regional coordination and participation at MEAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation with regional conventions, e.g. Regional Seas, Cartagena, Barcelona, Nairobi • Coordination on MEA preparations and reporting, e.g. SPREP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase substantive coordination within governments
MEA Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regarding capacity-building and training, focus on two or more related topics (like UNEP Green Customs Initiative which trains customs officials to identify articles in international trade that are covered by environmental conventions, such as chemicals and endangered species) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater use of Basel Technical Centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide capacity building so countries can fully implement MEA obligations
MEA Best Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease the amount of negotiating time and focus on implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased environmental monitoring, e.g. InterAmerican Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater environmental monitoring e.g. North American Biodiversity Information Network (NABIN) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of Global Taxonomy initiatives to build capacity

Proposal to Strengthen UNEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus only on areas where UNEP has a competitive advantage • Enhance participation in UNDG • More cooperation with national academies of science and other professional scientific societies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase capacity building • Increase cooperation with IFIs • Collaboration with regional trade bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase capacity building • Increase cooperation with IFIs • Build links with sub-regional organizations: SADC, EAC, ECOWAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase capacity building • Increase cooperation with IFIs • More partnerships with private sector
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