

**SYNERGY IN NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION
The Rio Agreements***

**Submitted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
to**

**Inter-linkages: International Conference on Synergies and
Coordination between multilateral Environmental Agreements**

**UNU Centre, Tokyo, Japan
14,15 and 16 July 1999**

*This paper is based on the UNDP publication “Synergies in National Implementation: The Rio Agreements”. The original report was written by Ted Howard, Rapporteur for the Sde Boker workshop. The current paper was edited by the Sustainable Energy and Environment Division, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP.

INTRODUCTION

Synergy: “a combined effect ... that exceeds the sum of individual effects”

_____ *Concise Oxford Dictionary, 7th edition*

Throughout the 1990's individual governments and the international community as a whole have declared specific goals with regard to sustainable development. These goals are contained in Agenda 21 and a range of individual instruments and conventions. These agreements are not simply environmental plans or proposals; most are binding international commitments with concrete objectives concerning the integration of environmental protection and natural resources management with socio-economic development.

Four of these instruments

—(i) the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),

—(ii) the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),

—(iii) the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), and

—(iv) the Forestry Principles (FP) and the subsequent action plan of the

Intergovernmental Panel on Forests — derive directly from the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, the “Rio Earth Summit”). These sustainable development instruments share a concern for many environmental issues and contain many complementary – and some overlapping - obligations required of their Parties (such as requirements for research, reporting, training, and public education and awareness).

Most often, however the instruments are being implemented in relative isolation of each other. Yet, great efficiency could be achieved if they were implemented in synergy.

The barriers to achieving synergy are often political and cultural. At the international level, organisations may view their mandates in ways that put them at odds with one another, despite what appear to be common, substantive goals. In the case of the Rio agreements, the institutions responsible for the various instruments can support synergy by coordinating among themselves and helping to ensure that participating countries are not burdened by conflicting directives or timing in reporting requirements.

Recognising the imperative of seizing the opportunity for synergy while avoiding the pitfalls of overlap among the Rio instruments, the United Nations Development Programme has explored ways to create synergy between and among the instruments — particularly at the national level — to help foster implementation and to improve the prospects for sustainable development. Two fundamental principles developed in consultation with participants and stakeholders, including representatives of the Secretariats of and Parties to the instruments provide the basis for this exploration:

- First, a recognition of potential synergies among the instruments must be an integral part of the planning process and implementation for each; and
- Second, strengthening and building in-country capacity is essential to the producing synergy in the implementation of the agreements.

This paper outlines a range of preliminary proposals, options, and recommendations to improve national-level implementation of the instruments, to reduce conflicts and overlaps, and to produce synergy. The paper is based on the report “Synergies in national

implementation: The Rio Agreements” from a UNDP organized workshop in Sde Boker, Israel. The recommendations contained in this paper resulted from discussions in working groups among “practitioners”, i.e. individuals responsible for the implementation of the instruments. Many of the proposals are already finding their way into practice at the national level. Along with these initial proposals, larger themes and messages are included, both for implementing countries and the international community.

THEMES AND MESSAGES: IMPLEMENTING COUNTRIES

Synergy is possible

Synergies in implementing the Conventions — at the international, national, and local levels — are clearly possible. However, producing such synergy is no easy matter; it is the culmination of a process in which complementarities between the conventions are identified and used to further implementation while overlaps are eliminated (or at least conflicts between them reduced). Taking advantage of the complementarities and reducing conflicts (e.g., the potential for conflict between a biodiversity strategy and a forest strategy) requires the ability to design necessary actions and the means to take them. Even before a potential point of synergy is reached, eliminating or reducing the conflicts can go a long way towards improving implementation of the instruments. Because of this, complementary provisions of conventions can be implemented in ways that improve cost effectiveness by achieving the same or greater results with fewer or the same resources. It is recognize that synergy does not end with the Rio Agreements; the same potential for overlap extends to other international agreements such as Ramsar, CITES, the Montreal Protocol, and the Law of the Sea. To take advantage of these overlaps, countries need to do a broad review of the institutional capacity and information requirements of all international agreements to which they are party.

- **Planning is essential**

The requirements (including reporting obligations) of these instruments can lead to duplicative effort and place a substantial burden on countries — particularly a strain on human and financial resources. To turn such potential burdens into possible synergies requires planning — national and sectoral development planning and plans built specifically for national implementation of the conventions. The key is to anchor implementation plans into national development priorities and policies. In many countries, there may be no cohesive planning framework, which makes the integration of the instrument-related plans into sectoral policies essential.

- **Implementation requires new and strengthened capacities**

Conventions are implemented in countries at the national, regional, district, and community levels. A high priority is to develop the institutions and capacities necessary to enable countries to translate these international agreements into action at these levels. One problem countries face is that capacities diminish from the national to the local level, therefore the well-justified efforts of governments to decentralize and devolve authority must be supported by additional resources of skilled, trained people and money.

- **Information systems are a key to sustainable development**

Underlying the challenge parties face in fulfilling the reporting requirements of the conventions is the more fundamental issue of the lack of effective information management in many developing countries. For example, where there is no monitoring system, reporting is necessarily ad hoc and demanding. Worse, a country has no real means for saying whether the conventions are being implemented or even whether progress is being made toward the goals of sustainable development. A systematic approach to information management not only allows a country to have the data necessary to fulfill its obligations and generate reports, but also to better define, guide and assess the progress being achieved on its development policies.

[Top of Page](#)

THEMES AND MESSAGES: INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Interventions at the international level can support — and in many cases are required in order to produce — synergy at the national level. Several messages are directed to the international community, not only associated with the Rio instruments but other environmental and sustainable development conventions as well:

- Instructions by the COPs to their Secretariats to work collaboratively and synergistically with the Secretariats of the other conventions would contribute greatly to opportunities for national-level synergy.
- Shared reporting schedules could be developed between instruments, thus lessening the reporting burden on developing country Parties.
- The instruments could be analysed in detail to identify data and information needed to monitor and assess progress. Carrying out such an analysis at the international level would provide a valuable resource to all parties. Interpretation of this global analysis at the national level will allow different data needs, scale, precision, and definitions to be developed locally.

The Convention Secretariats can contribute to the development and dissemination of training modules and information tools that increase understanding of and give greater access to the conventions at the country level.

UNDP FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For UNDP four thematic areas, each focusing on a different facet of the challenge of synergy at the national level, are at the heart of this issue:

- Institutional Requirements and Structures
- Capacity Requirements
- National Planning Requirements
- Information and Reporting Requirements

As with the Rio instruments themselves, these divisions are a useful but somewhat artificial, set of distinctions. Modeling the larger search for synergy, these divisions intend to promote cross-fertilisation and the development of harmonised approaches and recommendations. At the same time, just as there are overlaps between the instruments, so too are there necessarily overlaps between the recommendations in these thematic areas.

The following sections are not intended to be definitive, but rather to point towards the many issues to be addressed — and some of the ways to address them — in order to facilitate synergy in country-level implementation of the Rio instruments.

INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND STRUCTURES

In light of the commonalities of purpose and intention among the Rio instruments, there is a real opportunity for governments to provide a more intensive and enhanced attention to environmental and sustainable development efforts. To do so requires creating a new “critical focus” within the government, bringing together existing — and creating when necessary — institutions with diverse interests to work toward a set of shared goals.

The Conventions call for integration of environmental concerns into other areas of policy, but they leave it to country parties to determine the policy and institutional framework for implementation. The instruments do not, for example, require the establishment of particular institutions at the national level; this is for each Party to decide. While most countries have in place some form of agency or ministry with overall responsibility for environmental issues, a number of activities associated with the Rio agreements may fall within the mandates of other ministries. Thus, coordinated implementation of the agreements is likely to require horizontal structures for inter-ministerial consultation and cooperation. Effective mechanisms are not always in place to facilitate this coordination. Moreover, even where structures are in place, the different power bases and priorities of the ministries involved may tend to work against coordination.

There are no quick institutional “fixes” that can ensure synergy in the implementation of the agreements. Institutional arrangements intended to produce coordination are unlikely to result in benefits unless directed towards achieving specific goals. Institutional implementation of the agreements must be nationally driven, with identified synergies that both fulfill obligations under the agreements and support nationally set priorities.

Summary of Key Challenges

- The sectoral division of responsibility for implementation of environmental and sustainable development programmes is often a hindrance to effective, integrated implementation of such programmes at the national, regional (subnational), and local levels. The Rio agreements are international instruments that are the responsibilities of national governments which generally work in a sectoral fashion. To a large extent these agreements can be implemented only locally on the ground — which requires a multi-sectoral approach. There is a real tension here, which few governments have resolved.
- The institutions with responsibility for implementation under particular instruments vary greatly in their authority and resources. They also frequently lack effective means of coordinating information and activities, or even simply communicating, with other actors. In some cases, there are real disincentives to effective coordination, including institutional rivalries and tension over turf and resource control.

- The recognized need for effective coordination and a central “focal point” may tend to lead toward an unhealthy centralisation of control and power over environmental and sustainable development policies and programmes. The thrust of the effort should instead be on continued decentralisation and democratisation of participation, while at the same time maximising the cross-fertilisation, efficiencies, and available synergies.
- At the local level, communication between stakeholders and government is often fragmented and inadequate. In many countries local communities are insufficiently involved in the development of national policies.
- While these challenges are to a greater or lesser extent common to many nations, effective strategies and structures to address them will necessarily vary widely from country to country. Different structures and strategies will therefore apply to different circumstances. Recommendations regarding institutional arrangements must offer options which are flexible and adaptable to a variety of circumstances.

Activities around which institutions can work synergistically

Within the overall framework of policy-making, planning, and implementation of the Rio instruments and other sustainable development-related agreements, there are several core activities which are particularly amenable to the search for institutional synergies:

- Awareness-raising
- Education
- Reporting
- Data-gathering and inventories
- Public participation
- Research
- Training

Institutional models for supporting synergy

A variety of institutional approaches are available for use in a country setting at the national, regional, and local levels. Again, these are not intended to be definitive but rather to indicate some of the institutional configurations which could prove supportive of synergy.

National-level Institutions

Effective national-level institutions are anchored at a sufficiently high political level in the national government, respond to national priorities, have built-in incentives for coordination and participation, and provide an effective information-sharing center or clearinghouse as part of the established structures. Where appropriate, cross-sectoral task forces charged with implementing plans and programmes have the necessary authority to carry out activities and decisions.

Responsibility is established at multiple levels with appropriate decentralisation of implementation authority: while consultative inter-ministerial exchanges take place

regularly, synergies are also generated at the level of implementation, including the line ministries and other actors. Important to success is an enabling environment, including appropriate framework legislation, delegation of authority, and leadership at the highest levels. Convention focal points should be integrally involved as core participants in both policy and implementation-level structures.

- **Option one: a crosscutting national committee bringing together key participants**

The national committee is a policy-making structure which deals with strategic planning, implementation, and legislative requirements for successful implementation of the instruments and other related initiatives. It brings together the various government departments and ministries, including the focal points for each convention, into what ideally is a decision-making (rather than an advisory) body. To function effectively, a national committee:

- is vested with sufficient authority, including a legal and policy mandate and authority over allocation of resources, to make its decisions take hold.
- has an efficient secretariat function which can pull together a diverse group of participants with different agendas and interests.
- includes all key stakeholders at the highest appropriate levels.
- retains policy and resource allocation responsibilities.
- delegates operational responsibilities to the line ministries and other programme implementors (NGOs, institutes, industry) rather than becomes an implementing institution in its own right.
- forms subcommittees to address technical matters, specific crosscutting initiatives, or issues with a particular geographic focus. To avoid defeating the fundamental purpose of the National Committee structure, all such substructures retain the cross-sectoral, integrated character of the National Committee.

Option Two: Separate Institutions with a Coordinating Mechanism

Where strong functioning structures or committees already exist with responsibility for particular instruments, these structures can take joint action to build synergies, avoid duplication of effort, and carry out joint coordinated planning and implementation. Under these conditions:

- specific structures have policy and decision-making power
- high-level leadership creates an enabling environment for coordination
- regular joint consultative fora are organised for team leaders in each sector
- an entry point to synergistic action is to use the instrument of greatest national priority as the lead institutional convener for joint consultation, planning, and action. Alternatively, leadership can be rotated or shared.
- as is the case under option one, cross-sectoral interaction takes place at multiple levels, and includes those directly responsible for policy formation, those with line implementation responsibility, and a wider circle of others including academic and NGO participants.

- mechanisms ensure that each sector is fully informed in a timely manner about the plans and activities of each of the others. This can be accomplished in part through regular distribution of the minutes of meetings.
- cross-sectoral working groups, created on an as-needed basis, address challenges with clear synergistic implications. In addition, ongoing crosscutting working groups can work to ensure efficient synergistic implementation in areas such as reporting, information and data-gathering, and dissemination.

Option three: a single institution responsible for all instruments

In some cases, it may be appropriate to vest responsibility for policy, planning, and implementation activities relating to all environmental/sustainable development instruments in one high-level institution, with sufficient authority to pull together other essential participants. In this case:

- strong political support for the institution is needed.
- focal points for all conventions are housed within the same institution.
- policy-making and planning go hand-in-hand: neither are separated from responsibility for implementation. Experience has shown that planning frameworks (such as National Environmental Action Plans or other multi-sectoral strategies) can serve as a viable mechanism for integration of biodiversity, desertification, and other relevant issues. In the absence of a national sustainable development planning framework, such mechanisms can form the basis for synergy, provided that strong leadership, implementation responsibility, and effective coordination among line ministries are in place.

District level

The number and significance of subnational levels varies with a country's size and administrative structure. It is essential that the quest for coordination and synergy at the national level be carried through in implementation to the district and local levels. Indeed, for activities relating to awareness-building, education, information and data gathering, and training, effective integration at subnational levels assumes even greater importance.

The possible models at the district level parallel those at the national level. However, elements of each model can be applied regardless of the structure being used at the national level. Depending on the country situation, there could be:

- a coordinating committee pulling together the different sector
- a district coordinator for each sector, with a priority sector taking the lead in managing coordination
- a single district coordinator responsible for all sectors.

Experience has shown that the lack of adequate human and institutional capacity at the district level is a critical factor in causing breakdowns in coordination. Ensuring adequate capacity can be undertaken by:

- secondment of well-trained and experienced officer
- processes by which district and local actors are directly involved in the policy and programming dialogue at the national level
- ensuring that adequate authority has been delegated to the proper level

- ensuring that adequate resources are available
- ensuring that adequate training, both sectoral and skills-based, is available.

An important function of district coordinators is to identify and develop mechanisms for joint action involving people at the local level (see below). In many cases, this will involve extension agents, local officials, rangers, foresters, and others involved in natural resource management.

In addition to coordination and synergy within a subnational region, it is important to create mechanisms for inter-district information exchange and joint action. This includes mechanisms to facilitate cooperation and joint planning and management of shared ecosystems.

Local level

While many of the commitments deriving from the Rio instruments are seen as national-level tasks (such as reporting, compiling inventories, and reforming legislative frameworks), the success of the instruments depends on their implementation at the local level where people live and make their livelihoods in close relationship to the environment. The CCD, for example, explicitly recognises that desertification occurs, and can be combated, only at the local level. The same applies to biodiversity and its conservation, to forests and their management, and to emissions of greenhouse gases. National actions may provide an influential policy context, but the necessary physical changes can take place only at the local level — and it is here that the instruments will succeed or fail.

As is the case at the district level, capacity is key. Capacities need to be strengthened and built among local institutions and outside intervenors.

Local institutions include local government, grassroots organisations, schools, and local corporations. Outside intervenors include the local offices of the national and regional government and NGOs. Local institutions need greater capacity to develop, implement, and support the necessary regulatory regimes. They need support for planning their own actions and assessing progress on implementation of the conventions and improvements in socio-economic and ecological conditions. Outside intervenors have the difficult task of forging the links between top-down policies (which are inevitable in international instruments) and bottom-up actions (which are essential for lasting results). As such, they need training to become facilitators of locally-owned processes rather than enforcers of nationally-imposed plans.

In some countries, one model for local-level synergy involves the use of existing extension agents. In theory, these government agents have the most regular contact with local people. Often, extension agents involve existing community-based organisations and institutions at the village-level in identifying priorities and planning for action. When properly trained, they are capable of communicating effectively with villagers and can assist in developing community-based indicators, in monitoring and reporting, and in accessing information and resources.

In countries without a strong extension agent system, other local-level institutions and groups, such as churches, community-based organisations, and women's and youth groups, can be involved.

CAPACITY REQUIREMENT

Capacity building and strengthening of already-existing capacities among developing country Parties to the Rio agreements is urgently needed. Many countries are already overtaxed by the instruments' competing demands for reports and other obligatory activities.

In supporting more effective implementation of the Rio agreements, capacity building will enable the development of capabilities of individuals, groups, organisations, and institutions to address environmental issues as a part of a range of efforts to promote sustainable development. These capabilities may include technical and scientific knowledge, practical knowledge of resource management skills, data and information management, communication, training and empowerment, financial management, institutional development, leadership and management, policy development and analysis, and other areas of activity. Capacity building activities should include relevant partners and stakeholders to ensure the effectiveness of their participation in policies, plans, and processes affecting them.

Because there are many opportunities for synergy in joint capacity strengthening and building around the four Rio instruments, it is difficult to justify an approach in which each instrument acts in isolation, either from the other agreements or from larger national capacity building needs and efforts. Seeking greater synergy can make the building and strengthening process easier while helping ensure the development of enduring national capacities.

Consistent with the multi-sectoral approach of the instruments, country-level capacity building should be carried out as part of a comprehensive and integrated approach to sustainable development, one that takes into account overarching concerns including livelihood needs, poverty alleviation, and gender issues.

Following are some possibilities for capacity building initiatives and approaches which could both help countries to fulfill obligations (to the multiple instruments), and which would empower them to address creatively the many other concerns on their sustainable development agendas.

Gauging a country's existing capacities

Indicators of a country's existing capacities to conceive, plan, implement, and monitor effective initiatives related to the four instruments include:

- General level of knowledge and technical skills among decision-makers concerning the nature of the country's environmental problems and how those relate to key sustainable development challenges
- The degree to which existing strategies, plans, and programmes related to the instruments are participatory and involve affected stakeholders
- Familiarity and skill in using different types of planning tools in support of the instruments
- Clarity of distribution of responsibilities for different instrument-related activities among government agencies, the private sector, and civil society

Country-level requirements of the instruments

The instruments contain a number of requirements at the national, regional, and local levels which Parties are obliged to fulfill. In many cases, countries lack sufficient capacity to conduct these activities:

- Inventories, monitoring, and systematic observation
- Planning, policy development, and reform of legal frameworks
- Impact assessment and research, including participatory assessment
- Information and data management, including reporting
- Education and public awareness
- Training

Capacities needed for implementation of the instruments

Capacity for the implementation of the country-level requirements is needed in the following areas:

- **Human resources:** scientific and technical skills at all levels (government, NGO, private sector, and local community)
- **Infrastructure development:** physical infrastructure, materials and equipment needed to provide an adequate and effective working environment, ensure results, and achieve desired long-term goals
- **Coordination and cooperation:** integrated or complementary implementation of the requirements which takes advantage of potential synergies, thus lessening the burden on those responsible for individual instruments

Capacity-building interventions

A number of capacity-building tools and interventions are available to help maximise synergy in each of these areas:

Human resources

- **Education:** development or adaptation of existing curriculum at all academic levels of issues addressed by the four instruments (for example, expanded curricula in environment, biology, forestry, climatology, environmental law, policy analysis, and allied fields reflecting requirements under the convention). Education on global environment issues can promote the development of an increased awareness and understanding of the impact of local deforestation, desertification and drought, land and ecosystem degradation, and climate change on sustainable development.
- **Training:** use of existing national and regional specialized centers (such as regional centers for data management) to provide courses in technical areas relevant to all four instruments to targeted audiences (for example, collection of baseline data on forests that could be used for biodiversity purposes, calculation of carbon sinks, deforestation and desertification patterns and trends). Another training tool could be course materials for technical professionals and agency staff on issues relevant to the four instruments — and the synergies, complementarities, and areas of overlap that exist — to be used in structured courses, workshops, and seminars. The materials and workshops could be modeled on CC:Train, the Climate Convention Training and Capacity Building

Programme that produces multilingual training and information modules in regional and national seminars and workshops on climate change and the implementation of the Climate Change Convention.

Training in information and data management is urgently needed. Another tool could be joint exchange programmes of professionals at the national level (and between nations) on the implementation of activities under the different instruments (e.g., how to use forest inventory techniques in conducting biodiversity inventories).

- **Public outreach:** raising awareness of the four instruments at the national and global levels through media, fact sheets, public relations materials, video, radio programming, and other means.
- **Community participation:** involving local authorities and local communities in the planning and implementation of key components of the instruments (for example, in conducting inventories).

Infrastructure development

- **Development of infrastructure facilities:** such as laboratories, data centers, libraries, museums, herbariums, field stations, and monitoring sites. These could be shared between two or more institutions implementing activities under the instruments to make use of existing synergies (in, for example, data storage) and for cost effectiveness.
- **Equipment:** office, laboratory and field equipment, and supplies (including hardware and user friendly and compatible software, GIS equipment, and vehicles) needed to carry out activities under the instruments.
- **Material:** including maps and collections of germplasm, soil samples, water samples, and vegetation.

Coordination and cooperation

- **Implementing bodies:** encourage governments to establish multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral committees to help build capacity among policy and decision-makers for joint implementation of the four instruments and integration of policy reforms into national environmental action plans.
- **Compatible information systems:** build capacity to establish and maintain such systems in the different agencies and programmes tasked with the implementation of the different instruments to ensure that data collected and processed in one agency or programme can be used in another.
- **National assessments of sustainable development:** assess the effectiveness of actions underway to implement Agenda 21, international conventions, and other sustainable development initiatives. Also, assess the impact of a country's structural adjustment programme as part of the general assessment of conventions and sustainable development.
- **Audits of government accountability:** assess whether government actions are consistent with obligations under the four instruments.

NATIONAL PLANNING REQUIREMENTS

All four instruments provide for the development of strategies and action plans as a framework for country-level implementation. There are a number of options for developing national action plans and strategies to implement the Rio instruments. A key is ensuring that action plans related to these agreements are harmonised with existing national sustainable development and other overarching plans, if they exist.

Plans to implement the Rio agreements can foster synergies if they meet three conditions. The first is to be part of a national goal to improve both the well-being of people and the condition of the ecosystem, consistent with Agenda 21. The second is to identify the roles of the four instruments and other international and national commitments in achieving the improvements. The third is to show clearly where overlaps of organisation and action are likely among these commitments, and how to turn them into synergies rather than conflicts.

The purpose of a plan is to produce a set of practical actions that have widespread support. Plans will be implemented effectively if they are owned—in other words, prepared — by the country concerned, rather than by outside agents. Also essential are: commitment at the highest levels of government; adequate resources for preparation and implementation (or a programme to raise them); full participation by all those expected to carry out the plan; a clear legal mandate for the development of a plan; and a strong institutional arrangement to provide an “engine” for the planning process. Often this means that capacity for the planning process must be built or strengthened. A planning process that provides for periodic review, reflection, monitoring, evaluation, and feedback will enable the plan to be updated and improved. A well-designed public outreach and awareness program is necessary to inform stakeholders about the instruments, their requirements, and how their implementation will affect stakeholder groups.

Options for national planning

Countries are faced with one of two situations. First, there may be no national plans already in existence. Second, a national plan of some kind may exist — whether a national development plan, a National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP), a national conservation strategy, or a national sustainable development strategy.

Many countries have existing sectoral or multi-sectoral and national plans which can incorporate the requirements of the four instruments. A preliminary analysis has identified at least three options for undertaking national planning related to the instruments:

- **Develop separate plans for each of the four agreements**
This option requires four distinct planning processes, and thus is costly in resources, time, and integrated management. Separate planning is also likely to lead to overlaps and perhaps contradictions among the plans.
- **Develop a new umbrella/master plan that incorporates all four instruments**
While this option allows for greater harmonisation of the instruments, it may lead to conflicts with existing national development plans. It also requires substantial new resources for planning implementation and is likely to burden country

planning capacity. However, in countries without an existing national plan, this umbrella/master plan approach may be desirable.

- **Develop a mechanism to integrate planning associated with the instruments into existing national plans and planning frameworks**

This option has the advantage of producing a synergy between instrument planning and other existing national programs and plans. For example, components of a plan to implement the CBD might include problems such as loss of biodiversity through monoculture, forest clearing, misuse of pesticides, and solutions such as mixed cropping, agroforestry, and integrated pest management. These elements feed directly into the agricultural sector of the existing national development plan, thus ensuring that the two plans are integrated and harmonised. Integrated planning also has the advantage of making use of existing planning structures, thus producing cost effectiveness and planning efficiencies.

Recommendations for supporting integrated planning

- Pressures or problems existing in each country can be used to determine the strategic entry point into planning for the instruments. For example, if a country has a serious deforestation problem, this issue can be used to assess and analyse impacts on carbon sinks, forest gene pools, and biodiversity habitats. Activities can be designed that address these issues in ways that have clear linkages to other instruments and to the existing national plan.
- Establish an inter-ministerial or interdepartmental committee composed of high level representatives of appropriate ministries, along with focal points for the instruments, NGOs, and other stakeholders to coordinate integrated planning.
- Establish periodic review, analysis, and feedback into the plan and the planning process. Fill gaps in information through new research and other means identified through the review process.
- Important elements to be addressed during preparation for the planning include:
 - institutional arrangements and a legal basis for the plan
 - participation of all stakeholders through forums, new policies, and legal instruments
 - a multi-sectoral approach to facilitate integration and coordination
 - support by all agencies at the highest levels to provide the planning process with access to relevant information and to ensure transparency and the free flow of information
 - a preplanning public awareness strategy to lay the groundwork for informed participation and eventually widespread ownership of the plan
 - identification of capacity strengthening and building needs early in the planning process and a program to develop essential capacities
- The international community should provide support to the planning process, including financial resources, technical assistance, and technology transfer. Support can be most effective when given as an integral part of the process rather than in elaboration of separate action plans.

INFORMATION AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Strong information systems equip a country to regularly assess its progress toward sustainable development, and to better define, guide and assess the implementation of its development policies. How can information systems and reporting mechanisms be designed to maximise synergy between the instruments, thereby optimizing their contribution to the sustainable development movement?

Information gathering, analysis, and dissemination are at the heart of the four instruments. Each addresses a specific set of problems. Information is essential to know what the problems are, how big they are, whether and how they are changing, and where the priorities are for action. Accordingly, the CBD, for example, calls for assessment of the status and trends of: “components of biodiversity” (ecosystems and habitats, species and communities, and genomes and genes); threats to the components; and sustainable use of the components. It also requires assessment of whether the benefits of using biodiversity are shared fairly and equitably, as well as of measures to implement the CBD. Similarly, the CCD calls for systematic observation of land degradation and the processes and effects of drought, as well as monitoring and evaluation of implementation measures and their effectiveness. The UNFCCC requires reporting on greenhouse gas inventories, land use, forests, projections on emissions and sequestration, in addition to activities related to implementation of the Convention. Not being a convention, the Forest Principles do not require national reports, but FAO requests reports on forest matters through questionnaires and partially automated information systems.

Governments need information technology and the capacity to use it to respond to these instrument-required reports. Integrating capacity building and technology transfer programmes across the instruments will greatly enhance synergy and cost-effectiveness. Synergy in information systems, data management, and reporting will help ensure that investments in information management build a reusable infrastructure. Governments and donors, recognising the opportunities for efficiency, will be more likely to help finance national information systems.

Sound information systems also provide countries with the data they need to fulfill their reporting obligations. Oversight and reporting are important ways to determine whether parties are making progress towards the goals of the international environmental agreements. The Rio conventions, in common with other international agreements, require reports to their Conferences of Parties concerning steps taken to implement the conventions, implementation strategies, and related matters.

Reporting serves implementation goals in a number of ways. It provides guidance to all the parties to the agreements, as well as to the agreements’ administrative bodies. It gives them an opportunity to take stock of whether implementation measures are producing the intended outcomes, and to redirect energy and resources to be more effective. Reported information can notify the international community that a particular intervention is warranted and worthy of assistance. Results from reporting can reveal noncompliance, and stimulate either peer pressure for compliance, or assistance, or both. Information can also assist NGOs, advocacy groups, and businesses. Armed with information, they can mobilise public awareness through publicity campaigns, product

boycotts, and the full range of activities to pressure governments to adhere to their obligations.

But reporting requirements can also be a financial and administrative burden. Affluent countries with well-developed environmental protection infrastructures have an easier time absorbing this burden. Many other countries with skeletal environmental protection ministries and limited assets have greater difficulty. There may only be a small number of environmental professionals in a country who have the skills to obtain, process, and report information. Where personnel are limited, time spent responding to reporting obligations may reduce the human resources available for implementation activities or environmental enforcement.

Reporting overlaps among the instruments

The information and reporting needs of the instruments overlap institutionally and physically.

One of the key areas of reporting to the COPs is on implementation of action plans to fulfill obligations under the instruments. There are many common information and data needs for effective policy formulation, and this information often becomes part of the reporting to the convention COPs. Opportunities for synergy and efficiency in programme implementation and reporting are enhanced when strategies and action plans for each of the instruments are developed with greater coordination from the beginning.

There are three areas of physical overlap among the instruments. First, the role of forests: forests are biotic resources and havens for species (biodiversity); they are sinks for carbon (climate change); and they act as stabilisers of local climate and soils (desertification and land degradation) (table 1). Second, dry-land areas: as habitats for species and as sources and users of specially adapted genetic resources (biodiversity) and as influences on climate change (through reflectivity). And third, the potential impact of climate change on dryland areas and on biotic resources in general. These overlaps establish obvious possibilities for synergy in data gathering and reporting (table 2). As an example of how a more detailed analysis could be performed, the case of forest information products was developed to identify areas of potential overlap. These areas could, if made the focus of a collaborative effort between the concerned agencies, yield valuable synergistic actions.

In the case of forestry, a core data set on forest type and extent, available at the national scale, serves the background information needs for each of the instruments. At present, data are not collected and reported in manner permitting equal and easy access by all concerned parties. Yet, with a minimal effort in training and resources, it would be possible to modify forest inventory methods to include data of interest to other instruments. For example, data on biodiversity values (such as wildlife habitat) could be included in the data collection forms by the Forest Department and addressed in database design in such a manner that those agencies interested in biodiversity could access a common data source, rather than collecting similar data as part of a separate process. The synergy is represented by the savings incurred by not duplicating data collection. In addition, greater collaboration between agencies is enhanced by the dialogue stimulated through the above process.

A model for country level reporting

Reports are products of information systems, thus information systems and reporting requirements cannot be treated separately. These systems are susceptible to harmonization, synergy, streamlining, and efficiencies at many points in the chain. It is important that countries establish an information / reporting model that can serve as an effective framework for implementation. An effective information system should be based on a process from data gathering to policy decisions. There should be adequate feed back whereby monitoring and reassessment of policies and actions lead back to new approaches to data gathering and management.

The information system should be based on an analysis on the reporting requirements and subsequent data and information needs.

Analyse data and information needs

Detailed analysis of the instruments will enable identification of the data and information needed to monitor and assess progress. If done at the international level, this will provide resources to all countries. For example, this could result in the identification of minimum data sets and information systems needed for countries to be able to meet their obligations under the instruments collectively. Interpretation at national level will be required since data needs will differ, and issues of scale, degree of data precision, and definitions need to be agreed locally. This should also help the COP's ensure that reporting requirements focus on the minimum set of useful data for implementation of the conventions. Many resources exist which could be helpful, not least the World Conservation Monitoring Center's analysis of the CBD information needs. This also points to the usefulness of including non-Rio treaties in the analysis.

The system should also:

- establish common definitions of terms and indicators
- establish commonality in data among the instruments
- identify where data already exist
- encourage custodians of data to share with other institutions
- identify data gaps and develop plans to fill them
- develop the necessary capacity for data data integration and analysis

Continuing the synergy process

UNDP has continued its consultations with the Convention Secretariats in order to establish a useful process to promote the further integration of the implementation of the conventions at national level. Capacity building remains the main priority. In order to identify the needs and possibilities for capacity building at national level, assisted by external partners, it is important to understand more about the role and functions of the

national focal points. To this end, UNDP is conducting a global survey of national focal points concerning their potential for collaborating to achieve synergy, for influencing national planning processes, for setting up useful institutional mechanisms and for accessing needed resources, both human, financial and informational.

UNDP will also pursue the potential for establishing a minimum national data set that would meet the needs of all the instruments in collaboration with other partners and apply this in a number of countries.