



The United Nations
University

National and Regional Approaches in Asia and the Pacific



Inter-Linkages

Synergies and Coordination between Multilateral Environmental Agreements

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Regional & National Approaches in Asia and the Pacific

Inter-linkages:

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Environmental Agreements

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Abbreviations / Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIJ	Activities Implemented Jointly
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBO	community-based organization
CDE	capacity development in environment
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CEMD	Conservation and Environmental Management Division
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CITES	Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna
CITs	countries in transition
COP	Conference of the Parties
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
DANCED	Danish Cooperation for Environment and Development
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources (Philippines)
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs (Philippines)
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FCCC	Framework Convention on Climate Change
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation Agency
HDC	human development country
IAC	inter-agency committee
IEAU	International Environmental Advisory Unit (Cook Islands)
IGO	inter-governmental organization
JI	Joint Implementation
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MEA	multilateral environmental agreement
MMS	Malaysian Meteorological Service
MOSTE	Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment
NC	national committee
NCSD	national council for sustainable development
NEB	National Environment Board (Thailand)
NEC SD	National Environment Centre of Sustainable Development (Kazakhstan)
NEDA	National Economic Development Authority (Philippines)
NFP	national focal point
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSSD	National Strategy for Sustainable Development
ODA	official development assistance
OECE	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEPP	Office of Environmental Policy and Coordination (Thailand)
OERC	Office for Environmental Response and Coordination (Palau)
PICs	Pacific island countries
PCSD	Philippine Council for Sustainable Development
PO	people's organization
PPP	Policy and Perspective Plan (Thailand)
PSSD	Philippine Strategy for Sustainable Development
SACEP	South Asian Cooperative Environmental Programme
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environment Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNU	United Nations University

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Introduction and Background

The proliferation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) over the past quarter century has presented a new set of challenges and opportunities for policy-makers. Sub-regional, regional and global agreements responding to issue-specific and broad-based environmental concerns are beginning to overlap and, in some cases, duplicate or even conflict with other MEAs and legal regimes.

MEAs may have a tendency to overlap for a number of reasons. Many are scientific in nature and result from the bio-geo-physical dynamics of the Earth's ecosystems. This overlap creates significant potential to establish linkages within a cluster of issue-specific environmental agreements, such as those addressing various dimensions of biological diversity. Natural causes of overlap may also cut across MEA issue areas and scales, linking, for example, systemic problems of climate change and other atmospheric phenomena (e.g., ozone layer depletion) to regional and local problems of land degradation, desertification and biodiversity loss.

Policies negotiated in various institutional forums are also the source of overlap, which in some cases stretches across wide policy domains, linking environmental agreements to other legal regimes or the work programmes of various inter-governmental organizations, such as international trade and investment, food and agriculture or customs control. Overlap may be identified at the functional or operational levels of agreements too, through the use of common tools and approaches, reporting and communications, capacity building and awareness raising, technology transfer and financing mechanisms.

The phenomenon of MEA overlap can produce both positive and negative effects. In the positive sense, agreements across geographic scales may be complementary (if not a necessity), by extending the scope and coverage of regional MEAs to the global level or better defining global agreements in regional contexts.¹ On the other hand, institutional overlap can also produce externalities in the sense that

¹ Kimball (1999) appropriately describes these dynamics as the push-pull and drag effects of regional and global environmental law.

policy measures designed to achieve the objectives of conventions may duplicate existing efforts, or worse, be inconsistent or defeat the objectives of other MEAs or legal regimes.² Moreover, reporting requirements and data collection systems of agreements with similar goals may vary widely and strain the capacity of many governments to respond to treaty obligations.

Over the past few years, awareness on the need to better manage and coordinate environmental policies and policy-making processes has grown considerably. MEA secretariats have responded to this need by making extensive use of memoranda of understanding and other formal agreements in order to cooperate and exchange information not only amongst themselves, but also with relevant inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on common issues and policies.

Aiming to increase knowledge and understanding of the problem as well as promote a more integrated and comprehensive approach to environmental management, the United Nations University (UNU) organized, in July 1999, an International Conference on Inter-linkages. The Conference gathered a wide spectrum of professionals and viewpoints on the causes and consequences of MEA overlap. Although the conference focused primarily on the scope of the phenomenon, panelists identified a number of practical solutions and entry points to the various themes, including the role of information systems and exchange, finance, issue management and scientific mechanisms (UNU 1999). One of the general recommendations widely endorsed by the participants was the need to move from concept to application and produce synergies having tangible impacts “on the ground.”

² One often-cited example is the policy and measures conflict between the Montreal and Kyoto Protocols. The Montreal Protocol identifies hydro fluorocarbons (HFCs) as a substitute for chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), whereas in the Kyoto Protocol HFCs are listed in the basket of GHGs targeted for reductions.

BOX 1

The UNU Inter-linkages Initiative

The United Nations University launched the Inter-linkages Initiative with the aim of promoting a more integrated approach to environmental management through synergies and better coordination among multilateral environmental agreements.

The inter-linkages approach has two main thrusts: efficiency and coherence. From the perspective of efficiency, synergy among MEAs can produce a combined effect that exceeds the sum of individual effects. Policy-making and implementation can thus lead to cost effective measures and produce win-win outcomes of mutual benefit. From the perspective of coherence, MEAs need to contribute to furthering their own objectives while ensuring that the environmental considerations of such agreements are integrated in the broader dimensions of sustainable development and do not contradict other legal regimes.

The outputs of the initiative include applied research and case studies, policy dialogues and workshops, capacity development through training, education and awareness raising, Internet outreach and virtual networking, process consulting and policy design. Activities are implemented in partnership with intergovernmental, regional, and sub-regional organizations, MEA secretariats, NGOs, academic institutions and think tanks.

As a follow-up activity to the 1999 conference, the UNU organized an Informal Regional Consultation and Workshop in Kuala Lumpur in February 2001. This meeting scaled down the discussion of inter-linkages from the global to the regional and national levels, and aimed to identify lessons learned from experiences of holistic and integrated environmental management. The workshop also sought to develop "road maps" or "tool kits" for future case studies and, eventually, pilot projects demonstrating the inter-linkages concept. Another important component of the workshop was the need to engage multi-stakeholder partnership and participation in order to localize inter-linkages and promote a bottom-up approach to synergy.

From April 2001 until early 2002, the UNU conducted several national case studies in the Asia and Pacific regions. These case studies were undertaken in partnership with the respective regional organizations, viz, the Secretariats of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). The studies aimed to determine the challenges faced by national governments in implementing MEAs and weigh the pros and cons of an inter-linked approach to MEA implementation. In total, 13 countries were covered in the study, including Vanuatu, Palau and the Cook Islands in the Pacific and the ten ASEAN countries in Asia.

This policy brief reviews and elaborates upon the findings of the Kuala Lumpur Workshop and the national case studies. It includes a discussion of the challenges of and opportunities for linking MEAs, and examines a series of issues related to institutional coordination and multi-stakeholder partnership and participation at the regional and national levels in Asia and the Pacific. Where relevant, the brief provides examples in the form of short narratives on challenges encountered and solutions sought in coordinating the implementation

of MEAs. Cases are also used to illustrate promising projects that attempt to operationalize the inter-linkages approach to synergy. The policy brief concludes with a list of recommended action areas worthy of pursuing.

The selection and inclusion of specific illustrative examples are not intended to isolate a country and label its experience as either good or questionable. Institutional obstacles encountered in one country are sure to arise in other countries of the region. Moreover, a country experiencing difficulties with coordination in one area or sector may also enjoy successful practices in another. The cases are thus meant to provide the reader with concise illustrations of real-world challenges and current practices associated with MEA policy-making and implementation.

This policy brief draws on information provided in the background papers prepared for the Kuala Lumpur Workshop, participant presentations and interventions, summaries and recommendations of the four working groups, and the draft national case studies from Asia and the Pacific region. Other sources of information include papers and supporting documents published by the United Nations and its various agencies, regional and sub-regional organizations and programmes, government ministries and donor institutions.

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National and Regional Approaches

Considerable potential exists to develop and apply linkages at and across all levels of governance. In recent years, attention has been focused on improving inter-agency coordination at the global institutional level, mainly as a result of the UN Secretary General's proposals for better issue management and the 1998 Report of the UN Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements. Several of the Task Force's recommended actions pertain either directly or indirectly to the growing number of linkages among environmental conventions.³

While efforts to enhance synergies at the global level must continue, challenges and opportunities for enhanced coordination at the regional and national levels also need to be addressed.⁴ It is important to examine the dynamics of these levels for a number of reasons.

First, many natural linkages exist in ecosystems that have boundaries within and across the sub-national, national and regional levels. A geographic grouping can be useful when implementing agreements using a synergistic approach and can help achieve visible as well as tangible results on the ground. At the national level, where the best opportunities may exist for applying the inter-linkages concept, governments are in an optimal position to identify the contours for synergies and set up the most appropriate institutional framework for coordinating policy responses. It is precisely this level where crosscutting issues, such as monitoring and reporting, capacity building, public awareness and financing, can be better coordinated across agreements. National decision-makers may also be well suited to identify a country's environmental priorities and ensure that they are coherent with overall socio-economic and developmental concerns.

³ See Report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements. *A/53/463*, 6 October 1998.

⁴ The regional and national levels are defined broadly. Regional may comprise any sub-regions; national may include sub-national and local levels. Kimball (1999) uses the same definitions.

Second, regional and sub-regional institutions are essential players for the efficient and effective implementation of global agreements. For the smooth implementation of global MEAs, regional frameworks and cooperative action plans must often specify how global agreements can be applied in the context of a geographical or ecological region or sub-region.⁵ Regional institutions can take global environmental issues and refocus them into priorities and manageable agendas for national governments. Such frameworks and action plans are elaborated regularly in the scope of regional or sub-regional intergovernmental meetings, such as the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, the meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment or periodic gatherings in the framework of SPREP. They may also result from the negotiation of specific arrangements designed to apply global MEAs to a given region or to protect a threatened resource in a given area. The same reason applies to the country level in the sense that global and regional agreements require national action plans and strategies that provide guidance on how environmental commitments will be implemented at the sub-national and local levels.

Synergies between global and regional institutions are, therefore, important for the more efficient and effective implementation of global sustainable development commitments. From a problem solving perspective, the scale of shared environmental problems, and the connections between them, suggest that a regional and sub-regional approach to inter-linkages will be beneficial.

BOX 2

Global-Regional Linkages in the South Pacific

The Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Waste and to Control the Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region (Waigani Convention), for example, has links with a number of MEAs, and is an important vehicle to implement the Basel, Rotterdam (PIC) and Stockholm (POP) Conventions at the regional level.

Source: Jacques Mougeot, SPREP.

Third, closely linked to the second reason, although many worthy avenues exist among global MEAs to establish synergy and mutual support (e.g., the Rio Conventions), a large number of agreements are regional in scope, such as the various environmental conventions negotiated under the auspices of the UN regional economic commissions or sub-regional organizations and programmes (e.g., ASEAN, SPREP, SACEP).

Fourth, many of the administrative problems experienced at the global level also surface at the regional and national levels in the form of

⁵ For a discussion on the question of scales, see Kimball (1999).

coordination problems, conflicting institutional roles, failure of communications and duplication of efforts. For effective implementation, it is therefore imperative to correct any deficiencies that may impair proper and effective environmental management.

BOX 3

Guiding Principles for Inter-linkages

1. Inter-linkages should be **demand driven**. Possibilities for synergy may be identified at multiple scales (local, national, regional, intergovernmental), stages (negotiation, implementation, monitoring, projects, etc.) or in terms of tools (enforcement mechanisms, capacity building and awareness, technology, etc.) Adopting an inter-linkages approach for its own sake, however, may do more harm than good.
2. Inter-linkages should be a **value-added** approach, and there must be a win-win component for it to be viable. Poorly identified linkages or synergies may distract or inefficiently allocate financial and human resources.
3. Inter-linkages should ensure **subsidiarity** so that decision-making is done at the lowest appropriate administrative or organizational level.
4. Inter-linkages should be implemented from the **bottom-up**, involving, whenever possible, the expertise and concerns of civil society and the private sector through a spirit of partnership and participation.
5. Inter-linkages should contribute to the **integration** of environmental objectives of MEAs into the broader dimensions of sustainable development.

Source: Working Groups I & IV, UNU Inter-linkages Regional Consultation, Kuala Lumpur.

Institutional Challenges of MEA Implementation

The implementation of MEAs involves a simultaneous and inter-connected process at the domestic and intergovernmental levels of policy-making to follow up on agreements that have been made. Domestically, the task of coordinating the implementation of environmental commitments is facilitated by the designation of national focal points (NFPs) or lead agencies, which would usually be the most competent ministry or department related to a particular agreement. Some MEAs may require two or more NFPs, as is the case in some countries with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES).

Given the complex set of issues and crosscutting concerns addressed in MEAs, many governments, through their NFPs, have formed national committees (NCs) to oversee the drafting of communications, reports, action plans and strategies. In addition to the focal points, officials from other concerned ministries and, increasingly, NGOs, the private sector and academic institutions, participate in the NCs.

At the intergovernmental level, MEAs are often subject to further negotiation and review through annual or biannual conferences of the parties (COPs) and, on a more frequent basis, meetings of the subsidiary bodies or technical committees. National preparations for the follow-up negotiations usually have lead agencies, and they often

differ from the focal points designated to oversee the implementation of commitments. Thus, for any given MEA, there may be a set of national contacts – one or several for implementation and one for follow-up negotiations. The growing number of agreements to which states are contracting parties has significantly increased the number of focal points and committees required, and these are often spread across government ministries. This dispersion creates administrative and coordination challenges for most countries, particularly for the developing ones that lack the necessary capacity – both institutional and individual – to respond to and comply with environmental treaty obligations.

At this juncture, it is important to underline the closed-loop relationship between the national implementation process and the follow-up intergovernmental negotiations, each contributing significantly to the dynamics of the other. Managing these dual processes requires a mixture of knowledge, skills, legal competence and administrative coordination. At the inter-governmental level, ministries of foreign affairs have traditionally overseen all diplomatic encounters, including multilateral environmental negotiations. This practice has started to change in many industrialized countries and some developing ones with the involvement of other functional ministries equipped with the technical understanding of the issues. Most developing countries, however, lack the financial and often the professional capacity to send large delegations from home governments. In fact, given the multitude of meetings taking place annually, developing countries can often only send representatives from missions or embassies located in or closest to the country where the COP or other meeting is taking place. As a result, developing countries, particularly the least developing countries, often are unable to draw upon the combination of diplomatic skills, as well as substantive and technical expertise that would help them during the negotiations. These constraints make implementing environmental commitments all the more challenging, and coordination with functional ministries all the more essential.

A number of obstacles to coordination can arise at the national level. They may be horizontal in nature, surfacing across government ministries and agencies (e.g., between NFPs for negotiation and policy implementation, or between the environment ministry or agency and development planning authorities). Institutional constraints may also arise on the vertical dimension, across different levels of governmental administration. This section examines the challenges for coordination, both horizontal and vertical, and institutional responses.

Horizontal Challenges

The dispersion of NFPs across government ministries and agencies results from the complex and multifarious nature of environmental issues. It is also affected by constitutional constraints, the administrative organization of government and the availability of

skilled and trained professional staff in the respective agencies and ministries.

Both positive and negative effects are associated with the dispersion of NFPs of the various environmental conventions across government ministries. On the positive side, it can lead to an appropriate division of labor, pooled resources and shared ministerial responsibility. It responds to a natural need to assign the tasks of managing the implementation of commitments to the most capable department or agency. In fact, policy implementation in any specific case may be more efficient and effective if this task is assigned to a functional ministry or line agency other than the one overseeing intergovernmental negotiations.

Fragmented institutional structures are commonly found in low and medium human development countries (HDCs). For example, according to Van Toen (2001), the ministry responsible for negotiating MEAs is different from the ministry for overseeing national implementation in approximately 50 percent of medium HDCs in the Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) region.

When focal points are scattered across ministries that do not have established, open and frequent lines of communication, coordination problems may arise that compromise the efficiency and effectiveness of policy implementation. Problems may occur when lines of communication are broken between or among the ministries assigned to negotiate an MEA and the ministry or ministries overseeing national implementation. As Van Toen (2001) explains, ministries of foreign affairs are often accused of not involving NFPs during international negotiations of environmental plans. This dichotomy occurs throughout the region, but is more striking in some countries than in others.

BOX 4

The Philippines: Fragmentation and Communication Failures

In the Philippines, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) formulates the Philippine position and ensures participation in various UN and intergovernmental bodies, including ad hoc forums for negotiating MEAs and follow-up measures. Activities related to the implementation of environmental commitments, such as enforcement, compliance, monitoring, and strategic action plans, are coordinated by the International Environmental Affairs Staff of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The DFA has been criticized for not consulting and interacting sufficiently with the functional ministries that work on the very issues discussed in intergovernmental meetings. In 1994, the role of the DFA was reinforced with the establishment of the Cabinet Cluster to Promote Coordination on International Relations. Although the Cabinet Cluster is designed to correct for communication deficiencies, its role needs to be strengthened in order to ensure efficient and effective policy responses to international agreements.

Source: ESCAP (http://www.unescap.org/drpad/vc/orientation/phil_int_part.htm).

BOX 5

Cook Islands: Fragmentation through Non-formalized Procedures

In the Cook Islands, the International Environmental Advisory Unit (IEAU) was established to coordinate the negotiation and implementation of all MEAs. The creation of an NFP was seen as a positive development by many agencies, ministries and NGOs working in their respective areas.

Procedures for consultation with regard to the negotiation and ratification of MEAs have not been formalized between the IEAU and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration, which traditionally oversees the negotiation of MEAs. This could potentially lead to differing views and positions between the IEAU and the Ministry. If the relationship is properly developed, however, the IEAU has much potential to enhance the coherence of national policy making and the implementation of MEAs.

Source: UNU Draft Report, Cook Islands Case Study.

Institutional fragmentation often produces competing roles among government ministries or agencies. This is often the case when one functional ministry is designated as the NFP of a particular convention, while another functional ministry may be designated as the lead agency overseeing the implementation of a related and interdependent policy issue.

BOX 6

Thailand: Fragmentation and Competing Institutional Roles

Thailand's institutional landscape for implementing environmental agreements is spread primarily across the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE), the Ministry of the Interior (MOIN) and the Ministry of Agricultural Cooperatives (MOAC). Although MOSTE's Office of Environmental Policy and Planning (OEPP) serves as the secretariat to the National Environment Board (NEB) and oversees the preparation of environmental policies, MOAC has legal jurisdiction over most natural resources (e.g., forests, fisheries, water, land) and is the lead ministry for implementing policies related to nature conservation.

To provide an illustration, the OEPP is Thailand's NFP for biodiversity and is the secretariat of the National Committee on Biological Diversity (NCBD). The MOAC, as the lead agency for nature conservation, chairs the NCBD. However, according to some observers, it attaches less importance to the Convention on Biological Diversity than the OEPP does. The competing roles within Thailand's institutional structure create significant challenges for policy-making and implementation.

Source: DANCED (2000a).

Important institutional challenges also extend across sectors. It is well known and accepted that environmental objectives of MEAs need to be coherent and integrated in the broader dimensions of sustainable development. MEA concerns can be integrated through various policy documents, including legislative acts, development plans, strategies and long-term visions (United Nations-ESCAP 2000). The process of

integration requires a high degree of coordination, particularly given the sector-specific administrative divisions and occasional bureaucratic turf battles in national governments. Indeed, due to its very nature the planning and decision-making processes for national development are challenging and often lead to conflicts of interest. They require exceptional facilitation and leadership of development authorities, open channels of communication, frequent flows of information and widespread collaboration across ministries, particularly when resources and budgets are fixed, and even more so if they are diminishing in size.

Development planning authorities across the Asia and Pacific region have been increasingly making efforts to integrate environmental concerns into development plans, strategies and visions since the late 1980s (United Nations-ESCAP 2000). The Philippine Strategy for Sustainable Development (PSSD), adopted in 1989, reflects the importance of such efforts, as does Malaysia's long-term development Vision 2020. In Thailand, the OEPP has drafted the environmental chapter of the past two five-year National Plans, the most recent of which mentions the need to meet the objectives of MEAs, including the climate change convention. Thailand's twenty-year Policy and Perspective Plan (PPP) also refers to the need to integrate economic and social development with environmental management. In fact, the PPP refers specifically to the need to follow up on MEAs and develop more effective natural resource management.

While the inclusion of environmental concerns in development plans and visions is a welcome improvement from the economic and industrial growth-centered strategies of the 1970s and 1980s, many observers are critical, emphasizing that environmental priorities are not yet fully integrated across existing sectors in the plans, but rather are organized as separate sections or chapters. This situation has resulted largely from the environment becoming "sectorialized" in planning (OECD-DAC 2000). It is thus imperative that policy-makers break down the divisions between the environment and other sectors in the planning process, and to the extent possible, integrate environmental issues into various sectors in economic decision-making.

Few countries in Asia and the Pacific region have established national strategies for sustainable development (NSSDs) pursuant to Agenda 21. Some policy-makers question whether such a document is necessary, particularly when medium-term development plans and longer-term visions now include environmental considerations and objectives. Others insist that such a comprehensive document is needed to integrate all dimensions into a coherent policy framework. What is most important, however, is that actions are taken so that integrated decision-making is translated from paper to practice across all sectors.

Vertical Challenges

In addition to the need for improved horizontal coordination among government ministries, the implementation of MEAs also requires an administrative and institutional apparatus at the sub-national levels and effective vertical coordination across layers of government. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) states, "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" (UNDP 1999: 7).

The relationship between the national and sub-national (provincial, state, district and local) levels depends largely on the legal and political structure of countries, the degree of decentralization in policy-making and implementation, and the capacity at sub-national levels to formulate, implement, enforce and monitor policies.

Ownership and management of natural resources may be controlled by a central government or delegated to sub-national political institutions. In both cases, however, the efficiency and effectiveness of policy implementation may be compromised. Excessive central control over resources can create mistrust and result in conflicts with provincial, district or village-level officials, especially when the latter may be launching their own initiatives that do not necessarily support the aims of government-led policies or programmes. Problems of this nature have surfaced in Thailand, particularly prior to the decentralization measures in the country's 1997 Constitution (DANCED 2000a). Even with decentralization, however, the objectives of national-level environmental strategies and policies may be diluted if provincial, state or local governments assign a higher priority to economic development rather than environmental protection (UN-ESCAP 2000). Malaysia has experienced such problems in places where state governments have assigned a higher priority to the economic benefits of logging than to the protection of forests from deforestation.

A major impediment that many countries face is the lack of sub-national capacity and financial resources to implement agreements and policies (UNDP 1999, UN-ESCAP 2000). This applies not only to provincial, state and local governments, but also to the sub-national offices and staff of national and federal ministries and agencies.

BOX 7

Malaysia: Federal-State Conflicts in Implementing Policies

The Constitution of Malaysia allocates jurisdiction and competence between the federal and state governments, making institutional coordination and the implementation of policies particularly challenging. While federal government agencies are responsible for formulating and overseeing general environmental policy, state governments have jurisdiction over natural resources, including land, water and forests. The federal-state relationship is further complicated by a provision allowing for the governments to share legislative competence, such as is the case for wildlife protection. However, the federal parliament may enact legislation on behalf of the states, providing that they give their consent and that uniformity and harmony in the law and its implementation necessitate such action.

The complex relations imposed by the Constitution thus require federal agencies to engage in close consultation with state governments in the process of drafting laws and policies.

Source: DANCED (2000b).

Institutional Responses to Coordination Challenges

At the national level, countries have adopted various institutional responses, including the appointment of an individual to coordinate all MEAs, exchanges of information, periodic coordination meetings of various individual focal points, and the establishment of more permanent bodies such as coordination offices for the conventions.

Such coordination offices assume the role of focal point for a number of MEAs. Located under a single ministry or department, the office serves to centralize NFPs and can facilitate information exchange as well as foster linkages among various conventions (Van Toen 2001). The OEPP in Thailand, the DENR in the Philippines, the Conservation and Environmental Management Division (CEMD) in Malaysia and the Office of Environmental Response and Coordination (OERC) in Palau are examples of single agencies overseeing multiple MEAs.

BOX 8

Palau: Office of Environmental Response and Coordination

The Office of Environmental Response and Coordination (OERC) in Palau was established initially to assume coordination related to atmospheric pollution conventions, but the OERC now oversees biodiversity-related conventions and a number of other environmental instruments. The OERC prepares Palauan delegates that will attend inter-governmental negotiations, oversees the formulation of the national position and ensures that concerned government departments are informed of issues and any policy developments following the negotiations.

Source: UNU Draft Report, Palau Case Study.

Despite the potential benefits, however, obstacles may also arise with convention coordination offices. Following the encouraging example of the OERC in Palau, the Cook Islands created the International Environmental Advisory Unit (IEAU) as the NFP for the negotiation

and implementation of MEAs. Although the creation of this unit may appear to be a positive move, the IEAU still lacks the necessary high-level support and commitment needed to strengthen national coordination and enhance the implementation of the MEAs to which the Cook Islands is a party (see also Box 5).

Organizing focal points under one roof can also be labor-intensive and require resources beyond the capacity of certain ministries. In Thailand, the National Environment Board (NEB) has 42 sub-committees created to oversee the implementation of MEAs and other environmental policies. Not only does the OEPP assume the role of secretariat for the NEB, but it is also the NFP for numerous conventions. This may require logistical and secretariat support that exceeds the current capacity of the office's staff and resources. A similar problem arose in Malaysia, when the secretariat and focal point for the National Climate Committee was transferred from the CEMD to the Malaysian Meteorological Service (MMS) because the Division lacked professional staff to oversee national coordination. (See Box 18 for a discussion of efforts to overcome CEMD's capacity constraints.)

Another possible drawback of concentrating focal points of various MEAs in one agency is that the appropriate technical capacity for a specific agreement may be located in another ministry or agency. In such cases, efforts to centralize NFPs under one administrative division would not necessarily produce effective and efficient results.

Institutional responses for integrating environmental considerations of MEAs into the broader context of sustainable development are, for the most part, limited to the dual structures established for MEA coordination and economic development planning. Although these are generally separate structures, the practice of cross-participation of government officials working on development and environmental policies is becoming more common (Boyer 2001). Unfortunately, the frequency of meetings within and between MEA and development planning groups is low. (Boyer 2001, Van Toen 2001). This situation can negatively affect the success of policy implementation and integration in practice.

In some countries, institutional bodies overseeing the implementation of MEAs and sustainable development have proliferated so much that their roles and functions overlap. This is a concern in the Philippines, where the DENR oversees the enforcement and monitoring of environmental policies as well as the implementation of MEAs, while the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is also involved on policy issues and national plans related to biological diversity and the atmosphere (UN-ESCAP 2000).

Moreover, the excessive use of inter-agency committees (IACs) and multi-sectoral committees can quickly lead to "over-coordination" and "administrative fatigue." In the Philippines, for example, the National

Economic Development Authority (NEDA), which assumes the role of secretariat and administration for the PCSD, was at one point involved in nearly 400 IACs!

A fundamental concern with the inter-linkages approach is ensuring that the necessary institutional structure for increased coordination and synergy exists, but that the negative consequences associated with over-coordination and administrative fatigue among government officials are avoided.

One appropriate institutional response would be to create an umbrella-like structure that places together the NCs responsible for MEA follow-up and the implementation of Agenda 21. This is the approach that Kazakhstan has taken with the creation of the National Environment Centre of Sustainable Development (NEC SD). Fiji's Sustainable Development Bill also calls for the establishment of a national council for sustainable development (NCSD) organized along similar lines, but legislation has not yet been enacted. Most governments have not followed this approach; instead they have used existing institutional structures, created decades ago, for economic development and environmental policy planning.

BOX 9

Kazakhstan: National Environment Centre of Sustainable Development

The National Environment Centre of Sustainable Development (NEC SD) was established in 2000 by the Government of Kazakhstan, in cooperation with the UNDP. The NEC SD is a multi-functional coordinating body composed of representatives from various line ministries, local government, private enterprises and NGOs. The Centre's tasks include support for the signing, ratification and preparation of programmes and plans in order to implement MEAs. The NEC SD also supports activities related to sustainable development plans and strategies at the local, national and regional (Central Asia) levels.

Source: Bulat Yessekin, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Kazakhstan.

A country's particular institutional response depends on its constitutional constraints, administrative bureaucracy, capacity and the number and characteristic of MEAs to which it belongs. In many Pacific island countries (PICs), for example, an individual staff member of the environmental directorate or department frequently assumes a coordinating role for multiple conventions, whereas in larger countries with more complex bureaucratic structures and more MEAs to which to respond, a convention coordination office often oversees a series of agreements.

It is important that institutional responses be country-driven, and that horizontal and vertical divisions of labor be allocated efficiently and effectively, and consistent with the country's political decision-making systems and cultures.

3

Multi-stakeholder Partnership and Participation

Multi-stakeholder partnership and participation are key concepts and components for implementing MEAs through synergy and coordination, for at least three reasons. First, although governments must respond to many environmental conventions, limited human and financial resources pose serious capacity constraints. Reaching out through partnership and participation to multi-stakeholder groups and local communities has thus become a prerequisite for effective and efficient implementation. Over the past decade, the use of both concepts has improved the results of development assistance projects, and they are clearly preconditions for good environmental governance.

Second, the scientific and technical knowledge of NGOs and the private sector in many instances surpasses the capacity available within national governments, MEA secretariats and intergovernmental and regional organizations. While some NGOs may specialize along sector-specific lines, many undertake broader projects and activities that serve the objectives of multiple conventions, and are also effective in addressing important crosscutting concerns such as awareness raising and capacity building. Moreover, given the grassroots nature of their work, many NGOs and groups in civil society are in close contact with issues of poverty, social equity and income distribution. They are thus well placed to assist governments in identifying and establishing ways to integrate the environmental concerns of MEAs into the broader dimensions of sustainable development.

Third, partnership and participation can scale down the objectives of global and regional MEAs to the local, community level. Major groups, including the grassroots community-based organizations (CBOs) or people's organizations (POs), are generally well connected through networks, and often know and understand first-hand the local issues and concerns better than national governments. In short, they can more easily and effectively translate the objectives and obligations of MEAs into reality on the ground. This observation also applies to the private sector; large businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises are driving forces in economies and must be considered

as partners not only with government, but also with non-profit organizations, in implementing MEAs.

As a concept, partnership is a collaborative effort to involve multiple parties with diverse skills and competences to achieve common objectives. As mentioned above, various MEA secretariats have signed MOUs with NGOs and other stakeholder groups for implementing joint work programmes and other activities. For the smaller secretariats, their functions and operations depend on coordinating and partnering with NGOs. The CITES Secretariat, for example, has a long-standing relationship with TRAFFIC and other NGOs, particularly on programmes and activities to enhance the instrument's enforcement and compliance in developing countries relating to wildlife trade.

BOX 10

Malaysia's Compliance with the Ramsar Convention

Malaysia became a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1994 and designated Tasek Bera in the state of Pahang as its first wetland site of international importance.

Aiming to support Malaysia's compliance with the Convention, the Danish Government signed an agreement with Malaysia for a three-year project to protect the Tasek Bera site and its catchment area. The project was part of DANCED's second phase for the Malaysia country programme and sought to establish an ecologically sustainable management plan for the Tasek Bera area.

The project commenced in 1996 and was implemented in cooperation with the MOSTE/Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), the Pahang State Government (DWNP) and Wetlands International–Asia and Pacific, which provided technical assistance to the Pahang State Government. In 1998, the state government, which has jurisdiction over the land, froze all development project applications within the site and its buffer zone pending the completion of the site management plan. Staff from the departments of fisheries, forestry and wildlife monitor and ensure enforcement on a routine basis.

Source: Ramsar Convention Secretariat and DANCED (2000b)

In the context of the Ramsar Convention, Wetlands International maintains many designated wetland sites as well as the Database and Directory for Contracting Parties, and has been an important player in the creation and management of wetland sites of international importance in numerous countries.

To facilitate the implementation of individual MEAs, multi-stakeholder partnerships are indispensable. They can help in identifying the contours and initiating environment and development projects that link objectives and address the common concerns of multiple conventions, as well as instruments negotiated under the auspices of IGOs (e.g., organizations responsible for trade, food and agriculture). While the secretariat of a given MEA might generally endorse projects that promote sustainable development and projects that address

environmental issues not explicitly connected to its MEA, it would not be likely to be the initiator of a multi-sectoral project, given its sector-specific mandate and limited financial resources. A similar observation could be made at the governmental level with respect to individual NFPs.

The River Basin Initiative, described in Box 11, is one example of a broad-based multi-stakeholder partnership relating to wetlands, biodiversity and river basins on a global scale.

BOX 11

River Basin Initiative

The River Basin Initiative was established to facilitate the integrated management of wetlands, biodiversity and river basins on a global scale. To implement the initiative, a partnership has been established among various actors, including the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention, contracting parties, and NGOs such as Wetlands International and the Global Environment Centre (Malaysia).

Source: Global Environment Centre, Malaysia

Widespread acceptance and a common understanding exist for the term “partnership.” In contrast, the term “participation” is often perceived as being more vague, and can be defined in many different ways. Some people associate the latter term with “consultation,” “information disclosure” or “informed consent”; others see it as a form of education and public awareness; and still others relate the term to more active policy-making roles, such as a visible role in decision-making institutional structures at various levels of governance.

The form, level and degree that “participation” takes, however, is likely to be conditioned by constitutional rights and obligations, legislation, and supporting policy plans and visions. The Thai Constitution of 1997, for example, grants the public the right of participation in environmental management. Environmental legislation, national development plans, strategic documents and vision statements more frequently provide the right for public participation and stakeholder involvement in policy and decision-making processes. Although these rights are granted, however, the specific modalities for participation are often not addressed. On one hand, this situation opens the door for free interpretation and could potentially lead to greater dialogue and participation. On the other hand, it may also exclude stakeholders simply because the guidelines for their participation have not yet been determined and little, if any, precedent has been established in practice. Unfortunately, experience across the Asia and Pacific region suggests that the latter is more likely to be the case.

Institutional Mechanisms for Engaging Multi-stakeholder Groups

National MEA Committees

National MEA committees represent one type of mechanism that facilitates multi-stakeholder involvement in decision-making. The extent and nature of multi-stakeholder participation in NCs depends largely on the decision-making culture of the country, the nature of the party's treaty obligations, and the technical needs and capacity of the focal points and lead agencies to meet their commitments. In most countries of the Asia and Pacific region, multi-stakeholder participation is generally limited to academic institutions and NGOs, with little involvement from the private sector or provincial and local authorities. Participation is restricted to low-level task forces, working groups and sub-committees, although in some cases NGOs have participated and contributed to the work of higher-level committees.

The low-level and ad hoc nature of NGO participation should not be underestimated, however. In some cases, NGOs and other stakeholders have been instrumental in producing background studies and other documents that were subsequently integrated into national reports and country studies.

The low frequency of the meetings and the sector-specific orientation of the committees present institutional constraints and hinder the participation of multi-stakeholder groups in decision-making. While progress has been observed across the region throughout the 1990s, institutional arrangements designed to assist the implementation of MEAs need to provide additional opportunities for meaningful multi-stakeholder participation and dialogue.

National Councils for Sustainable Development

National Councils for Sustainable Development are designed to facilitate the integration of environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development. They are also intended to provide a venue to integrate the interests and concerns of multiple stakeholder groups in policy-making, by serving as a platform for giving and receiving advice, and for interactive participation in the design of policies, action plans and strategies. Thanks to their national standing, these councils are in a good position to convey the policies and programmes that have been negotiated at the global or regional levels down to the national and local levels.

Although NCSDs provide a promising framework to implement MEAs and integrate environment into socio-economic development planning through multi-stakeholder dialogue and inter-ministerial collaboration, structures of this sort have been slow to emerge in Asia and the Pacific region. To date, multi-stakeholder NCSDs have been established only in Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mongolia, the

Philippines and Thailand. Initiatives have been underway to develop similar mechanisms in Malaysia and Indonesia, and a sustainable development bill calling for the creation of an NCSD is pending in Fiji.

NCSD frameworks have great potential to contribute to policy-making and implementation of sustainable development. Unfortunately, this potential has not been fully realized in the region. NCSDs require an enabling environment that offers exceptional leadership, widespread commitment, adequate financial resources, "lateral thinking," and a built-in process for learning and improvement. The PCSD is widely regarded as a successful example of multi-stakeholder collaborative decision-making (Box 12).

BOX 12

Philippine Council for Sustainable Development

The Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) was one of the first multi-stakeholder institutional mechanisms established following UNCED. The PCSD has various committees and sub-committees with widespread multi-stakeholder participation, including nine NGOs and people's organizations, two labor organizations and two businesses.

The PCSD has an innovative secretariat structure composed of two components: one to coordinate the participation of government officials and to oversee all technical and administrative requirements, and a civil society secretariat to coordinate NGO inputs and participation.

It is noteworthy that in addition to the PCSD, a number of regional and local councils for sustainable development also exist in the Philippines that have multi-stakeholder participation.

Source: Earth Council (1999-2000).

Public Consultation Processes for National Policies and Strategies

Other forms of participation may include ad hoc consultations with NGOs during the preparation of medium and long-term development plans, as well as during the formulation of other environmental policies and strategies, such as those relating to the implementation of MEAs.

Promoting Multi-stakeholder Partnership and Participation

Although multi-stakeholder participation has increased over the past decade, the concept remains relatively undeveloped in practice in many parts of the region. Participants at the UNU-organized Kuala Lumpur workshop on inter-linkages in 2001 identified a number of interrelated obstacles or issues that require immediate attention and action.

- *Building collective ownership of problems and solutions is essential.*

Improving opportunities for partnership and participation requires a stronger sense of collective ownership of the problems and solutions, from the global to the local levels of governance. This concern was echoed at the July 2001 Eminent Persons' Regional Roundtable for East Asia and the Pacific Region.

"It is necessary to strengthen a sense of collective ownership and responsibility for the implementation of sustainable development and programmes among stakeholders at the national and local levels."

Regional Roundtable for East Asia and the Pacific Region, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 9-11 July 2001. Draft Final Report.

In order to place local communities in the "driver's seat" a series of actions are needed, such as the development of individual and institutional capacity as well as the establishment or enhancement of networks among CBOs, between CBOs and NGOs, and between the non-profit and business sectors. In this respect, it is important to ensure that locally-based CBOs do not become the instruments of larger NGOs or that non-profit organizations become the instruments of the private sector.

- *Modalities for stakeholder participation are often ambiguous and need to be developed and clarified.*

Modalities need to be developed or clarified to promote and facilitate multi-stakeholder participation in policy- and decision-making. This may include legislation and specific policies and guidelines for general consultation processes as well as specific provisions for more direct and permanent participation in policy- and decision-making arrangements. This recommendation applies across the different levels of governance.

National funding mechanisms also need to be addressed for NGOs and CBOs. Although financial resources may be limited or nonexistent in parts of Asia and the Pacific region, some countries have established funds for these purposes. Where such funds exist, procedures for qualifying and obtaining financing need to be improved and made less bureaucratic.

- *Stakeholders and government should work together to establish an inventory of resources, projects and plans.*

The wealth of resources available from multi-stakeholder groups is phenomenal, but these resources are occasionally overlooked. As a

result, efforts may be duplicated or opportunities to build on the projects and plans of others may be missed. It is thus necessary to establish an inventory of resources at the national and local levels, including a roster of specialists that could help in the design and development of projects serving the objectives of multiple MEAs. A more active use of the Internet could improve channels of communication, disseminate information and contribute to both vertical and horizontal networking.

- *Improving the understanding of multi-stakeholder participation among local governments requires tools and demonstrations of good practices.*

In order to promote participation, certain skills are needed, as well as an understanding of what approaches work in which situations, and how they work. Efforts should be made to replicate the practices that have proven successful in one country at the national and local levels. When this is done, due attention should be paid to differences in constitutional obligations, decision-making systems and cultures, in different countries and localities.

Linking Multi-Stakeholder Participation across Levels of Governance

- *It is important to recognize and foster links between the various global MEAs' processes and their implications with local concerns and capacities.*

It is important not only to enhance horizontal linkages and networking, but also to recognize the vertical links between environmental problems, and to improve response strategies and processes. As a result, it is hoped that the objectives of MEAs will be achieved at the local level, and that the concerns and capabilities of local communities will be, in turn, reflected at the regional and global levels (Srinivas and Yashiro 2001).

Although support to enable multi-stakeholder groups – especially those from developing countries – to participate in regional and global negotiation processes should continue, a great need exists to focus on national and local processes and initiatives. National coordination mechanisms often play an important role in enabling participation in regional and global negotiation processes, but in doing so they have tended to look up towards the global level and not sufficiently down towards the local community. This bias is partly responsible for the failure of messages evoked in global and regional MEAs to penetrate to the level of large urban and smaller local communities, or even to the household.

The current situation presents a paradox. Participatory governance practices are more advanced and tend to work best at the local, community level. This level is where multi-stakeholder groups, especially the CBOs and POs, proliferate and organize a great majority of their activities. Ironically, this level appears to be the most detached from many negotiation and follow-up processes relating to MEAs. To resolve this paradox, greater efforts are needed to consider and apply bottom-up approaches and the principle of subsidiarity.

4

Capacity Development

“Institutional capacity remains one of the most common bottlenecks in the development process.”

Capacity Development in Environment,
DAC/OECD (2000: 10).

Important complementarities exist between the Capacity Development in Environment (CDE) approach (initiated by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD following the 1992 Rio Conference) and the inter-linkages approach to implementing MEAs. Both are key elements for better environmental management, and the underlying principles for putting them into practice are much the same. Capacity development in environment is a necessary condition for the inter-linkages approach to succeed. Conversely, the inter-linkages approach to environmental management can contribute to the CDE approach by increasing the efficiency, effectiveness and coherence of environmental policy-making and implementation. The inter-linkages and the CDE approaches also require that donor institutions become vehicles to translate the concepts into reality on the ground.

At present, the greatest obstacle for effective implementation of MEAs in the region is probably the lack of institutional, financial and human capacity. Capacity in this sense includes aspects that are physical (i.e., the number of professionals actually involved in the negotiation and implementation of MEAs), qualitative (i.e., the knowledge required to analyze information), and sustainability-related (i.e., continuity and transfer of know-how).

Capacity building not only improves responses to and the effectiveness of MEA implementation, but also the ability to prepare for and participate in regional and global negotiations. In most countries, “field training” in this context often means participating in actual negotiations, and “flexibility” often means single-handedly managing all MEA issues. This approach to “capacity building” might help create “super-delegates” and “super-bureaucrats” that are knowledgeable in multiple issues and are thus best positioned to identify and take advantage of the inter-linkages between them. Serious problems arise, however, when trained and experienced

professionals leave the government service, particularly if they do not transfer their know-how and knowledge base to those they leave behind.

The key issues for capacity development include: the facilitation of training, education and awareness raising; the facilitation of an environment where training can exist, including the availability of programmes and the existence of a critical mass of people to be trained; and the sustainability of these activities, including the transfer of know-how and continuity of training programmes themselves.

BOX 13

Limited Human Resources in Vanuatu

In Vanuatu, the Environmental Unit consists of three officers in a section that is attached to the Department of Health. Apart from a general heavy burden of work, the unit faces difficulties to implement MEAs ratified by the government, particularly given the lack of national legislation and technical capacity to advise the concerned government officials prior to and following the negotiations. Delegates participating in MEA negotiations and related intergovernmental processes usually come from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To offset the scarce resources of small island countries, the delegations often “team-up” with other countries in the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). While this “teaming-up” may respond to immediate capacity constraints faced by the delegation during negotiations, it may also have longer-term repercussions when it comes to implementing commitments at the national level.

The State Law Office currently has six law officers, but lacks both the capacities and the resources to establish an international legal division. Because of frequent changes of government, continuity of policy development and implementation is rare, accompanied by changes of political commitment and support.

Source: UNU Draft Report, Vanuatu Case Study.

Training, Education and Awareness Raising

In many cases, countries lack the capacity to implement MEAs. The usual problem is infrastructure, mainly dealing with the various convention requirements on negotiation, data collection, reporting and assessment. It is interesting to note that the often-quoted lack of data in developing countries is not precisely true. In most cases, data exists, but is often neither collated nor presented as such.⁶

Much can be done, however, to use existing resources in order to enhance inter-linkages so that national obligations to international treaties can be fulfilled, at the same time as real progress is made with the country’s own development strategy. Existing national and regional centers are obvious starting points for coordination and collaboration. For example, they could organize courses for targeted groups on technical issues relevant to a number of MEAs and other

⁶ See Paoletto (1999).

agreements that promote sustainable development. It should be noted that even the best capacity building programme could have only limited results if incentives that encourage the trainers to train are not in place. One model available is UNITAR's Climate Change Convention Training and Capacity Building Programme (CC:TRAIN).⁷

BOX 14

Training Trainers in Thailand

In Thailand, five training workshops trained 150 women in the safe handling and use of toxic substances. The 150 women, in turn, conducted their own local training sessions and trained 27,018 other Thai women about the dangers, use and management of toxic substances in their work-places and homes, and on how to disseminate this information to their families and communities. This is an easy model to replicate. Master training manuals and guidelines for conducting training workshops, together with instructional posters, were published in the respective languages and distributed. The project relied greatly on NGOs, youth organizations and national authorities. The project was financed by UNEP at a cost of US\$20,000.

Source: UNCSD, 1997.

While international agencies identify coordination and cooperation as key elements of any inter-linkages capacity building strategy, the field remains wide open. There have been efforts to promote cooperation and coordination within national governments, but most have been unsuccessful. For instance, UN agencies and programmes have encouraged governments to establish "multidisciplinary" or "cross-sectoral" committees or forums, but success has been for the most part limited to countries having a culture for collaborative-decision making. There are various aspects of themes where potential for inter-linkages in capacity building may exist. These include:

Scientific Capacity

Scientific capacity is an important foundation of any good policy reform based on an inter-linkages approach. National governments will call often on the same scientific resources within a country to answer questions arising from environmental concerns. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Global Change SysTem for Analysis, Research and Training (START), International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), International Human Dimensions Programme for Global Environmental Change (IHDP) and other global networks and programmes are positive forces in that they directly and indirectly promote capacity building at national and local levels. Programmes of this nature need to be strengthened at both levels. More efforts are needed to enhance in-country scientific capacity to understand how issues affect a given country, and based on that understanding, to determine what types of decisions are

⁷ See the Internet sites of UNITAR or GEIC (www.unitar.org; www.geic.or.jp/cctrain)

needed to minimize, mitigate or avoid the anticipated negative impacts. In terms of prioritizing, technical training will need to involve scientists first in order to build the scientific base in the country, and then government officials and others, on integrated assessment techniques (or issue-oriented approaches). International personnel exchange programmes can support this process.

Policy and Management

Any capacity building strategy for inter-linkages will need to extend to professional development programmes in management skills for mid- to high-level government officials. At this level, the issues become more philosophical in their nature, in terms of better understanding effective management techniques and approaches, and the concepts and benefits of cooperation, coordination and partnerships. The traditional centralized structures of government, which continue to exist in most countries, make progress difficult in this regard. Programmes such as CC:TRAIN have a place, but the incentive for an official to coordinate and take action is virtually non-existent at the moment. To change that structure and provide an incentive for a government official to take action remains a perplexing challenge. Nevertheless, putting in place information systems and encouraging the transparency that this process can bring about is a major and important step in this direction.

Through its actions, the international community – knowingly or otherwise – calls for a change at the *conceptual level*: one founded on philosophy, and how we think about and approach concepts of cooperation and partnership. Considering inter-linkages in this context is appropriate. Organizing leadership seminars and courses, and promoting policy dialogues and workshops among key actors within countries and regions are important steps in this process. Such a process would be continuous, so that eventually full support and commitment from countries (industrialized, developing or CITs) would be required to sustain the activities. They would come to make up a part of a country's educational activities. However, the investment would be comparatively small when compared to the expected returns over a period of five years. International organizations, training institutes, universities and other bodies with expertise in these areas can do much to assist.⁸

The objective of these professional programmes would be to support the development of leaders who can in turn support the formulation of national strategies that can effectively 'inter-link' the regimes. However, in that process, it is vital that any strategy proposed establish a close connection to a country's development and educational strategies. For example, the promotion of improved information collection and sharing can be planned to support a

⁸ IGES (in the Asia-Pacific), the Aspen Institute, and LEAD International are examples.

country's participation in the digital economy. An emphasis on cooperation can be planned to support the development of human resources that can enable more effective participation in the global economy. Alternatively, emphasis could be placed in supporting the creation of partnerships with the private sector so as to reduce burdens on government expenditure. If an inter-linkages approach is not linked to education and development, then it will fail.

Education

Much of the present discussion ultimately relates to education, which is a key area where countries need to rethink curricula. Most educational institutions do not adequately incorporate development and environmental issues into curricula, although Parties to MEAs are in many cases obliged to do so. This shortcoming is not by any means limited to developing countries. Indeed, many developed countries would also do well to pay more attention in education to issues of sustainability, which international experience suggests to be the following:

1. insights about the future (developing long-range thinking and scenario building);
2. stewardship of natural resources;
3. designing sustainable communities, including both the social and physical dimensions;
4. economics; and
5. globalization.⁹

There is a widespread need for attractive, locally appropriate and easily understandable materials outlining the linkage between the objectives of MEAs and day-to-day human needs and local ecological processes. Awareness raising and community education programmes operated through partnerships between governmental agencies, research institutions, private enterprises, local radio or TV-stations, and NGOs, for example, have proven to contribute significantly to increasing the level of understanding of sustainable development. Some countries have successfully addressed the need to raise awareness through creative means, as the Vanuatu case below illustrates.

Countries in a region often not only share similar environmental constraints, but also the same needs in raising public awareness. Consequently, there is a great potential for joint regional programmes that reduce costs for each country involved, and contribute to enhanced regional cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships across borders in efforts to raise awareness.

⁹ For an example of a successful programme that is incorporating these elements in school curricula, see the Center for Sustainable Development: <http://csf.concord.org/>

BOX 15

Vanuatu: The One Bag Theatre

Inefficient resources in Vanuatu considerably limit governmental programmes for public education in the areas of environment and sustainable development. A private theatre company named “One Bag Theatre”, however, undertakes a well-established awareness raising activity. This group of young people travels around the country and educates the spectators on issues that link local behavior with environmental impacts on the regional and international levels.

Source: UNU Draft Report, Vanuatu Case Study.

Information Capacity

The capacity of a country to organize, collate, coordinate and share information lies at the heart of any inter-linkages capacity building strategy.

(a) Linking Actors, Programmes and Schemes

There are a number of ways in which information plays a pivotal role. Identifying actors, programmes and schemes for coordination and cooperation at the national level is an obvious role for information in an inter-linkages scenario. In a broader context, using and sharing information to link up schemes, such as AIJ and CDM, with other existing or future programmes and information requirements would make sense. With regard to these schemes, however, countries have pointed to several deficiencies, including a lack of:

- human capacity to design the necessary policies and to implement agreed programmes and procedures;
- policy and legal frameworks for AIJ/JI/CDM activities consistent with development priorities (including familiarity with and use of indicators for sustainable development); and
- transparent and efficient administrative and decision-making procedures.

(b) Reporting and Data

Reporting requirements and data collection systems under various MEAs and other sustainable development agreements are also areas calling for coordination and streamlining. In its report on synergies in national MEA implementation, the UNDP distinguishes between data integration and analysis.¹⁰ Managers of data sources can manage decentralized datasets and control them for quality, but need analytical facilities to do integrated analysis. Each country will

¹⁰ UNDP. 1997. *Synergies in National Implementation: The Rio Agreements*. New York: UNDP.

eventually require the infrastructure and human resources to undertake strategic studies, as well as access to data over the Internet.¹¹

Information product design can be streamlined, or at least harmonized (rather than standardized). Efforts to do so may require technical and professional development workshops for a targeted audience. The rationale for such efforts is related to efficiency: attention to design saves a great deal of time, effort and money in later stages. In addition, information may have less practical value and fewer applications if information design factors are ignored.

Financial Capacity

Regarding the role of external donors and technical assistance agencies, the approach needs to be based on the concept of “partners in development”.¹² This approach implies consultation and dialogue between donor and recipient on all aspects of a project. Since the mid-1990s, technical assistance schemes and foreign aid has desperately needed to incorporate “softer” aspects into their programmes. By “soft”, issues of human resources development (education, learning, information systems, information management, management philosophy, leadership) come to the fore. Although bilateral and multilateral donors have increased “softer” aspects of technical assistance, much aid still focuses on large, heavy infrastructure.

Bilateral Donor Institutions

Bilateral and multilateral donor institutions have been key sources of funding for projects linked to the implementation of various global MEAs. In Asia and the Pacific region, several agencies are particularly active, including the Australian Overseas Aid Programme (AusAID), the Danish Cooperation for Environment and Development (DANCED), Germany’s Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ), and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). This list is far from exhaustive, however.

AusAID and DANCED are highly involved in building capacity in a number of areas, including strengthening focal points and supporting collaboration among developing countries to coordinate responses to global warming. In cooperation with SPREP, AusAID also has an extensive public awareness programme for numerous Pacific island countries. Through a range of country projects, GTZ is providing support to implement the conventions on biological diversity and

¹¹ Australia’s ERIN is often cited as a useful model See <http://www.erin.gov.au/>

¹² Chambers, B. ed. 1999. Global Climate governance. UNU/GEIC/IAS. Tokyo. For a copy of the report, see: <http://www.geic.or.jp/climgov/index.html>

climate change in various developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Multilateral Donor Institutions

Multilateral donor institutions are also well positioned to assist developing countries meet their obligations under MEAs. This includes providing both technical equipment for enhanced monitoring and data collection as well as strengthening the capacity of government officials at the national and sub-national levels.

As controllers of financial resources, regional development banks are in a prime position to assist in capacity building. Development banks are by their nature information collectors, and with the support of the country in question, can also be information providers and capacity builders. For instance, countries have cited a lack of local institutions to perform independent verification of greenhouse gas reductions achieved by AIJ/JI/CDM projects.¹³ The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), with its close relations to industry in countries with economies in transition, can play a significant role in monitoring and supporting the reporting requirements of countries under MEAs. Regional development banks can also work with countries to synthesize data and reporting, and train in basic data collection and collation, as is being done by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).¹⁴

The ADB has also been actively engaged in providing environmental assistance to its developing member countries. In 2000, the Bank increased its support for environmental activities to 23 percent of the total approved loans, up from the 13 percent average over the past five years (ADB 2001). Over the course of the year, the Bank approved three technical assistance grants to strengthen the capacity in environmental management of national and provincial government officials from India, the Kyrgyz Republic and Thailand. In cooperation with a host of other organizations, the ADB conducted 11 workshops for over 500 participants from 14 Asian countries on environmental, economic and legal issues related to the Kyoto Protocol, including the Clean Development Mechanism, JI, and the Buenos Aires Plan of Action. The Bank also approved a grant to strengthen national capacity in the Philippines to implement the CBD. In the Central Asian Republics, the ADB is supporting a mechanism for regional environmental action, planning and implementation (ADB 2001).

The Global Environmental Facility (GEF), through its various grant programmes and project types, provides funding for activities related to biodiversity, climate change, international waters and ozone.

¹³ Swiss AIJ Pilot Programme. 1998. *Report on Capacity building needs identified under the Swiss-World Bank Collaborative Initiative on National AIJ/JI/CDM Strategy Studies*. Zurich.

¹⁴ ADB. 1999. *Annual Report 1998*. Manila: ADB.

Projects on land degradation projects are also eligible for funding provided that they address links to one or several of the four focal areas.

Similar to the practice of many bilateral donor institutions, projects financed through multilateral development channels are for the most part specific to a single agreement. Although the GEF accepts and even encourages multi-focal projects, the gross allocation for pilot phase and restructured GEF projects amounted to less than USD 200 million.

It is important to underscore, however, that while MEA-related projects have been generally conceived and implemented with a specific agreement in mind, many development and environmental projects end up meeting – at least partially – the objectives of various arrangements, given the natural geo-bio-physical linkages in ecosystems. In fact, a single targeted action can bring about multiple benefits (Box 16).

BOX 16

Preventing Forest Fires in Southeast Asia

Trans-boundary haze resulting from large-scale land and forest fires is one of the most pressing environmental problems in Southeast Asia. The specific objective of preventing fires can bring about multiple environmental benefits, such as reducing air pollution and airborne particles, haze, and greenhouse gases. Forests and biodiversity also benefit, not to mention human health.

Source: Faizal Parish, Global Environment Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

Nevertheless, there is growing pressure within the donor community to strive for more synergy and coordination in project design. While the experience of the DANCED Southeast Asian Development Assistance Programme is not unique, it is a particularly noteworthy case.

BOX 17

Synergies in Action: DANCED and Bilateral Development Assistance

The Danish Cooperation for Environment and Development (DANCED) Programme was launched in 1994 as Denmark's contribution to provide new and additional financial resources to developing countries in order to meet the challenges of sustainable development.

DANCED has strategically linked the phases of its environment and sustainable development programme in Southeast Asia. DANCED has linked the activities and projects of the Malaysia Country Programme's first phase which focused on sustainable management of forests and other critical habitats with biodiversity conservation in the second phase. The linkage is demonstrated by projects related to implementing Malaysia's National Policy on Biological Diversity on the conservation of wetlands, integrated conservation and development in the Perlis State, and establishing a nature education centre in Johor.

Source: DANCED (2000b)

Strengthening institutional capacity is a major concern of bilateral and multilateral donor institutions and reflected in many strategy documents and projects. One of CIDA's Sustainable Development Strategy objectives, for example, aims to constructively engage developing countries and CITs in addressing key global challenges, and one of the strategies to meet this objective involves strengthening the capacity of developing countries and CITs to negotiate and implement multilateral trade and environmental agreements. Other bilateral donors are also highly preoccupied with this need, as the following case demonstrates (Box 18).

BOX 18

Supporting the Implementation of MEAs in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the Conservation and Environmental Management Division (CEMD) of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE) is the focal point for a number of MEAs, including the CBD, FCCC, CITES, and the Ramsar, Basel and London Conventions. Due to shortages in professional staff, the CEMD has experienced capacity constraints to operate efficiently and effectively at both the intergovernmental and national levels.

Danish Cooperation for Environment and Development (DANCED) is providing assistance to Malaysia to support the implementation of international environmental conventions. The assistance places priority on the Rio Conventions and more recent instruments such as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the Biosafety Protocol and the Inter-governmental Forum on Forests. Specific projects include enhancing Malaysia's negotiating capacity and assessing potential impacts.

Source: DANCED (2000c).

As the above illustrations show, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies have assigned much importance to building capacity at the national level. In the past, capacity building activities have been for the most part externally driven, with outside consultants providing services of a limited duration.

Increasingly, however, development assistance projects are internally driven, based more on the needs of recipient countries, and identified in consultation with multi-stakeholder groups, government agencies and multilateral donor agencies. This in itself is an example of partnership that can be used to identify possible linkages among MEAs. To the extent possible, capacity development for inter-linkages must promote local ownership and control.

Given the mutually supportive concepts of the OECD's CDE approach and inter-linkages, it would seem appropriate for national and sub-national training centres to be equipped with the conceptual and practical knowledge of building synergies to implement MEAs. Forward-looking national and multilateral seminars should be held to prepare for new negotiations, and inter-governmental bodies should develop priorities for capacity building and funding.

As one moves from global towards more local levels of governance, the need for awareness raising, training, and capacity development increases considerably. Initiatives to develop institutional capacity in order to applying the inter-linkages concept must also target the provincial, district, and local levels – not only governmental administration, but also non-governmental segments of society. Integrated capacity building concepts should be based on multi-stakeholder participation and partnerships, nationally and regionally, within and across different levels of governance.

The concept of capacity development, however, should not be limited to the act of providing training and resources to individuals or institutions. It should also encompass providing the means to access resources. Therefore, targeted information sharing and data collection at local, national and regional levels might prove to be equally important. Several regional case studies show that poor performance in these areas is hindering the effectiveness in coordinating, implementing and linking MEAs, as well as in monitoring the results on the ground (Boyer 2001; Van Toen 2001).

Before conducting activities related to capacity building, national and regional surveys should assess and prioritise needs in order to minimize the costs and prevent duplication. These assessments should also focus on the institutional sustainability of actions to be taken and the new challenges that might be caused by capacity development, in order to avoid the “brain drain” phenomenon that occurs when trained personnel leave public service, either because professional incentives are greater elsewhere or because programmes are discontinued due to a lack of funding or commitment at higher levels.

Sustainability of Capacity

One key problem in many developing countries is the lack of continuity of capacity after it has been created. In some cases, training programmes may provide knowledge to individuals, who only a year later may be transferred to another position or leave the government service. In addition, if the capabilities of an individual are strengthened through training, that person will also become more attractive for other institutions, which may result in a loss of personnel for the initial host institution.

In this context, training programmes tend to lose their effectiveness as soon as they end, if they have not designed to be sustainable. Programmes to “train the trainers” and sustained training are some approaches used to maintain the level of capacity for a certain issue.

Another way to ensure sustainability is a thematic and institutional approach to capacity building. A thematic approach is necessary in

order to ensure that synergies that exist in particular areas are identified and utilized, such as the cluster of MEAs that relate to energy or the cluster that relates to biodiversity protection. An institutional approach is necessary to ensure that knowledge and capacity are sustained.

Capacity building on MEAs should also be forward-looking, and should seek to raise awareness of upcoming MEA negotiations, and assist national governments to identify inter-linkages between these new initiatives and existing MEAs.

5

Moving Forward

Some progress has been made internationally in discussions about creating linkages between MEAs at the global level, in order to address environmental problems more effectively and efficiently. This policy brief asserts that the concepts of synergy and inter-linkages can also be applied at the regional and national levels. The priority now is to apply the concepts through a series of actions, including applied research and policy analysis, training and awareness raising programmes, pilot project development and Internet outreach and virtual networking. This concluding section turns to a brief discussion of each action.

Applied Research and Policy Analysis

Applied research and policy analysis are essential tools to further our understanding of the inter-linkages concept and identify the possibilities and boundaries for using this approach to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of MEA implementation.

As a follow-up to the Kuala Lumpur Workshop on inter-linkages in February 2001, the UNU launched a series of case studies to examine national experiences in the PIC and ASEAN regions. Thirteen cases have been drafted, including three Pacific island countries (PIC) and the ten member countries of the ASEAN. The studies look at the institutions and processes for policy formulation and implementation at the national and sub-national levels, the extent to which multiple stakeholder groups participate in decision-making and implementation, and cases where MEAs are being implemented through synergy on the ground. The studies seek to reveal deficiencies in the institutional setup that may prevent a country from responding to its obligations, as well as examples of best practices that can possibly be replicated elsewhere in the region.

Training, Education and Awareness Raising

The possibilities for training, education and awareness raising are virtually endless. From a training perspective, MEA secretariats and individual governments have stressed the need to strengthen the negotiating capacity of delegates from developing countries, who far

too often participate in the periphery of discussions and thus are unable to exert much influence on the process or outcome of the negotiations. This observation is particularly relevant for delegates from Africa, but also applies to countries in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Central Asian Republics.

Training workshops could include skills and techniques to enable delegates from these countries to more thoroughly and systematically prepare for, as well as to improve their performance and effectiveness in, the intergovernmental negotiation process. In addition to acquiring general negotiation skills and techniques, delegates also need training on the substance and history of MEA negotiations, including crosscutting issues and linkages arising among instruments, as well as MEA overlap and conflict with other international instruments.

Awareness raising on environmental conventions and their inter-linkages are also important areas that need to be enhanced at the national and sub-national levels. The failure of some countries to ratify, implement and/or comply with environmental conventions often stems from the lack of awareness and understanding at the national and sub-national levels.

Parliaments and legislative bodies play an essential role in national capacity by creating governance structures and policies that respond to the obligations negotiated in international conferences.

Targets for Training and Awareness Raising

- Government (national, state and local);
- NGOs, CBOs and other members of civil society;
- Private sector, including small and medium-sized enterprises; and,
- Educational institutions

Training and awareness raising programmes should not only aim to build individual capacity, but also strengthen institutional development at the national and sub-national levels. These activities must be country-driven and implemented in partnership with national training institutes, NGOs and CBOs.

Process Consultation and Development of Pilot Projects

Another component of the Inter-linkages initiative is providing guidance and consultation on programmes for operationalizing inter-linkages. This work could include identifying issue clusters that cut across MEAs. Clustering can be approached through sectors (climate and atmosphere, biodiversity, chemicals, etc.), impacts (species loss, deforestation, land degradation, etc.), goods (agriculture, industrial products, etc.) or tools (capacity building, training, transfer of technology, etc.).

- *Develop practical guidance in the form of "tool kits" or "road maps" to assist developing countries to implement the inter-linkages approach.*

Policy guidance and assistance could take on various dimensions, from designing or modifying institutional structures to follow-up on MEA commitments and general objectives, to the design of curricula for educational activities and awareness raising at the local level.

Pilot projects should address economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and could be developed in the areas of watershed management, CDM projects, and trans-boundary movements of pollutants.

Internet Outreach and Virtual Networking

It would be beneficial to enhance the UNU Inter-linkages Internet site with the objectives described below.

1. *To serve as a virtual knowledge network of institutions and individuals committed to promoting mutual support and synergy among MEAs*

In addition, the site should be linked with MEA secretariats and the intergovernmental organizations concerned, NFPs for specific conventions, donor institutions, NGOs, the private sector, and academia.

2. *To develop a database of good practice examples of inter-linkages*

In many cases, countries experiencing good practices or successes in one area may also experience problems or difficulties in other areas. An enhanced Internet site could provide MEA secretariats, governments, the donor community, NGOs, the private sector and academic institutions a virtual venue to post short narratives of success stories and good practice examples of implementing MEAs through synergistic and mutually supportive activities. Contributions could be organized according to the level of activity (e.g., local, national, regional, global or multi-scale) type of activity (e.g., awareness raising, coordination, capacity development, multiple activity), and type of linkage (e.g., sector specific MEA, multi-sector MEA, other).

The site could build on the experience of ESCAP's Virtual Conference on Integrating Environmental Considerations into Economic Decision Making. The ESCAP project is particularly valuable because it provides opportunities for third parties to submit and evaluate

examples of projects in terms of sustainability, adaptability, efficiency and process. At this stage, it is important that people become involved, and the Internet is an excellent cost-effective tool.

3. To promote and assist the creation of partnerships for project design and implementation

The Internet site could also serve as a virtual bulletin board to list projects and solicit partners (technical, operational or financial) for the design and implementation of projects supporting MEA synergies and coordination. The virtual Inter-linkages bulletin board is an excellent and cost effective means to facilitate broad-based partnerships and participation involving MEA secretariats, NFPs, donors, NGOs, the private sector and academia.

* * *

Taken together, these actions can assist governments and other stakeholders to improve the collective understanding of the problems, identify options for solutions, and clarify the assignment of roles.

In concluding, it is important to underscore that the inter-linkages initiative should not result in a loss of focus. Put somewhat differently, linking MEAs must not be an end in itself; it provides tools that add to the goal of effective implementation and coordination of MEAs. As shown in the previous chapters, the linking or de-linking of policies and implementation programmes must go hand-in-hand with adjustments in institutional frameworks, the sharing or shifting of competencies, joint awareness raising and capacity development, and regional coordination. If not embedded in a holistic approach, linking bears the risk of further institutional fragmentation, if new institutions or tasks are added without making the proper organizational adaptations.

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