

## **Working Group #1: National and Regional Approaches Summary and Recommendations**

The Working Group requests that the UNU Secretariat review these recommendations in light of the July 1999 meeting and that it encourage new actions that build on the earlier recommendations.

### **Summary**

1. Given the interlinked nature of the issues addressed by the MEAs, greater synergy in the implementation of the agreements should be beneficial.
  
2. **Interlinkages among Secretariats**  
At the regional and global scale, significant progress on direct interlinkages among MEAs
  - Extensive use of MOU arrangements and joint work programs;
  - Main thrust of the secretariats is to implement the MEAs and interlinkages can help achieve this goal
  - Strong incentives for interlinkages – secretariats respond to the requests from parties for greater interlinkage and obtain benefits from greater interlinkage with other bodies in achieving their goals. “A small secretariat can’t function without creation of partnerships and has to cooperate with others to achieve its goals”
  
3. **Programmatic Interlinkages at Global and Regional Scales**  
At the regional and global scale, significant programmatic activity that serves to promote interlinkages among the MEAs
  - Data and information (e.g., UNEP assessment activities, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, Wetlands International, River Basin Initiative)
    - Role in issue identification
    - Support national needs for information pertaining to all conventions
  - Capacity Building (UNDP, UNEP, etc.)
  - Regional bodies (e.g., ASEAN, ECLAC, ECA, ECE) are involved in MEAs and can and do help promote synergies
  
4. **Significant challenge involved in effective interlinkages at national and sub-national level**
  - Interlinkages concept assumes more capacity in national governments than may exist:
    - Significant capacity constraints even to deal with the separate MEAs, much less the interlinkages
    - Greater emphasis on interlinkages could lead to people being in meetings all the time rather than implementing conventions
    - Many governments insecure with respect to their own legitimacy and unlikely to invest the effort needed
    - Tension involved in the idea of interlinkages since many governments are seeking to devolve authority to gain greater legitimacy yet the interlinkages concept would centralize greater authority.

- Incentives (e.g., financial, etc.) may sometimes promote independent action rather than synergy/harmonized action
  - Those negotiating agreements may not be involved in implementation
  - There is a shortage of data and information that truly addresses the ‘interlinkages’ among issues (i.e., what data exist are generally collected sectorally)
  - Precondition that countries within a region have all ratified the MEAs that are to be interlinked
5. Core ‘principles’ for identifying opportunities for interlinkages.
- Proposed interlinkages should clearly be in the national interest – interlinkages could undermine negotiated agreements if they divert attention, resources from agreed on problems;
  - The ‘goal’ of efforts to promote interlinkages should be to help countries pursue sustainable development in all its economic, social, and environmental dimensions;
  - Proposed interlinkages should have substantial value added – synergies for synergies sake will simply bog people down in meetings; High value added opportunities are likely to exist at all stages from negotiation, to development of national strategies, implementation of strategies, reporting and monitoring, etc.
  - Although the meeting is focused on MEAs, the reality is that opportunities for helpful interlinkages exist across both agreements focused on related issues (e.g., the environmental agreements) and agreements focused on related tools/approaches. Thus, interlinkage opportunities should be explored with agreements such as trade agreements or agreements that rely on similar enforcement mechanisms such as the involvement of Interpol, or International Customs (e.g., transboundary chemical movements, CITES, ozone)
  - Not all interlinkages are best promoted/established at a national government level – regional or international agencies sometimes can play an important role in fostering interlinkages at a national level without adding greater burden to national governments.
  - Different “interlinkages” issues arise across different levels (global, regional, national, local) and at different stages (planning, implementation, monitoring) and the actions need to be tailored to these specific needs.

**Recommendations: Value-Added Opportunities to Promote Interlinkages at National/Regional Level**

1. Information and data
  - Data and information assembled to address issues in the context of one MEA can often be useful in the context of others. Better access to data/information along with enhanced capacity to handle that information. Information exchange needs to be multi-agency and multi-level rather than each agency level duplicating others. Regional/international bodies can help.
  - Harmonization of data management systems and harmonization in the methodologies used can also aid interlinkages. (E.g., not all conventions need to define ‘wetlands’ the same way, but the data systems should be constructed in a fashion that enables any definition to be used.)

2. Policy, strategy and planning
  - Currently inter-MEA communication focused on reporting. Instead, much more effective if extensive communication occurs at the policy and strategy development stage. Actual implementation may not need to be interlinked and can be done by separate agencies, but key that the planning and strategy development is done jointly.
  - Moreover, at the policy and strategy stage, opportunities exist for governments to play an agenda setting role in the MEAs. Currently countries spend their time reacting to demands of conventions and the ‘interlinkages’ discussions focus on how to enable countries to be more efficient in their response to those demands. Instead, the goal of interlinkages should be to expand opportunity for agenda setting among countries.
3. Capacity Building
  - Need programs aimed at building capacity for negotiating MEAs. (Help countries play more of an agenda-setting role and ensure that additional MEAs don’t add still greater burden to existing capacity.)
  - Conflict resolution
  - Scholarship programs
  - Develop manuals for convention reporting and pool of trainers to train officials in reporting processes
4. Financial
  - Availability of funds key in supporting interlinkages
  - Just as the nature of funding sources provides an incentive for synergistic work at the international level, national governments could use the type of funds made available to promote synergy at a national level.
  - Greater exploration is needed of ways for financing multipurpose projects.
5. Communications and outreach
  - National governments don’t see MEAs as central to their development concerns and don’t have the incentive to work on interlinkages. But, taken together, the set of issues addressed by MEAs are unquestionably of importance for development. (“Conventions are interlinked through their consequences for people”) Opportunity for regional institutions to help promote this perspective and educate and communicate the importance to the public and other ministries outside of the Environment sector.
6. Interlinkages with non-MEAs
  - Some of the greatest ‘value added’ opportunities may lie in addressing the interlinkages with regional trade agreements, WTO, etc.
7. Interlinkages among regions
  - Actions taken within one regional grouping may ultimately be affected by actions taken or not taken within others. (E.g., sulfur control in Europe will be affected by

steps taken in other regions.) Interlinkages are helpful both in providing models and capacity and in strengthening the capacity of each regional effort to reach its goals.

8. Organizational Changes

- Same agency that implements an agreement should negotiate the agreement
- Consider giving one agency lead responsibility for synergy or establish a inter-agency committee to achieve this end.

9. Other stakeholder

- Civil society and private sector can play important roles in promoting interlinkages.

10. Pilot activities and Case Studies

- Pilot activities: In order to make the Interlinkages concept more “real” for the agencies involved, it would be useful to implement pilot activities focused on specific sites and issues and which address social, economic, as well as environmental dimensions and will promote sustainable development. Such activities might involve projects focused on important watersheds, wetlands, CDM projects, transboundary movement of pollutants, etc.
- Case Studies
  - a) Assess the benefits and costs (monetized) of implementation of MEAs. Assumption that they are costly and a burden needs to be challenged with data.
  - b) Regional Economic Commissions such as ECLAC and ECA will be preparing a summary of progress in implementation of the Rio agreements as contributions to the Rio+10 planning. These could usefully include an analysis of synergies in its summary.
  - c) Hazardous wastes. Ratification and implementation of the Waigani Convention and the Basel Convention by Island States in the Pacific Region. Ministers of the Environment of the Pacific Island States (Guam 2000) decided that hazardous wastes are a priority for the region. Partners: UNU, SPREP, ESCAP, Basel Secretariat, UNEP Regional Office. (Meeting of the countries already convened in Cairns Australia for April 2001.
  - d) Study barriers to national attempts at interlinkages. In some cases attempts by governments to pursue interlinked approaches run into obstacles by donors or others. A study of these barriers would be helpful.
  - e) Study existing design of financial mechanisms at the regional level to identify opportunities for changes in their design and implementation that would promote greater synergy.
  - f) Prepare a “Biodiversity, Climate, Wetlands and Sustainable Development” strategy for one country to demonstrate utility of integrated approach.
  - g) Study examples where synergy seems to work effectively at a national level (e.g, Kazakhstan)
  - h) Create a Task Force of all the MEAs to explore opportunities for harmonization with regards to the methodologies for planning national strategies and action

plans and the tools and guidelines for implementation of MEAs at regional and national levels;