

## Rio +10 Report on Inter-linkages: Review and Analysis and Future Considerations

### Introduction

1. Inter-linkages is an approach to managing sustainable development that seeks to promote greater connectivity between ecosystems and societal actions. On a practical level this involves a greater level of cohesiveness among institutional, environmental issue-based, and development focused responses to the challenges of sustainable development as well as the range of international, regional and national mechanisms that share this challenge. The inter-linkages approach to sustainable development is comprised of two fundamental elements; synergism and coordination. It is believed that a synergistic approach to sustainable development will lead to more effective and resource efficient assessment, negotiation, decision-making, planning, and implementation of policies. Similarly, improved coordination at the international, regional, and national levels, and between institutions, will minimize inadvertent conflicts between environmental policies and measures and between different international regimes. The key to developing a strong integrated approach to sustainable development is the identification of the inherent *synergies* that exist between different aspects of the environment and an exploration of the potential for more effective *coordination* between sustainable development issues and their responses.
2. Inter-linkages was not included in *Agenda 21* as a thematic cluster although various aspects of the concept are promoted throughout the document. *Agenda 21* reverses the trend of approaching ‘environment’ and ‘development’ issues separately and puts in place the basis for an integrated approach under the broader principle of ‘sustainable development.’ Chapter 2 of *Agenda 21* recognizes the need to create supportive systems between the international economy and environment and to coordinate these activities in a manner that increases mutual compatibility. Chapter 8 addresses the means of integrating environment and development issues at the policy, planning, management, and legal levels. Chapters 38 and 39 stress the importance and role that various sectors and institutions may play in responding to the challenges of sustainable development within a coordinated and cooperative environment. Chapter 39 also stresses the need to avoid inadvertent conflicts and contradictions between international environmental instruments.
3. Since the Rio meeting there has been a growing awareness of the fragmentation and lack of coordination among efforts to achieve sustainable development. Within the context of UN reform, there is also increasing awareness that the existing coordination mechanisms have not adequately created the most efficient systems for addressing sustainable development problems. In 1997 the UN Secretary General in his reform proposal, “recognized the need for a more integrated systematic approach to policies and programmes”.<sup>1</sup> At the five year review of *Agenda 21* governments stated that, “the conference of the parties to conventions signed at the United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Secretary-General: Renewing the UN a Programme for Reform, Doc. A/51/950, July 14, 1997

Conference on Environment and Development or as a result of it, as well as other conventions related to sustainable development, should cooperate in exploring ways and means of collaborating in their work to advance the effective implementation of the conventions to continue to pursue sustainable development objectives ...”<sup>2</sup> In 1998, the UN Secretary General set up a task force to review existing UN structures and arrangements in the field of the environment and human settlements. This task force concluded that current UN activities are characterized by substantial overlaps, unrecognized linkages, and gaps and that these flaws were "basic and pervasive.”<sup>3</sup>

4. There is a growing awareness within the UN, governments, and civil society of the necessity for greater coordination and synergism among environmental institutions, policies and legal instruments, and for approaches that take better account of the inter-relationships between ecological and societal systems. Although efforts to translate the inter-linkages approach into better sustainable development practice are still only preliminary, a great deal of work has already been undertaken in this regard. These efforts must be accounted for and promoted if the ultimate sustainable development goals of *Agenda 21* are to be realized.

#### **Synergies and Coordination among International Legal Instruments and Mechanisms**

5. The need for greater coordination and synergism has recently received a great deal of attention among multilateral environmental conventions and between international legal instruments and mechanisms. As a result, a number of efforts have been undertaken by various entities to address the linkages between conventions. Much of this activity has been steered by the Global Conventions Division of UNEP. This body has, since 1995, encouraged and promoted greater cooperation between environmental conventions by convening meetings aimed at increasing coordination among the various convention secretariats. Several global meetings have also been hosted with the aim of examining the practical and specific ways by which inter-conventional collaboration could occur. In 1997 the UNDP organized an expert meeting on "Synergies between the Convention on Biological Diversity, Climate Change, Desertification and Forestry Principles". In an attempt to building upon this initial effort, the United Nation University (UNU) and UNEP co-organized an "International Conference on Inter-linkages: Synergy and Coordination between Multilateral Environmental Agreements“ in July 1999. This conference brought together a significant number of environmental secretariats, UN organizations and experts to examine increased use of synergies and improved coordination could lead to stronger environmental management and better-integrated mechanisms. The Inter-linkages conference report demonstrated how this improvement might take place using financial mechanisms, the harmonization of information systems and information exchanges, managing cross-sector issues using an issue management approach, the more effective use of scientific mechanisms, and institutional reforms.

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<sup>2</sup> Rio+5 General Assembly Special Session A/S-19/29 27 June 1997

<sup>3</sup> Report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlement, 1998, General Assembly Document A/53/463 (annexed)

6. Environmental conventions have, themselves, been very active in establishing opportunities for collaboration and improving cooperative arrangements. The biodiversity related conventions such as Migratory Species, CITES, RAMSAR, World Heritage and the Convention on Biological Diversity have taken decision at their COPs to create closer links and at the secretariat level and have exchanged MOUs to this effect. They have also launched a collaborative information programme that is highlighted by a joint convention web-site. Some of these conventions are also beginning to push for collaborations that extend beyond the issue of biodiversity. The Ramsar Convention, for example, has recognized the impact of wetlands on climate change, land degradation, and desertification and has submitted official conference documents focusing on these policy and scientific linkages to the relevant decision-making forums and COPs. Ramsar has also taken steps to increase communication and the exchange of information between itself and the Desertification and Climate Convention Secretariats. As one of the more mature conventions CITES represents a useful example in the promotion of synergies and coordination, and greater cooperation with technical partners such as IUCN, WCMC, TRAFFIC.
7. The recognition of the inextricable link between climate change, ozone depletion, and the Kyoto Protocol's regulation of HFC has provided the impetus for the Climate and Ozone Conventions to initiate formal cooperation. In 1998 at the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP4) the Climate Change Convention requested submissions by Parties and Observers on "ways and means" of reducing the use of HFCs and PFCs.<sup>4</sup> The requested submissions were compiled and considered at SBSTA 11 in October/November 1999. These issues were considered only at the preliminary level as many parties felt that more scientific inputs and a much deeper level of examination of the issues were required. The decision was made, therefore, to postpone close examination until SBSTA 14 in 2001.<sup>5</sup> In 1999 both conventions also endorsed the convening of a joint workshop between their scientific assessment bodies; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Technological and Economic Assessment Panel on Ozone Depletion. The workshop took place in 1999 in Petten, the Netherlands. This focused mainly on an exploration of the technical options for limiting the use of HFC and PFC, and less at the overall net effect of the impact on climate or ozone depletion.
8. The RIO agreements, UNFCCC, UNFCCD, and the CBD have formulated and exchanged MOUs.

### **Scientific, Technological and Economic Assessment**

9. Scientific, technological and economic assessments are indispensable tools for environmental policy making. With increasing pressures on the environment from

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<sup>4</sup> UNFCCC Decision 13/CP.4. A similar decision was taken within the framework of the Montreal Protocol, Decision X/16.

<sup>5</sup> UNFCCC Decision 17/CP.5

globalization, technological change, and population, greater consideration is being given to the need to examine the inter-linkages between sectors, eco-systems and environmental problems. This has led to the recognition of the need for integrated assessments.

10. The World Bank, UNEP and NASA, with the cooperation with outside experts, produced a report in 1998 called "Protecting our Planet Securing Our Future". The impetus for this report, was the realization that the scientific community, governments, and secretariats of MEAs all tend to view problems associated with climate change, biodiversity, land degradation, desertification, ozone depletion, fresh and marine water degradation, deforestation, and persistent organic pollutants in relative isolation. This report highlighted a number of scientific and policy linkages among these issue areas and illustrated their combined influence on the potential to meet basic human needs.
11. In 1995 the UNEP Governing Council at its 18<sup>th</sup> Session addressed the need to create an outlook on the state of the global environment which also considered socio-economic, developmental and the political institutional nexus. In the 1997, UNEP in cooperation with a number of leading environmental think tanks and experts produced the first comprehensive report focusing on this outlook. The "Global Environmental Outlook" offered a cross-sectoral analysis of the core concerns, identified environmental trends, and took account of regional concerns and perspectives. A second report, GEO 2000 was released two years later and a third is under preparation and is expected in 2002.
12. The first attempt at a fully integrated scientific assessment will be undertaken by the Millenium Eco-system Assessment (MA). This assessment is a collaborative effort between agencies and is financed through the GEF, the UN Foundation, and other sources. The MA is expected to set baselines on the state of ecosystems and the estimated total goods and services they provide. A major integrated part of the study will be to establish the impacts of biophysical changes on ecosystems. Finally, the MA will conduct a number of regional case studies and models in order to provide policy makers with better knowledge of how the assessment can be interpreted at national decision making levels.

### **Regional/Sub-regional Levels**

13. Regional and sub-regional institutions are important for taking global environmental issues and refocusing them into priorities and manageable agendas for national governments. 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 effective. A number of environmental agreements and action plans which exist at the regional level also raise the importance of creating better coordination among regional instruments. Work in

this area has been carried out mostly by UN Regional Commissions and by the UNEP Regional Seas Programme. The Regional Seas Programme has provided a particularly effective forum through which to share regional experience on protecting marine resources, bio-diversity, and ecosystem level threats. The United Nations University has also convened an Informal Regional Consultation on the Synergies and Coordination between MEAs that examined how regional frameworks and modalities could be developed to encourage the use of inter-linkages approaches at the level of national implementation.

14. The 1997 Special Session of the General Assembly to Review and Appraise the Progress on *Agenda 21* recognized the value of a regional approach to sustainable development. As a result, the Commission for Sustainable Development was called upon to increase its cooperation with regional organizations and UN Regional Commissions in order to promote the regional implementation of *Agenda 21*. As a result, DESA convened a number of consultative meetings among regional institutions to examine trends and practices in regional cooperation and how to prioritize the CSD's work on implementing *Agenda 21* through regional cooperation.

### **Information Harmonization**

15. One of the most practical opportunities for creating synergies and coordination among environmental instruments is through the harmonization of methodologies, procedures, and formats for gathering and analyzing information required by conferences of the parties. A feasibility study focusing on how this might be achieved was carried out by the World Conservation and Monitoring Centre in 1998, using the bio-diversity related conventions as an example. The study demonstrated that by creating modular approaches, standards for data collection, and through synchronizing the timing of reporting, the information needs of several conventions could be satisfied within a single system. Ways and means of developing an actual joint information system for the biodiversity conventions is currently underway by the WCMC, which is now a body within UNEP.

### **Finance Mechanisms**

16. Finance mechanisms may also play a significant role in working towards sustainable development. Yet, with funding levels steadily declining the need to develop innovative ways in which existing funds can be made to go further, and through which additional funds can be located, will remain a critical. The more effective use of synergies represents one possible method of using existing funds more efficiently. Existing funds could be focused upon projects that have multiple benefits and longer-term effects. It must be noted, however, that the potential gains to be made from a more synergistic approach to environmental management must not become an excuse to reduce funding when the need for financing sustainable development is at its greatest.

17. The Global Environmental Facility, which funds the ozone, biodiversity and climate change regimes is the foremost example of an inter-linked approach to financing. The GEF could serve as a model for future coordination of financing to international environmental agreements. The GEF itself has recognized that finance issues are important in terms of promoting coherency between conventions and has devised new funding strategies with this in mind. GEF has also increasingly adopted an ecosystems approach to its work by financing programmes in areas such as agrobiodiversity, and synergy on carbon sequestration, water storage capacity, and soil diversity.
18. In 1999 the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Working Party on Development Co-operation and Environment, reviewed the implications for the development co-operation among the Conventions on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Desertification (UNCCD), and Biodiversity (UNCBD). The working group identified the unique requirements of each convention, the synergies between them, and the policy and operational implications for donors.

### **Non-Governmental Organizations**

19. The World Conservation Union (IUCN), in cooperation with regional and local partners, has conducted a series of Global Biodiversity Forums (GBF) that have contributed to an exploration of the connections between the CBD and other convention subjects.
20. The World Resource Institute (WRI) in a joint effort with the World Bank, UNDP, and UNEP prepared a pilot study of the Global Ecosystem called the "People and Ecosystems: The Fraying Web of Life". This report formed the basis for the first integrated ecosystem assessment (the Millennium Eco-System Assessment) which will try to determine the carrying capacity of earth's ecosystems that continue to sustain humankind.

### **Prospectus for Future Considerations**

21. At present, inter-linkages remains complex and to a certain extent abstract, for the most part, understood only in terms of a broad overarching principle to create more efficient sustainable development systems. Work is required to develop a greater level of understanding at the level of practical implementation. Such an understanding could be fostered with more research and comprehensive case studies that would provide concrete examples of how an inter-linkages principles could be operationalized at the policy and working levels.
22. More research and understanding is required to create better systems and inter-sectoral models based on the eco-systems approach to sustainable development issues.
23. There are a number inter-MEAs issues that need require urgent address by governments. The foremost being the inter-linkages between climate change and

stratospheric ozone depletion which are still not widely realized by the public or many governments. The hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica continues to expand and has reached a record size of 28.3 million square kilometers in September 2000. The growth of the hole is caused by concentrations of ozone depleting substances that were released decades ago, but remain in the atmosphere over long periods of time, but another contributing factor is the impact that climate change is having on the ozone layer's recovery and vice versa. The implications of climate, forests, land use and land use change is another important issues that need to be addressed more synergistically between MEAs.

24. National planning processes for the implementation of MEAs should be mainstreamed into national development activities, taking into account interrelationships among MEAs. In recipient countries, this will help ensure that donor activities reflect national priorities.
25. National governments, with the support MEA secretariats, should initiate efforts to identify synergies and facilitate collaboration between MEAs. Capacity building at the national level, carried out by international institutions, should promote awareness of any specific inter linkages between MEAs (see capacity building, section iii below). The promotion of synergy between national government activities and policies relating to MEAs should be based on a bottom up approach, moving from the local, to the national and the regional levels.
26. When related MEAs are being negotiated or renegotiated, a group of technical and legal experts established at the global level could usefully help to harmonise the use of terms, or encourage a cross-fertilisation of ideas, between negotiating groups.
27. Collaboration between MEA secretariats has occurred informally on a case-by-case basis. Formal agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding between MEA secretariats may not be particularly useful or necessary in promoting these exchanges. UNEP should, using existing structures, provide a forum for MEA secretariats at both the regional and global level, to identify areas for collaboration on concrete and specific activities such as information exchange, common research agendas, or the streamlining of national communications reports. Where such collaboration requires additional resources or the endorsement of governments, the UNEP Executive Director should draw this need to the attention of relevant international institutions.
28. Capacity building should be thematic and institutional. A thematic approach is necessary for ensuring that synergies that exist in particular areas – such as the cluster of MEAs that relate to energy, or the cluster that relates to biodiversity protection -- are identified and utilised. An institutional approach is necessary to ensure that knowledge and capacity are sustained.
29. Capacity building on MEAs should be forward looking, and should seek to raise awareness of upcoming MEA negotiations, and assist national governments to

identify interlinkages between these new initiatives and existing MEAs. National governments could examine (if they have not already done so) the potential benefits of having a national focal point responsible for more than one MEA, and encourage collaboration with focal points for related issues at national and regional levels.

30. International institutions should support regional inter linkages between national and regional focal points. International institutions should build their own capacity to provide training and assistance on the interrelationships between MEAs.
31. Since financial mechanisms play such a key role in achieving the goals of sustainable development a close examination current financial mechanisms, existing arrangements and donor institutions should be conducted to encourage and support project that promote synergies. Opportunities should also be explored of how common lending criteria, reporting and policies between multilateral and bilateral donor agencies could be developed. At the national level capacity needs to be strengthened to better promote integrated and better co-ordinated policy making processes and synergistic implementation of environmental and sustainable development agreements innovative and alternative financing methods at national and local levels for projects that have multiple or synergistic benefits should also be explored.