



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM INTER-LINKAGES --
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SYNERGIES
AND COORDINATION BETWEEN MULTILATERAL
ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS
WEDNESDAY, 14 JULY 1999**

On the opening day of the International Conference on Synergies and Coordination between Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), participants met in Plenary sessions to hear opening remarks and keynote addresses, introductions to the conference working group themes, and a panel discussion among heads of MEA secretariats and other high-level officials.

OPENING PLENARY

Motoyuki Suzuki, Vice Rector, United Nations University (UNU), welcomed participants to the conference. Delivering a statement on behalf of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, he noted that the international community is learning to appreciate the value and vulnerability of the global environment and is increasingly aware that sustainable development requires a holistic understanding of global environmental change. He said a major challenge for policy makers is to develop an integrated approach to addressing the synergies between the natural environment and to enable more effective policy coordination. He welcomed the conference as a timely initiative, hoping that it would lead to more consistent environmental policies and contribute to preservation of this fragile planet.

Kiyotaka Akasasa, Deputy Director-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, on behalf of Keizo Obuchi, Prime Minister of Japan, noted growing threats to human survival from global environmental threats such as climate change, biodiversity loss and ozone depletion. He emphasized that individual nations cannot solve these problems alone. He highlighted Japan's prioritization of joint international efforts, citing its hosting of the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, support for environmental organizations such as UNEP, and expanded ODA to developing countries, including its new sustainable development initiative. He stated that, since global problems ignore national borders and sovereignty, a new perspective that focuses on human security rather than national security is required. Noting existing MEAs as well as those under negotiation on hazardous chemicals and biosafety, he called for deepened cooperation among Parties, convention secretariats and other relevant actors in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency in pursuit of sustainable development.

J.A. van Ginkel, Rector of UNU, emphasized that environmental protection is one of the most pressing global issues facing humanity and requires concerted international cooperation. He recalled that at their recent meeting in Cologne, the G-8 countries' heads of State urged greater cooperation and policy coherence among international financial, economic, labor and environmental organizations and agreed that environmental considerations should be fully taken into account in the upcoming round of WTO negotiations. He emphasized that the aim of this conference is to explore the potential for a more integrated approach to MEA negotiations and environmental management, and proposed to host a similar conference next year. He highlighted several important initiatives, including the recent World Bank/NASA/UNEP report "Protecting Our Planet, Securing Our Future," the UNEP/World Conservation

Monitoring Centre (WCMC) Feasibility Study for Information Management Infrastructure, and the UN Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements.

Jorge Illueca, Assistant Executive Director, UNEP Division of Environment Conventions, on behalf of Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director, UNEP, stressed that time is of the essence in addressing the issue of global inter-linkages, and underscored the need to identify immediate, cost-effective, prudent steps, targeting the most severe environmental threats. He said that, due to imperfect knowledge of the consequences of global environmental linkages, adaptive management and the precautionary principle should be exercised, and collaboration and coordination at the scientific, policy, programmatic, legal and participatory levels should be undertaken. He outlined UNEP's efforts to promote coordination and collaboration among MEAs, including plans to consult regularly with the bureaus of the MEA Conferences of Parties (COPs) and with the heads of secretariats of global and regional conventions. He drew attention to a recent meeting in The Hague, attended by representatives of 22 regional and global conventions, to address issues of mutual support and collaboration. He emphasized that enhancing synergies between MEAs is central to UNEP's core objective of sustainability.

Akiko Domoto, President, GLOBE Japan, noted that rapid globalization and changes in social values in the past century have decreased international organizations' ability to address environmental and social problems. She stressed the need for a holistic approach to address the numerous gaps and overlaps in efforts to respond to these problems, and observed that, since individual MEA secretariats cannot do this alone, a specific institution is required to examine synergies between them. She said the initial challenge is to link environmental issues from scientific perspectives, and stressed that science must examine the combined impacts of global environmental problems. She also emphasized the importance of incorporating efforts to address social problems, particularly poverty and gender inequality, into environmental policies. She underscored the need for leadership by heads of national governments and for partnerships between international institutions, governments, NGOs and other actors to restore the earth to health, and expressed hope that this conference would take a major step forward in this regard.

Teodoro Bustamante, on behalf of Yolanda Kakabadse, Minister of Environment of Ecuador, advocated separating analyses of MEA negotiations and activities from their actual impacts on the ground, stressing that discussion of synergies should focus on the tangible impacts of MEAs and not necessarily on improving their administrative work. He noted developing countries' lack of capacity to adequately represent themselves on a multiplicity of issues in various fora, and suggested that the international governance structure build on national capacity. He also addressed the need for accountability at the institutional level and in monitoring implementation activities at the national level. He underscored the importance of discussing environmental issues within a sustainable development framework and linking the discussion of MEA synergies with actors at the national level.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKING GROUP THEMES

SCIENTIFIC MECHANISMS: Robert Watson, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), underscored the need to understand the scientific linkages among MEAs and

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identify win-win outcomes based on this understanding. Warning against addressing each issue in isolation, he highlighted the inter-linkages that have already been identified, particularly those relating to climate change, ozone depletion, forestry and water-related regimes. Noting the pressing nature of environmental issues, he said policy makers cannot wait for perfect knowledge before acting.

SYNERGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

Salvano Briceño, former Deputy, Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) and Principal Officer, Framework Convention Climate Change (FCCC), highlighted several initiatives to create synergies between the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), FCCC and CCD on: scientific and technical issues; education, training and awareness; information systems; financial mechanisms; national reporting; policy advice, principles, procedures and legal aspects; and guidance to MEA COPs and their subsidiary bodies. He outlined obstacles to forging such synergies, including: a lack of organizational development awareness in international organizations; fragmented and specialized approaches; short-sighted political objectives of government agencies; competition for international funds; and competition at the national level. To address these obstacles, he recommended improving organizational capabilities, adopting a trial-and-error approach to forging synergies, focusing on the national and local levels, and formulating an ethical framework for sustainable development.

HARMONIZATION OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION EXCHANGES:

Mark Collins, WCMC, highlighted the need for efficient and effective information management for implementation of relevant environmental treaties. He discussed possible solutions to address overlaps and inconsistencies in information and indicators for MEAs. He said this working group's objective was to examine ways of harmonizing methodologies, procedures and formats for the collection and analysis of information required of Parties to MEAs.

FINANCE: Remy Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), provided an overview of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). He noted that the DAC focuses on general socio-economic considerations and has yet to integrate specific MEA objectives. He stressed DAC members' responsibility for influencing their governments' policies impacting sustainable development in developing countries. He emphasized demand-driven development assistance and general capacity building over creation of specialized "islands" of capacity. His recommendations for donors included harmonizing donor reporting, reviewing ongoing projects to identify synergies, and reviewing environmental impact assessment procedures for bilateral assistance to ensure consistency with MEA objectives.

ISSUE MANAGEMENT: Brett Orlando, Climate Change Programme Officer, IUCN, introduced the concept of issue management and its application to MEAs. He described issue management as a system that aims to promote wider, more active cooperation on an issue area by establishing, at the UN inter-agency level, a planning framework and priority-setting agenda. He noted that this working group would attempt to develop a set of guiding principles to assist implementation of issue management among MEA secretariats and relevant organizations.

PANEL DISCUSSION

J.A. van Ginkel, Rector of UNU, introduced the panel and posed three questions for discussion: what is the real problem for promoting inter-linkages; what are the expectations for working group discussions; and is regionalization a solution?

Lars Nordberg, Executive Secretary, Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution Secretariat (LRTAP), noted a significant problem in regard to air pollution, where some regions are actively reducing sulfur emissions while emissions in other regions are expected to increase substantially. He emphasized the utility of regional action and the need to support and coordinate activities and programmes in the latter regions.

Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director, stressed that the lack of human resources in developing countries is a significant obstacle to effective convention implementation. He noted UNEP's efforts to convene meetings to assist African delegates in preparing for MEA negotiations. In capacity building efforts, he suggested grouping

conventions with similar substantive areas, such as those relating to biodiversity or chemicals. He recommended examining global problems within the context of their regional impacts, and suggested that discussions on climate change and desertification begin addressing possible regional impacts and adaptation measures.

Wakako Hironaka, Member, House of Councilors, Japan, highlighted difficulties in implementing the multiplicity of international environmental agreements in Japan, including the relative weakness of the environment ministry in relation to the finance ministry and the precedence of financial concerns given the current economic crisis. She emphasized the importance of public support and understanding of global environmental issues in implementing MEAs, and called on international organizations and academics to influence politicians at national and international levels to pursue environmental policies.

Kiyotaka Akasaka, Deputy Director-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, highlighted obstacles to implementing the numerous MEAs, such as insufficient national capacity and limited financial resources. He questioned whether the MEA secretariats should be involved in operative activities given overlaps among them in technical cooperation and capacity building. He also noted the fleeting interest of the public, business and governments in specific environmental issues as an obstacle and suggested using the upcoming Rio+10 review to galvanize international momentum to address urgent environmental problems. He observed that regionalization could lead to greater bureaucracy and suggested that global issues may be more efficiently addressed by coordinated, centralized approaches.

Michael Graber, Deputy Executive Secretary, Montreal Protocol, addressed problems in coordination and synergies among MEAs. He noted that the scientific bodies of the Montreal Protocol and Kyoto Protocol had cooperated to identify solutions to the problem of hydrofluorocarbons. He illustrated other problems, such as substances and their definitions that are dealt with by both the Montreal Protocol and other MEAs, particularly the International Plant Protection Convention and the International Customs Code.

Willem Wijnstekers, Executive Secretary, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), illustrated various problems that the international community is facing, particularly the lack of national and international coordination for development of new conventions and of national legislation to implement existing conventions. Regarding regional cooperation, he emphasized that being a part of UNEP, CITES can utilize UNEP's regional offices to undertake regional cooperation activities such as training, seminars and increasing the membership of the convention.

Delmar Blasco, Executive Secretary, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, stated that the main challenge faced by environmental conventions is mainstreaming their work into the development process, which is necessary for MEAs to make a significant contribution to sustainable development. He said the issue management approach, which would involve organizations inside and outside the UN system, could help integrate environment and development processes. He underscored the need for MEAs to maintain their international focus while recognizing that implementation must occur at regional, national and local levels.

In the ensuing discussion, participants raised a number of issues from the floor, including: the risk that greater coordination and cooperation would increase bureaucracy and add another level of decision-making that would have little impact at the grassroots level; the need for capacity building to enable developing countries' effective participation in MEA negotiations; and the desirability of regionalization. Töpfer emphasized the need for MEA negotiators to be well-informed and prepared. He stressed the importance of issue management, and informed delegates that recommendations contained in the Report of the UN Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, including a recommendation to establish an Environmental Management Group, are likely to be adopted by the UN General Assembly in the near future. Blasco stated that regionalization may be beneficial in specific cases, but noted that, in the case of Ramsar, a river basin approach is more suitable. Wijnstekers and van Ginkel underscored the need for funding to support developing country participation in MEAs.