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SUMMARY REPORT OF INTER-LINKAGES – INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SYNERGIES AND COORDINATION BETWEEN MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS 14-16 JULY 1999

Inter-Linkages -- the International Conference on Synergies and Coordination between Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) took place from 14-16 July 1999 at the United Nations University (UNU) Centre in Tokyo, Japan. The conference, organized by UNU in cooperation with the Global Environment Information Centre (GEIC), the UNU Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU/IAS) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), was attended by approximately 300 participants, including representatives of MEA secretariats, governments, the academic and scientific community, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

The UNU and its partners convened the conference to assist in the development of a synergistic and coordinated approach to environmental policy making that takes into account existing interlinkages between environmental issues. The objectives of the conference were to: create awareness at the public, governmental and intergovernmental levels of the importance of synergies and coordination between MEAs; survey existing initiatives; foster discussion and interaction among international institutions, scholars and other relevant stakeholders who can cooperate to identify and examine opportunities; and identify concrete mechanisms, next steps and feasible win-win paths forward on this important issue. The conference's main outcome was a series of recommendations on the promotion of inter-linkages between MEAs in the areas of harmonization of information systems and information exchanges, finance, issue management, scientific mechanisms, and synergies for sustainable development.

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE

On the opening day of the conference, participants convened in a Plenary session to hear keynote addresses and a panel discussion among heads of MEA secretariats and other high-level officials on promoting inter-linkages between MEAs. The conference devoted most of its time to working group discussions on five issues: harmonization of information systems and information exchanges, finance, issue management, scientific mechanisms, and synergies for sustainable development.

The working groups produced recommendations based on these discussions, which were presented and discussed in a closing Plenary. The following is a summary of the proceedings of the conference, with an emphasis on the recommendations resulting from the working groups' discussions.

OPENING PLENARY

Motoyuki Suzuki, Vice Rector of 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 the preservation of this fragile planet.

Kiyotaka Akasasa, Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, on behalf of Keizo Obuchi, Prime Minister of Japan, noted growing threats to human survival from global environmental problems 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 official development assistance (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 to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the 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 said it requires concerted international cooperation. He recalled that, at their recent meeting in Cologne, Germany, 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 World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations. He emphasized that this Inter-Linkages Conference would aim to explore the potential for a more integrated approach to MEA negotiations and environmental management. He highlighted several important initiatives to this end, including the recent World Bank/UNEP/U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration 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. He proposed to host a follow-up conference on promoting inter-linkages next year.

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Jorge Illueca, Assistant Executive Director of UNEP's Division of Environment Conventions, on behalf of Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director, 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 effects of interactions between global environmental problems, 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, the Netherlands, 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 of 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 Bustamente, on behalf of Yolanda Kakabadse, Minister of Environment of Ecuador, suggested distinguishing between analyses of MEA negotiations and activities and 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 upon national capacity. He also addressed the need for accountability at the institutional level and for 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.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Following these opening remarks, J.A. van Ginkel, Rector of UNU, introduced the panel of MEA secretariat heads and other high-level officials and urged them to address the underlying problems in promoting inter-linkages and whether regionalization offers a solution to these problems.

Lars Nordberg, Executive Secretary of the 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 those regions with increasing emissions.

Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP, 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 clustering 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 of the House of Councilors of 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 Akasasa, Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 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 between them in technical cooperation and capacity building. He also noted that fleeting public, business and government interest in specific environmental issues presents an obstacle and suggested using the upcoming Rio+10 review to galvanize international momentum to address urgent environmental problems. He observed that regionalization could create more bureaucracy and suggested that global issues may be more efficiently addressed by coordinated, centralized approaches.

Michael Graber, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Secretariat for the Vienna Convention and the 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 (HFCs), however, he highlighted conflicting treatment of this and other substances and their definitions by the Montreal Protocol and other MEAs, particularly the International Plant Protection Convention and the International Customs Code.

Willem Wijnstekers, Executive Secretary of the Secretariat for the 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, as 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 of the Secretariat for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, stated that the main challenge faced by environmental conventions is mainstreaming their work into the development process, which is necessary if MEAs are to make a significant contribution to sustainable development. He said the issue management approach could improve coordination and synergies between MEAs and help to integrate environment and development processes by facilitating cooperation between organizations inside and outside the UN system on cross-cutting issues. 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 in the audience raised a number of issues, including: the risk that greater coordination and cooperation could 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. In response, 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 one 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 MEA negotiations.

WORKING GROUPS

Five working groups met throughout the day on Thursday, 15 July and on Friday morning, 16 July. The reports of their findings and recommendations, as summarized below, were presented to the Plenary on Friday afternoon.

HARMONIZATION OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION EXCHANGES: This working group, chaired by Mark Collins, Chief Executive of the WCMC, was mandated to: identify ways of improving the practical sharing of data sets at the international institutional level; examine methods of harmonizing reporting, planning, strategies/action programmes and information systems for conventions; and determine ways to improve collection, organization and dissemination of information relevant to each convention process.

The report emerging from the working group's discussions identifies existing problems and their effects on implementation of MEAs and makes recommendations on sharing information internationally, harmonizing national reporting, improving data collection, improving public information, and building capacity.

Sharing Information Internationally: The report notes the potential usefulness of meetings between information officers from MEA secretariats and relevant supporting organizations (including knowledge brokers such as UNEP, WCMC, IPCC, GEIC and IISD) to discuss strategies for synergy, including a common entry point via the World Wide Web for all MEAs. The report recommends that UNEP and associated service providers be encouraged to support and facilitate this dialogue and collaborate widely in doing so. It recommends the creation of a harmonized convention information resource with the following characteristics: improved access to information in national reports; simplification of standard reports such as overviews on the implementation of each convention; improved feedback to Parties on implementation; opportunities to develop additional reports; provisions to conduct electronic searches while allowing users to tailor information retrieval to their needs; and opportunities to archive documents and retain easy access. The report recommends that this information resource should seek to: harmonize document cover sheets; adopt a standard thesaurus for keywords and searching; harmonize Web sites; develop meta-databases listing available information sets; and develop an inter-convention Web site and search engine, clearly highlighting interlinkages. The report further recommends the establishment of a "lessons learned network" to encourage sharing of experience from beneficial case studies. These networks should endeavor to select lessons learned from existing secretariat documents, develop Web site prototypes and establish links to other lessons learned facilities and MEA clearinghouses.

Harmonizing National Reporting: The report recommends streamlining national reporting by undertaking efforts to: review and clarify the reporting requirements of each MEA; prepare and test an integrated handbook of modular national reporting; and build the capacity of national reporting teams. It recommends that UNU carry out a pilot study and that an analysis of information needs in the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) be undertaken.

Improving Data Collection: The report notes that there is a need to develop standards for data management, such as thesauri, methodologies and definitions. To this end, the report recommends: requesting UNEP/INFOTERRA to review its thesauri and keyword databases against the requirements of MEAs; extending thesauri and keyword databases as required; and delivering those standards to MEA secretariats and national focal points. The report further recommends improving access to remotely sensed data sets for MEA reporting and assessment by: reviewing the information needs of MEAs; identifying relevant remotely sensed data sets; establishing routine access for national focal points; providing training as needed; and establishing verification and "ground-truth" methodologies at the national level. The report also calls for the mobilization of multilateral development banks' information resources by reviewing the information needs of national focal points of MEAs, consulting development banks to identify the existence of relevant data and modalities for access and establishing data access agreements.

Improving Public Information: The report recommends developing MEA awareness programmes by producing educational materials, exploring appropriate mechanisms for efficient information dissemination and paying attention to language problems. It further recommends using concrete examples of environmental data or analyses that appeal directly to the public, such as personal CO_2 output tables.

Capacity Building: The report highlights the need to carry out a global assessment of capacity to implement MEAs synergistically. It suggests developing a basic requirement overview and assessment questionnaire and testing it in pilot countries, analyzing the results to identify shared needs, priorities and success criteria and implementing it through mirrored decisions in MEAs. It recommends the following actions regarding information capacity building for the implementation of MEAs in developing countries: developing and strengthening existing information exchange networks; preparing and disseminating synthesized information notes; organizing capacity building workshops; and developing a resource of training materials and effective applications, focusing on national core teams.

General Recommendations: The working group's report also contains a number of general recommendations to improve information harmonization and exchange. In particular, it calls for: serious attention to information management in MEAs; an appraisal of the coverage of MEAs and action to fill gaps and reduce duplication; and inclusion of harmonization and rationalization of information systems on the agendas of all MEA COPs. The report underscores the importance of establishing a target date for real advances in information support to environmental assessment and planning and identifies a number of opportunities that should be taken advantage of, including: the Special Session of the UN General Assembly to review implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in September 1999; the World Bank Global Knowledge Conference in 2000; the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in 2001, which will review Chapter 40 of Agenda 21 on information for decision makers; and Rio+10 in 2002. It recommends that a needs assessment be completed and information sources and gaps be identified as input into the state of the world report to be prepared for Rio+15

FINANCE: This working group, chaired by Remy Paris, Administrator of the Development and Cooperation Directorate of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), addressed the following: the general context for identifying and supporting synergies to implement MEA provisions; opportunities and needs to develop synergies at the national level; the role of external actors, such as multilateral and bilateral financing bodies, in promoting synergies through resource mobilization; and innovative financing methods. The report of the working group included a number of recommendations on these themes.

General Context: The report's recommendations on the overarching issue of financing synergies to implement MEAs address a number of points. The report stresses that synergies among MEAs should be pursued only where significant benefit is identified, activities to be financed must be demand-driven, and capacity to develop projects is required at all levels, most critically at the local and national levels. It emphasizes the importance of promoting synergies between MEA commitments and socio-economic development priorities, such as poverty reduction, at local, national and regional levels. It further stresses that, to be sustainable, implementation of MEAs in developing countries and countries with economies in transition must reinforce and complement socio-economic development objectives. The report recognizes the need to build the capacity of developing country negotiators to participate effectively in MEA negotiations. It emphasizes that financial mechanisms under MEAs need to be distinguished from development assistance, as the former arise from convention commitments under the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Also, consideration should continue to be given to enhancing the effectiveness of the conventions' financing mechanisms and creating synergies where possible. The report states that multilateral development banks and development cooperation agencies' policies and operations should embody the general principles of environmental law. The report stresses the need to harmonize host and donor priorities in project preparation and design. It further identifies the complexity of existing procedures for disbursement of multilateral and bilateral assistance and underscores the need to improve the efficiency of the process at the approval and disbursement stages.

National Synergies: Regarding synergies at the national level, the working group's report recommends that MEA focal points increase their efforts to engage relevant economic and financial planning authorities to identify how MEA commitments fit into national development frameworks, and that resources be earmarked specifically for this coordination work. It identifies several priorities for capacity building, including to: understand and identify synergies for relevant MEAs; increase awareness of existing funding resources and means to access them; assess, monitor and report on progress made in implementing MEAs, including efforts by local actors and small- and medium-sized enterprises; and learn and apply evaluation and valuation methods as well as environmental impact assessments.

External Actors: On the role of external actors, such as multilateral and bilateral financing bodies, the report calls for increased dialogue between financial institutions and MEA secretariats to promote synergies. It notes that common lending criteria and policies among multilateral and bilateral funding agencies are unlikely to be feasible at this time. It recommends that multilateral and development cooperation agencies mainstream MEA objectives into their sectoral policies and operations and that MEA decision-making processes support and facilitate long- and medium-term programming for financial assistance. The report stresses the importance of reliable statistical information on donor funding and the need to identify gaps in the allocation of financial resources to support convention implementation. It notes that incremental costs are difficult to operationalize and can undermine the principle of ownership. It highlights the potential usefulness of systematic efforts to collect case study material documenting the scope for synergies between MEA objectives and broader sustainable development priorities. The report also identifies several principles that promote synergistic projects, including: flexible programme-based approaches with long-term funding time-frames, which are preferable to project-based approaches; decentralized management incorporating democratic governance and ownership; local capacity building; resource flows that leverage additional local resources; greater use of qualitative criteria in project evaluations; and greater flexibility in the criteria for allocating resources for MEA implementation.

Innovative Financing: In the area of innovative financing, the report recommends considering an assessment of the adequacy of existing financial mechanisms and, in the long term, the possible need for new ones. It notes that, provided they are structured properly and take development objectives into account, national environmental funds and the proposed Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol can play a positive role in developing synergistic projects. It calls for special efforts to promote public-private partnerships at the local level to develop synergies, and stresses that incentive-based instruments at the national level to internalize environmental externalities may help make available additional fiscal resources to realize MEA objectives and commitments.

ISSUE MANAGEMENT: This working group, co-chaired by Brett Orlando, IUCN Climate Change Programme Officer, and Salvano Briceño, former Deputy Executive Secretary of the CCD and Principle Officer of the FCCC, had the following terms of reference: to determine the appropriateness of the issue management approach as a specific way to address problems that cut across MEAs and that may require inter-MEA action; to discuss new ways and methods for developing synergies around specific issues that can lead to more permanent and far-reaching synergies; to examine past and ongoing examples of issue management and identify lessons learned from these experiences; to identify how issue management might function practically and contribute to improving existing mechanisms between the conventions and organizations; and to decide on a set of guiding principles that would assist the execution of issue management between MEA secretariats and organizations.

General Points: The working group's report describes issue management as a practical method for coordinating activities of related MEAs on cross-cutting issues that require an integrated, systematic approach. It states that issue management should aim to involve intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to this end. It notes that, with regard to issue management, the UN Secretary-General's report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme For Reform" proposes the creation of task forces or working parties related to specific issues of concern, and that such task forces should work on an *ad hoc* basis to, *inter alia*, inform and consult with other participants on proposed new initiatives; contribute to a planning framework on the range of activities being undertaken on a specific issue; and develop an agreed set of priorities for the issue so participating organizations can use their respective capacities and resources more effectively.

Summary of the Discussion: The working group's report notes that participants began by discussing the usefulness of applying the issue management approach to developing synergies among MEAs and agreed to focus on land use management as a cross-cutting example to test and evaluate this approach. On this issue, the report notes that the group identified: relevant MEAs and other main actors; a set of priorities that could be common to all relevant MEAs; functional areas of work in which cooperation and coordination could occur; and the relevant bodies and levels for decision making that could apply to land use management.

The main actors identified in the report include various conventions, such as the FCCC, CBD, CCD, Ramsar, CITES, Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), World Heritage Convention and International Tropical Timber Agreement, as well as other relevant agen-

cies and organizations, including UNEP, UNDP, CSD, Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, UN Food and Agriculture Organization, World Meteorological Organization, World Bank, Global Environment Facility (GEF), WTO and IUCN. The report also identifies the "entry point" for each relevant actor in terms of land use management, including, for example, carbon sequestration, energy efficiency and development and emissions reduction and stabilization for the FCCC and habitat and species conservation and sustainable land use for the CBD. It notes that the group identified a clear set of priorities that could be common to all MEAs involved in land use management, including: poverty alleviation; habitat and species conservation; food security; renewable energy/efficiency; and the use of the Kyoto Protocol's flexibility mechanisms. Functional areas in which cooperation and coordination could occur include research and information, policy and planning, implementation, capacity building, evaluation and financing. Relevant decision making bodies and other stakeholders that could facilitate implementation of the process include COPs, MEAs' subsidiary and technical bodies, national focal points and civil society and NGOs.

Recommendations: The report notes that the working group developed a set of recommendations based on their experience in applying the issue management approach to land use management, including tentative guidelines and related actions that could be applied to other cross-cutting issues. It recommends that the UNU continue work on this issue, and in particular, that it develop case studies for applying issue management to cross-cutting issues. These case studies could identify: potentially conflicting policies and measures for each existing MEA as well as for future agreements and decisions by the relevant COPs; the relevant provisions, policies and practices of each MEA that have either a positive or negative impact on other relevant MEAs' objectives; impacts of other international processes, such as the upcoming WTO Millennium Round, on MEAs' objectives as well as possible common approaches to address them; and the areas in which MEA implementation could be enhanced by integrating efforts and developing synergies.

The report identifies other cross-cutting issues for which the issue management approach may facilitate the development of synergies among the MEAs, including, *inter alia*: environmentally sound technology transfer and development; renewable energy and energy efficiency; wetland, marine and coastal management; protected areas management; education and capacity building; national reporting and planning; trade and investment; human settlements; environmental impact assessment and risk assessment; dispute settlement and other legal procedures and principles; tourism; and participatory approaches in policy and decision making.

The report also recommends further development of the concept of issue management as a tool to enhance and develop synergies between the MEAs, including consideration of the relative timing of MEAs' work programmes. It highlights interest in examining how to operationalize the issue management concept, including methodologies for goal-setting and the establishment of benchmarks, accountability mechanisms and measurement indicators.

The report recommends that the work of UNU and its partner organizations should lead to a set of specific recommendations to be forwarded through appropriate channels to the relevant bodies, such as the MEA COPs and secretariats, the CSD and other relevant UN General Assembly bodies, and other intergovernmental fora undertaking negotiations on new issues.

SCIENTIFIC MECHANISMS: This working group, co-chaired by Robert Watson, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and Akiko Domoto, President of GLOBE Japan, had the following objectives: to review known scientific inter-linkages between environmental conventions; to discuss possible inter-linkages between environmental issues and ways of identifying them; and explore possible mechanisms to deal with these inter-linkages, including how their technical bodies could work in partnership with relevant organizations and processes.

The report contains recommendations in the following areas: mechanisms to identify and further examine key issues and gaps in scientific and policy inter-linkages; scientific capacity to address environmental issues in the development context; assessment processes; communications; and the precautionary principle. It notes that the working group's starting point was an evaluation of whether the right mechanisms exist to identify key issues and gaps in scientific, technical and policy inter-linkages among environmental issues or whether new mechanisms need to be developed. It indicates that, in addition to discussing the global conventions, the group recognized their relationship to other local and regional environmental issues and the need to place them within a development context.

Identification and Examination of Key Issues and Linkages: The report addresses mechanisms to identify and further examine key issues and gaps in scientific and policy inter-linkages, recognizing that there are both synergies and trade-offs. It recommends the establishment of an open-ended *ad hoc* panel comprised of scientific, technical and economic experts and policy makers that would identify and further examine key issues and linkages. It recommends that UNEP could convene such a panel, which should approach issues from an environmental perspective based on areas covered by conventions as well as from a regional and development perspective. The panel should be balanced in terms of geography and gender and should represent a broad range of stakeholders, including representatives of MEA secretariats and subsidiary bodies for scientific and technical advice, relevant agencies, environmental NGOs and the private sector, and scientific and technical experts. The report also notes that the panel's work should build on existing assessments and could provide direction for future assessments but should not itself produce assessments.

Scientific Capacity: The report advocates improved use of existing and long-term development of scientific and policy capacity to address environmental issues in the development context, with emphasis on the inter-linkages. It highlights the need for: enhanced inter-disciplinary and social science expertise; identification and networking of experts, particularly in developing countries; enhanced scientific and technical capacity building for negotiators, building on pilot efforts such as those undertaken by UNU/IAS and UNEP; long-term scientific and technical capacity building in developing countries to improve negotiations and implementation of conventions; improved dialogue between the scientific and policy communities to enhance mutual understanding of each others' needs; and development of regional research centers, building on initiatives such as the System for Analysis, Research and Training in Global Change (START).

Assessment Processes: The report suggests that, rather than conducting a special assessment for inter-linkages, individual thematic assessments such as for climate change, ozone or biodiversity should be undertaken to identify and highlight relevant linkages. For example, the IPCC could look at implications of climate change on biodiversity or desertification. Assessment summaries presented to policy makers should stress these key inter-linkages. The report further notes that regular international assessments only exist for climate change and ozone depletion but not for biodiversity or desertification. The report recommends coordination between assessments in order to avoid duplication of

effort. It states that assessments should be policy relevant but not policy prescriptive and should explain the implications of uncertainties for policy making. It also notes that global thematic assessments should draw upon and be complemented by regional or national assessments and that greater attention should be given to conducting regional and national assessments. It suggests that regional assessments be undertaken within the development context, recognizing the inter-linkages among environmental issues as well as between development needs and environmental issues.

Communications: The report recommends that the complexities of assessment results be conveyed to policy makers in easily understandable language that focuses on the information needed for policy formulation and highlights inter-linkages. It recommends improved communication of inter-linkages to different sectoral ministries as well as environmental ministries, possibly through inter-sectoral workshops. The report also recommends: translation of assessment information into different languages; enhanced utilization of Internet resources; outreach beyond convention participants through NGOs and the media; and awareness-raising for the general public regarding their vulnerability to and influence on environmental changes and their possible responses. It recommends that a body such as UNEP address the need to translate assessments into a suitable form for educational purposes and for the general public and that information be tailored to the target audience.

The Precautionary Principle: The report emphasizes the need to further examine the concept of the precautionary principle, noting that its interpretation and use varies in different circumstances. It notes that the key challenge is how to operationalize the precautionary principle. The report encourages research and notes that the International Council of Scientific Unions has already been encouraged to address the issue in one of its regular panels.

SYNERGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A number of experienced former officials or "wise persons" were requested to participate in this special working group, co-chaired by J.A. van Ginkel, Rector of the UNU, and Gary Sampson, Professor at the London School of Economics and former Director of the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment. Its terms of reference were to: review the system and process that has so far been established for the environment and sustainable development; explore this system's strengths and weaknesses and how potential inter-linkages can be used in the promotion of a sustainable system; explore the values, attitudes and practices that need to be encouraged or discouraged to build inter-linkages for sustainable development; consider the manner in which environmental treaties are negotiated and how this impacts the level of policy coherence, coordination and synergism within and between treaties and other multilateral regimes; and explore ways in which the process of treaty making can be improved to increase policy coherence, coordination and synergism.

The working group's report makes recommendations for action at the national, intergovernmental and inter-agency levels to address the following major functions carried out by international bodies related to MEAs: agenda-setting and development of rules and norms; information gathering and management and scientific, technological and economic assessment; capacity building and technical and financial support; and assessment of country performance, non-compliance response/dispute settlement and review of regime performance.

Agenda-Setting and Development of Rules and Norms: The report recommends that, at the national level, planning processes for MEA implementation be mainstreamed into national development activities, taking into account interrelationships among MEAs. It further recommends that: national governments, with the support of MEA secretariats, initiate efforts to identify synergies and facilitate collaboration between MEAs; international institutions build capacity at the national level to promote awareness of specific inter-linkages between MEAs; and the promotion of synergies between national government activities and policies relating to MEAs be based on a bottom-up approach, moving from the local to the national and regional levels. It stresses that the full and effective participation of national delegations at the regional and global level, particularly those from developing countries, is essential in promoting synergies and improving the quality of decision making.

At the intergovernmental level, the report suggests that initiatives to convene the presidents or other members of related MEA COP bureaus might be useful to resolve short-term problems, but notes that these would be of limited value for addressing long-term synergies, as the terms and mandates of these officers vary significantly from agreement to agreement. It further suggests that: existing intergovernmental fora at the regional level could be used to identify and realize synergies between MEAs and strengthen government involvement; a global-level group of technical and legal experts could help harmonize the use of terms or encourage cross-fertilization of ideas between negotiating groups when related MEAs are being negotiated; and the principle objective of efforts to promote synergies between MEAs should be the sharing of experiences.

At the inter-agency level, the report notes that collaboration between MEA secretariats has occurred informally on a case-by-case basis, although formal agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding between MEA secretariats may not be useful or necessary in promoting these exchanges. It states that UNEP should, using existing structures, provide a forum for MEA secretariats at both the regional and global levels to identify areas for collaboration on concrete and specific activities such as information exchange, common research agendas or the streamlining of national communications. Where such collaboration requires additional resources or the endorsement of governments, UNEP's Executive Director should bring this need to the attention of relevant international institutions.

Information Gathering and Management and Scientific, Technological and Economic Assessment: The report recommends promoting, at the intergovernmental level, complementarity in national reporting obligations and formats among MEAs where it results in efficiencies at the national or international level. It notes that the development of a common reporting system may require decisions to be taken by MEA governing bodies and will require additional financial and technical resources at the inter-agency level. It calls on: MEA governing bodies to seek to prioritize the research needs of each regime; national governments and international institutions to target resources to exploit synergies in areas where priorities for research coincide across different regimes; and each MEA to explore the potential for synergies across the networks of research institutions that support its activities. It notes that additional financial resources are needed to support these research activities and should be provided through existing financial institutions.

At the inter-agency level, the report recommends that, in the short term, technical bodies within each MEA identify appropriate technologies and practices taking into account their potential impacts across environmental sectors. Over the longer term, expert working groups organized on a sector-by-sector basis could carry out these tasks. The report notes that synergy could be promoted if assessments of risks and impacts carried out by independent expert bodies address interrelationships between the risks and impacts that each MEA attempts to avoid or reduce.

Capacity Building and Technical and Financial Support: The report emphasizes that capacity building should be thematic and institutional to ensure that existing synergies in particular areas are identified and used and that knowledge and capacity are sustained.

The report recommends that capacity building at the national level, carried out by international institutions, promote awareness of specific inter-linkages between and synergies among MEAs. It

notes that such capacity building programmes should promote the exchange of information, such as examples of best practice from national experiences.

The report proposes that international institutions, including MEA secretariats, should collaborate in producing basic "tool kits" or "road maps" for national decision makers, and identifies possible approaches, such as the development of tool kits supporting more than one agreement or identification of the full range of and interrelationships between MEAs, with examples of how national policy, implementing legislation and institutional design might take these interrelationships into account. Minimum standards for implementing legislation available for each MEA could be compiled and any overlaps and complementarities identified. The report emphasizes that capacity building on MEAs should be forward-looking, seek to raise awareness of upcoming MEA negotiations and assist national governments to identify inter-linkages between these new initiatives and existing MEAs. It suggests that national governments could examine the potential benefits of having a national focal point responsible for more than one MEA and encourage collaboration between focal points for related issues at national and regional levels. It stresses that participatory sustainable development programmes should be designed in a synergistic manner to meet obligations under many MEAs.

The report calls on governments to act at the regional level to develop priorities for capacity building and financial and technical assistance, particularly where they reflect transboundary environmental concerns. It urges international institutions to support regional inter-linkages between national and regional focal points and to build their own capacity to provide training and assistance on the interrelationships between MEAs.

Assessment of Country Performance, Non-compliance Response/Dispute Settlement and Review of Regime Performance: The working group's report suggests that, at the national level, compliance with certain MEAs could be enhanced through a common national framework on regulatory enforcement in areas such as legislative design or customs regulation. At the intergovernmental level, it stresses the responsibility of each MEA governing body to ensure compliance with its Parties' treaty obligations, but notes that significant lessons can be learned for the design of effective compliance procedures from other MEAs and international review and compliance procedures.

With regard to the review of country and regime performance, the report highlights OECD country environmental performance reviews as an example of an in-depth review that is relevant to more than one MEA, as well as other processes, such as UNEP's Global Environmental Outlook and the work of the UN-ECE and NGOs, which could contribute to integrated performance reviews. It states that regional-level reviews could supplement both country-specific and MEA-specific reviews and highlights examples from other regimes, such as the WTO's Trade Policy Review Mechanism, as useful models for strengthening MEAs. The report suggests that the secretariats of MEAs and intergovernmental organizations support such country-level and regional-level reviews.

CLOSING PLENARY

Following the presentation of the five working group reports in Plenary on Friday afternoon, 16 July, a panel comprised of the working group chairs discussed challenges faced and lessons learned in the working group deliberations and then responded to questions from the floor.

Akiko Domoto noted the finding of the scientific mechanisms working group that scientific assessments should address synergies between convention secretariats as well as between the environment and wider social issues, and highlighted the challenge of broadening efforts to create synergies to incorporate a wider development perspective. Salvano Briceño highlighted the challenges faced in exploring the application of issue management, as it is a relatively new issue. He noted the working group's recommendation that UNU continue work on issue management, as the approach has significant potential to promote inter-linkages. Brett Orlando also addressed the potential of issue management. He noted that there are a number of organizations or conventions that could work together, and the issue management approach could be a useful catalyst for discussion and as a facilitating mechanism for developing stronger coordination and synergies.

Remy Paris stressed the need for concrete and convincing field-based examples that demonstrate evidence of linkages and synergies between the conventions and between economic development objectives and MEAs, as these could help to convince OECD and similar actors that they should be concerned about synergies. He asked what the time-frame for obtaining such examples might be. Domoto said the next G-8 meeting in Okinawa, Japan, presents an important opportunity in this regard and emphasized the Japanese Government's commitment to give due attention to these issues at the meeting. She stressed the need for strong international leadership to realize and strengthen inter-linkages in the 21st century.

Gary Sampson reiterated the pressing need for a more coherent and consistent approach to how environmental matters are handled on a global level and agreed that the next G-8 meeting is an auspicious opportunity to address how this might be undertaken. He noted that the working group discussing synergies for sustainable development was challenged by how to ensure cohesiveness between the different MEAs on a global basis, suggesting that the WTO could serve as a model. He observed that, although the set of WTO agreements differs from the set of MEAs, there are a number of similarities. The defining characteristic of the WTO agreements is that they are all managed under one roof and by one dispute settlement mechanism, which has considerable power. He noted that, while the working group did not advocate this kind of model, it could be instructive to compare how the MEA regime and the trade regime are dealt with at present.

Salvano Briceño highlighted two major processes central to the promotion of inter-linkages: the WTO Millenium Round, where environmental concerns and the relationships between trade and MEAs will arise, and the upcoming UN conference on financing for development in 2001, which will address integrated approaches for development. He also stressed the need to increase investment in raising public awareness and education.

Jacob Werksman noted that, while there was a high level of awareness at this conference of the inter-linkages between MEAs, the lack of such awareness on the part of multilateral or bilateral agencies in designing specific projects is a matter of grave concern. He also noted that, despite the fact that developed countries are creating the greatest environmental pressures, discussions regarding synergies tended to focus on what developing countries can do. He called for improved efforts to provide models for synergies in industrialized countries.

Mark Collins inquired about the balance of expenditures on items such as MEA implementation, secretariats, COPs and project activities and asked whether their results are cost-effective. He said ineffective funding could be re-allocated to information management and other exercises that could generate case studies on activities promoting both environmental and development objectives. Remy Paris stressed that the focus should not always be on financing MEA implementation in developing countries and that attention should be given to activities in developed

countries that undermine such efforts. He suggested further examining the role of trade and finance ministries in developed countries and raising such issues at the next G-8 summit.

In the ensuing discussion, participants raised a number of issues and questions from the floor. In response to a comment on the need for the media to act as a watchdog in monitoring the UN, a panelist said the media does play this role but that it has yet to demonstrate sufficient interest in the issue of synergies.

One participant highlighted the need to identify specific areas where developing synergies could be useful and the actors who should carry this out and support it financially. In response, a panelist noted that the conference's work lacked an example of how synergies and coordination between MEAs would work in practice. He highlighted the inter-linkages between the CBD, Ramsar, CITES and CMS on freshwater ecosystems and the synergies that might emerge from cooperation and coordination as an example of how effective information sharing could assist wetlands management. Another member of the panel responded that the issue management working group had developed some examples of specific areas that could benefit from synergies and enhanced cooperation and coordination.

In response to a comment expressing concern that vested interests may present obstacles to developing synergies and coordination, a panel member said vested interests should not always be viewed negatively, as these interests often relate to the protection and promotion of the interests and principles set out in MEAs. He also suggested that tensions between objectives of the various MEAs was a matter for governments, not secretariats, to resolve.

In response to a question about the need for designating one broker for promoting synergies between MEAs, a panelist agreed that many agencies, including the UN General Assembly, the CSD and UNEP, have played important roles and will continue to do so. It was noted, however, that it is not feasible to designate one broker given the complexity of agenda-setting. The importance of geographical and gender balance was also emphasized in agenda-setting and promotion of synergies. In response to a comment on the lack of discussion on equity concerns in the working group on synergies for sustainable development, one panel member stressed that synergy should promote a balance between developing countries and donor countries. One participant emphasized the need to undertake national measures to match external activities so that countries genuinely benefit from synergies. One panelist noted similar needs for synergy at national and international levels and highlighted an urgent need to work at the national level to reduce fragmentation of functions and duplication of work, but also highlighted that some countries have done a great deal in this regard. One panel member identified the need for a comprehensive assessment of synergies at both national and international levels as well as the need for input from MEA secretariats to this end. One participant commented on the long list of proposed activities and suggested that national level efforts be addressed first.

One panelist highlighted the linkages between MEA principles and WTO rules. Another proposed an analysis of the information needs of all MEAs and pilot projects at the country level to demonstrate information-related synergies.

In his closing remarks, UNU Rector J.A. van Ginkel emphasized the need to clearly establish what each of the MEAs means for sustainable human development. He stressed that, since synergy is a relatively new concept, it is important to clarify its meaning and identify how it can improve overall MEA performance. He underscored the need to capture the media's interest and involve civil society and the private sector in this regard. He observed that all the working groups had concluded that solutions should be relatively simple and that linkages between existing structures should be examined rather than new structures established. The working groups had also emphasized the need not only to bring the MEAs together but also to mainstream them into the overall framework of development cooperation activities, and noted that UNEP may play an important function in this regard. He noted general agreement that increased synergies should not result in greater bureaucracy but in functional relationships between activities.

He highlighted the continuing need for capacity building, awareness raising and education, not only to promote understanding of environmental issues as natural scientific problems, but also to place them in the larger social context. He further stressed the need to address the relationship between MEAs and the world trade system. Noting that many of the working groups' recommendations called on UNU to continue its work on dissemination of information related to inter-linkages, he expressed UNU's commitment to do this while emphasizing the need for networks and support from all relevant partners. He highlighted three major upcoming events that would provide opportunities for follow-up to the conference: the next G-8 meeting in Okinawa, Japan in 2000, the UN conference on financing for development in 2001, and Rio+10 in 2002. He thanked the organizers of the conference, UNEP, the Japanese Government, the chairs of the working groups and all participants for their hard work and contributions to promoting inter-linkages between MEAs and declared the conference closed.