Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development

Strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development: the environmental pillar

Note by the secretariat

Introduction

1.   Nearly a decade after the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September 2002, the challenges of environmental sustainability and sustainable development have become more pronounced, while the world's interconnectedness and interdependence have dramatically increased. There is a growing recognition by the public and the diplomatic community of the need to manage these problems through closer global cooperation; the current global governance architecture, however, is struggling to adapt, and some believe that the international system has reached an evolutionary crossroads.[1] The international organizations that were established in another era are finding it difficult to cope with the common challenges facing the international community. There is a need to rethink how we tackle these challenges and to reinforce the commitment to the international order that was put in place to manage problems that cannot be solved by a single country and instead require collective action by a committed and cooperative international community.

2.   To meet the goals of sustainable development it is essential that there is an effective institutional framework at all levels and that full consideration is given to all three pillars: economic, social, and environmental. An international governance system involves the institutions and mechanisms responsible for the entire process, integrating all aspects of sustainable development and the institutions specializing in the three key areas. To make progress towards sustainability, the overall structure must be strengthened and the individual components enhanced.

3.   Since it will have as one of its themes the "institutional framework for sustainable development", the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (commonly known as "Rio +20") will present a valuable opportunity both to think creatively about how to ensure that the three pillars of sustainable development are equally strong and to take action outside the constrained framework of institutions within which the international community usually operates.

4.   Regarding the environment pillar, the high-level consultative process on broader international environmental governance reform established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council in its decision SS.XI/1 of 26 February 2010 has led to several proposals to strengthen and improve coherence in the international environmental governance system. The aim of those proposals, set out in the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome,[2] is to establish an international environmental governance system capable of achieving the objectives and performing the functions identified by an earlier consultative group of ministers and high-level representatives, established by the Governing Council in its decision 25/4, whose work came to be known as the "Belgrade Process".

5.   The Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome is a positive step towards more coherence between economic, social and environmental interests throughout the United Nations system. Questions remain, however, as to the relationship between the current institutional structures for environmental sustainability and those for the economic and social sectors, in addition to whether an overarching institutional framework for sustainable development can be created.

6.   The present note outlines the reform process as undertaken by the consultative groups established by the UNEP Governing Council and the current gaps in the international environmental governance regime, and shows the importance and fundamental value of environmental sustainability to economic development, social welfare and human well-being. It also outlines some main options for strengthening environmental sustainability. It focuses on the governance of the environmental pillar and argues that if the framework for sustainable development is to be reinforced it must begin with

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1   Richard Samans, Klaus Schwab and Mark Malloch-Brown, "Everybody's Business: Strengthening International Cooperation in a More Interdependent World", 2010.

2   The Consultative Group of Ministers or High-Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance met in Nairobi from 7 to 9 July 2010 and in Espoo, Finland, from 21 to 23 November 2010. The outcome of its work, which was adopted by the Group at the Espoo meeting, is known as the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome.

strengthening both the environmental pillar and the integration and coordination functions of overall governance for sustainable development. It concludes by offering recommendations that should be considered if progress is to be made in better integrating the environment pillar into the framework of sustainable development.

I. Consultative groups established by the Governing Council

7.   By paragraph 1 of decision 25/4, the Governing Council established a regionally representative, consultative group of ministers or high-level representatives, inviting each United Nations region to propose between two and four Governments to participate, while remaining open to participation by other interested Governments.

8.   The work of this group, which came to be known as the "Belgrade Process" in reference to the location of its first meeting, resulted in the identification of some objectives and functions of an international environmental governance system (see box) and the elaboration of a set of options for improving international environmental governance, which were presented to the Governing Council at its eleventh special session.

Belgrade Process: **Key objectives and underlying functions**
Creating a strong, credible and coherent science base
- Data and information collection, exchange and analysis
- Assessment, early warning and awareness raising
- Cross-sectoral data collection and research
- Science-policy interface

1.   Developing a global authoritative and responsive voice for environmental sustainability.
- Global agenda setting and policy guidance
- Rulemaking, standard setting and development of universal principles
- Compliance, monitoring and accountability
- Dispute avoidance and settlement

2.   Achieving coherence within the UN system.
- Coordination of policies and programmes
- Coherence among multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and rationalisation of MEA secretariat activities

3.   Securing sufficient, predictable and coherent funding.
- Mobilising funds for the global environment
- Development of innovative market-based financing mechanisms
- Influencing priorities for financing environmental initiatives
- Linking the public and private sector

4.   Ensuring a responsive and cohesive approach to meeting country needs.
- Human and institutional capacity building
- Technology transfer and financial support
- Linking international and local levels

5.   Facilitating the transition towards a global green economy.
- *The functions for objectives 1-5 will collectively contribute towards achieving the objective of facilitating the transition towards a global green economy, for example through assessment, policy guidance, rulemaking, mobilizing funds etc.*

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9.   By its decision SS.XI/1, the Governing Council took note of the set of options and decided to establish a regionally representative, consultative group of ministers or high-level representatives and that the group would consider the broader reform of the international environmental governance system, building on the set of options, but remaining open to new ideas. It also decided that the group would conclude its work in a timely fashion and to present a final report to the Governing Council at its twenty-sixth session, in anticipation of the Council's contribution in time for the second meeting of the open-ended preparatory committee of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

10.   The Executive Director of UNEP, in his capacity as Chair of the Environment Management Group, was requested to invite the United Nations system to provide input to the group, and the consultative group, through the UNEP secretariat, was requested to seek relevant inputs from civil society groups from each region.

11.   Having considered the objectives and functions of an international environmental governance system identified during the Belgrade Process, and after reviewing the gaps and options discussed in a document on elaboration of ideas on broader international environmental governance reform (UNEP/CGIEG.2/2/2), the Consultative Group identified a number of potential system-wide responses to the challenges in the current system of international environmental governance, including:

   (a)   Improving the science-policy interface with the full and meaningful participation of developing countries;

   (b)   Developing a system-wide strategy for environment in the United Nations system;

   (c)   Encouraging synergies between compatible multilateral environmental agreements and identifying guiding elements for realizing such synergies;

   (d)   Creating a stronger link between global environmental policy making and financing;

   (e)   Developing a system-wide capacity-building framework for the environment;

   (f)   Continuing to strengthen strategic engagement at the regional level.

12.   Having identified the potential system-wide responses above, the Consultative Group considered institutional forms that would best serve to implement those responses and achieve the objectives and functions identified during the Belgrade Process.

13.   Strengthening the global authoritative voice, as well as other voices, for the environment is a key outcome of the international environmental governance reform process, providing credible, coherent and effective leadership for environmental sustainability under the overall framework of sustainable development. During the Belgrade Process and in the Co-Chairs' document on elaboration of ideas for broader reform of international environmental governance (UNEP/CGIEG.2/2/2), various options for broader institutional reforms were put forward, including the following five options:

   (a)   Enhancing UNEP;

   (b)   Establishing a new umbrella organization for sustainable development;

   (c)   Establishing a specialized agency such as a world environment organization;

   (d)   Reforming the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development;

   (e)   Enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining existing structures.

14.   The Consultative Group recognized the need to develop all the options further and suggested that options (b) and (d) would best be addressed in the wider sustainable development context.

15.   Based on the principle that form follows function, and recognizing that it had not achieved consensus on institutional form, the Group suggested that existing institutions should be strengthened and enhanced. It also considered that options (a) enhancing UNEP, (c) establishing a specialized agency such as a world environment organization, and (e) enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining existing structures were potential options for strengthening the form of the environment pillar in the context of sustainable development and achieving effective international environmental governance.

II.   Institutional framework for sustainable development: the importance of the environment to the economic and social pillars

16.   The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, commonly referred to as the "Rio Conference" or "Earth Summit", was a major success in raising public awareness of the need to integrate environment and development. In the preparatory process for the Earth Summit, there were a number of proposals made for institutional reform to meet the challenges of sustainable development. The summit participants adopted crucial agreements, including the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 and the landmark "Rio conventions" (the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). The participants also created new international institutions, including the Commission on Sustainable Development, which was tasked with the follow-up to the Earth Summit, and led to the reform of the Global Environment Facility. Ten years later, the concept of three mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development was incorporated

into the 2002 Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This was also addressed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

17.   A guiding principle for discussions on the institutional framework for sustainable development is that form should follow function. Since there has been a broad agreement that there is insufficient integration among the three pillars of sustainable development, it follows that governance in all three pillars needs to be strengthened, better coordinated and more coherent. The environmental pillar, stated in the Secretary-General's report to the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at its first session (A/CONF.216/PC/2) as being the weakest of the three pillars,[3] needs to be strengthened in order to be able to improve human well-being, to contribute to economic growth and to increase social well-being.

18.   While the idea of achieving sustainable development has been politically popular, and although there have been many efforts to define sustainable development, the world continues to lack coherent strategies for its implementation. Part of the reason for this is that a lack of clarity has enabled sustainable development to become a catch-all concept for special interest groups, resulting in an incoherent, sprawling and costly agenda.

19.   This situation has done little to advance the sustainable development agenda and has detracted from the original premise that environmental sustainability, economic development and social welfare are complementary goals (see figure). Consequently, the importance of the environment to the other two pillars of sustainable development has yet to be sufficiently recognized in mainstream policymaking.

20.   Environmental issues are intertwined with many economic development and social issues and are intricately interwoven with poverty. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report shows that there is a direct relationship between the health of the environment (ecosystems) and economic and social welfare, establishing conclusively that efforts to alleviate poverty and improve human well-being will not succeed where environmental degradation is allowed to continue. Underlying all the resources that we use are ecosystem processes: the biological, chemical and physical interactions between the components of ecosystems (e.g., soil, water and species). These processes produce benefits to people (or ecosystem services) in the form of food, clean water, carbon sequestration and reductions in erosion, among others. In essence, the goods and services that drive our economies and support our social systems are derived largely from a healthy and functioning environment.

Links between the environment, economic development and social welfare
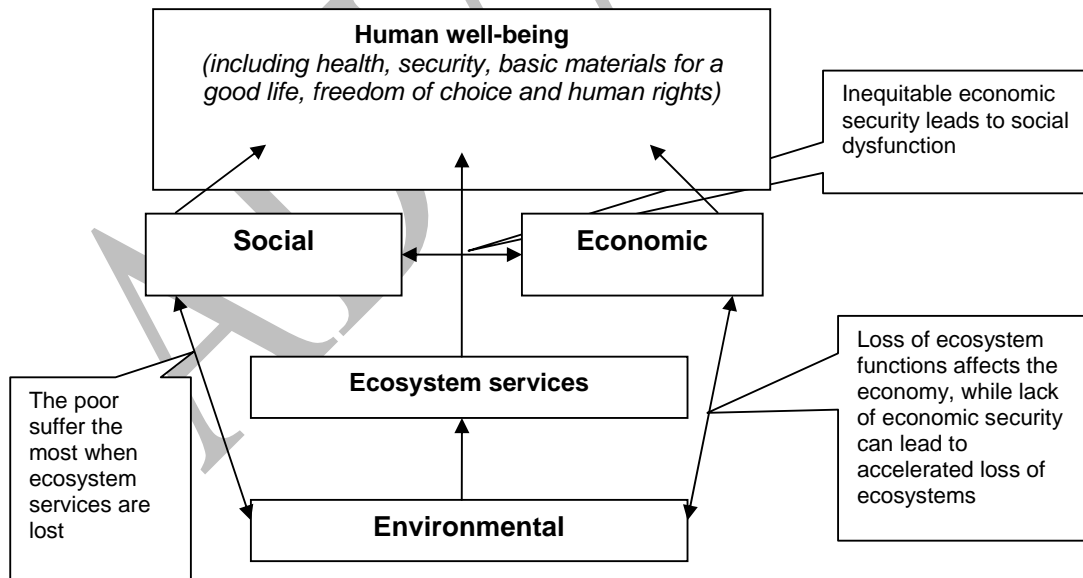
21.   A stable environment, the fostering of economic and social development and the enhancement of human well-being (including security, the basic materials for a good life (for example, sufficient

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3   See also the information note by the Executive Director, *Environment in the United Nations system*. UNEP, 7 June 2010. Available at www.unep.org/environmentalgovernance/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=tZyjX8cn738%3d&tabid=4556&language=en-US.

nutritious food), health and good social relations) are interlinked and inseparable, and prosperity and poverty reduction are dependent on the benefits coming from ecosystems.

22.   Goods and services derived from the environment have contributed to substantial net gains in economic development, social welfare and human well-being overall. The report on the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity for national and international policymakers shows that the economic and social sectors are directly concerned with biodiversity and ecosystem services, including agriculture, fisheries, forestry, development, health, energy, transport and industry. Several sectors depend on natural capital for their flow of inputs, research, new products and business innovation. For example, 20–25 per cent of the pharmaceutical sector's turnover (some $650 billion per year) is derived from genetic resources, and ecotourism generates around $100 billion per year in employment. Overall, the report estimates that failure to halt biodiversity loss on land may cost $500 billion by 2010, this being the estimated value of ecosystem services that would have been provided had biodiversity been maintained at 2000 levels. At sea, unsustainable fishing reduces potential fisheries output by an estimated $50 billion per year.

23.   These gains have been achieved at an ever-growing cost in the form of degradation of many ecosystem services, increased risk of non-linear changes and exacerbation of poverty for some groups.

III.   Gaps in the current governance system

24.   Continuing environmental degradation indicates that the current system of international environmental governance is inadequate to support Governments in preserving the environment for the social and economic well-being of their constituents. A number of basic challenges limit the effectiveness of the current international environmental governance system. They are described below.

A.   Lack of an authoritative voice to guide environmental policy effectively at the global level

25.   The most self-evident gap is the lack of a single authoritative and responsive voice for environmental sustainability at the international level. The system is fragmented, inefficient and characterized by a blurred division of labour and overlapping mandates. More than 40 United Nations agencies are dealing with aspects of environmental sustainability and multiple multilateral environmental agreements have been developed to govern various aspects of environmental change. No single institution or authority exists to provide global leadership in galvanizing political will, providing coherent policy guidance, framing international responses along the lines of the Millennium Development Goals and establishing a global monitoring and reporting framework. As countries do not receive the required support at the national level, there are alarming gaps in commitment and action.

B.   Lack of coherence between global environmental policies and programmes

26.   The current hierarchy of environmental decision-making at the international level is incoherent, leading to fragmentation, inefficiencies and overlaps. At the same time, coordination and coherence are essential to the smooth functioning of an international environmental governance system in view of the interdependent and intersectoral nature of global environmental systems. The coordination of the international environmental governance system will have implications for the distribution of data and information throughout the system, for the integration of policy responses and for the distribution of financial resources and the identification of country-driven priorities.

C.   Weak science-policy interface for informed decision-making

27.   The existing environmental knowledge infrastructure goes beyond UNEP and consists of a wide range of institutional components that supports various stages in the interaction between science and policymaking. It spans the global, regional, national and local levels and involves many entities from the United Nations system. The evolution of the knowledge infrastructure needs to keep pace with increasing environmental change and document how society interacts with the environment across geographic scales and boundaries, with particular attention paid to developing countries. A fundamental deficiency in the existing international science-policy infrastructure for environment is a prevalent lack of shared science, of common science and policy objectives, and of capacity in monitoring, data management, assessments and early warning systems, particularly in developing countries and regions.

D. High degree of financial fragmentation

28.   The two issues concerning the financing mechanisms within the environmental sector are the dispersion of funds and the non-alignment of funds with those institutions whose mandates pertain primarily to environmental management. Most funds within the environmental sector are spread across the Global Environment Facility, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, with fewer resources administrated by other financial mechanisms, including the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol; several funds related to climate change adaptation and mitigation; the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management; and the Technical Cooperation Trust Fund of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal. All funds operate according to their own rules and regulations, based in different locations, with little to no coordination. This lack of coordination between mechanisms results in the duplication of activities, higher operational costs and inefficient use of resources.

E. Irrationality of multilateral environmental agreement governance and administration

29.   Following a piecemeal approach to environmental management, today's international environmental governance system consists of a plethora of multilateral environment agreements, each dealing with individual environmental challenges. They are integral to establishing standards, guidelines, and policies for the stewardship of the global environment but, at the same time, the nature of their development has resulted in a complex and fragmented system with substantive and administrative overlaps.

F. Lack of a central monitoring, review and accountability system for commitments made under multilateral environmental agreements

30.   Contrary to other global regimes, within the environmental field accountability for global commitments is not guaranteed. While Governments are willing to implement and comply with the commitments that they have made under the various multilateral environmental agreements, questions remain about the degree of implementation and, more specifically, about accountability, including accountability for funding and/or support for implementing commitments.

G. Implementation gap: insufficient response to countries' needs

31.   Following the ratification of multilateral environmental agreements, many Governments face implementation challenges at the national level. This gap is generally the result of a lack of technical, human and financial resources, among others, and is particularly prevalent in developing countries, whose leaders argue that, the political will to implement their obligations under the multilateral environmental agreements notwithstanding, they lack the expertise, institutions, human and financial resources to do so.

32.   The need for increased and tailored support to countries includes support for: carrying out scientific assessments and establishing a science-policy interface; implementing their obligations under the multilateral environmental agreements (from drafting necessary environmental laws to devising appropriate institutions and increasing human capacity to follow through); and linking environmental sustainability with developing strategies and plans. The current governance structure does not meet these needs sufficiently and as such institutional reforms are required.

V. Institutional options for filling the gaps

33.   Over the past six months, Governments have suggested that UNEP should focus on further developing the options dealing strictly with environmental governance, leaving discussion of the institutional framework for sustainable development at large to the participants in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development preparatory process. The present section therefore focuses on three options: enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining existing structures, establishing a specialized agency such as a world environment organization and enhancing UNEP.

34.   In the light of the transformative changes required to meet today's environmental challenges in the context of sustainable development, and given that previous incremental reform efforts did not result in genuine improvement, the aforementioned options concerning UNEP are interpreted to be sufficiently strong to bring about transformative change.

35.   Enhancing UNEP is interpreted as upgrading UNEP into an organization through a United Nations General Assembly resolution, whereas enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining

existing structures is interpreted as strengthening existing structures without any changes to the legal status of UNEP.

Comparison table of options for broader reform of international environmental governance

Evaluation objectives*	UNEP: status quo	Enhanced institutional reforms and streamlined existing structures	Specialized agency	Enhanced UNEP**
Global authoritative and responsive voice for environmental sustainability	Lack of authority to advise the United Nations system on the environment; Governing Council decisions subject to United Nations General Assembly and other bodies.	Authority increased through modest reforms of system, such as stronger role of the Environment Management Group; Governing Council sessions held back to back with other forums; use of system-wide strategies.	Central authority for the environment; universal membership; absolute decision-making powers.	Stronger authority as "organization"; universal membership; decision-making subject to General Assembly but through practice.
Effectiveness, efficiency and coherence within the United Nations system	System deeply fragmented, lack of authority to provide coherence.	United Nations system-wide strategies developed for environment; enhanced synergies between compatible multilateral environmental agreements; identified guiding elements for realizing such synergies while respecting the autonomy of the conferences of the parties.	Mandated to have strong functions for synergies of multilateral environmental agreements and coordination of the environmental pillar; specialized agency has legal power to establish treaties, thus future multilateral environmental agreements are under the organization.	Mandated to have stronger authority over multilateral environmental agreement synergies and improvements through universal membership to play advisory and review role across the United Nations system; no treaty-making powers.
Securing sufficient, predictable and coherent funding	Funding spread among multiple mechanisms, voluntary only, disconnected from global ministers for environment, insufficient funds to fulfill mandate	Tracking system developed to monitor financial flow for entire system.	More centralized funding for developing countries; stronger advisory role in existing mechanisms; mandate to assist developing countries to gain access to funding; more predictable and stable financing through assessed contributions; broader mandate to attract further funding; independent from the regular United Nations budget.	More centralized funding for developing countries; stronger advisory role in existing mechanisms, mandate to assist developing countries access funding; broader mandate to attract further funding; increased contributions from the regular United Nations budget.

*   *The objectives and functions of an international environmental governance system were agreed in the Belgrade Process by the Consultative Group.*

**   *"Enhanced UNEP" assumes the upgrading of UNEP into an organization established by a resolution of the General Assembly.*

A.   Enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining existing structures

36.   Enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining existing structures would entail strengthening the existing functions of UNEP, without any changes to its legal status, into a more efficient and effective programme to enable it effectively to fulfill its mandate under General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972 and the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of UNEP, which was adopted by the Governing Council in its decision 19/1 of 7 February 1997.

B.   Enhancing UNEP

37.   This option would entail upgrading the functions of UNEP into a centralized, more authoritative and better-endowed international environmental organization by making it a subsidiary body of the General Assembly that would report its decisions to the General Assembly directly, similar to the Human Rights Council. A General Assembly resolution enhancing UNEP would establish it as an organization and would set up its governance, functions, financing and relationship with the rest of the United Nations system..

38.   UNEP would remain, legally, a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and therefore would not be completely autonomous from General Assembly decision-making and authority. It would not have certain powers, particularly those to appoint its own executive head, to create treaties and conventions, to request advisory opinions from the International Court of Justice and to develop its own financial rules and policies or vary from the United Nations regulations and rules. Its programme of work and budget would also be dependent on the approval of the General Assembly.

39.   A key element of an enhanced UNEP is universal membership with full representation of ministers providing them with the legitimacy and authority to fulfill the mandate of UNEP and to convene, deliberate and set the overarching strategy and provide policy advice to the United Nations system on matters relating to the environment, within the context of sustainable development.

C.   UNEP as a specialized agency

40.   The option of establishing UNEP as a specialized agency (often referred to as a world environment organization), as provided for by Articles 55 and 56 of the Charter of the United Nations, is premised on an independently negotiated treaty as its constitutional foundation. A specialized agency is mandated to deal with a specific issue area but is not exclusively in charge of that issue. Just as other specialized agencies, such as the International Labour Organization or the World Health Organization, a world environment organization would closely cooperate with other United Nations agencies and the United Nations system at large.

41.   A world environment organization would strengthen the effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of international environmental governance. It would pursue three objectives: giving more political weight to international environmental action, making that action more coherent and allowing developing countries to devise and implement their national environment policies.

42.   UNEP would be enhanced to fulfill its global mandate by having universal membership, a mandate to lead the development of a United-Nations-wide environmental strategy, and a mandate to link global financing for environment to global policymaking, allowing it to consider, for example, the role of the Global Environment Facility or a permanent science-policy interface based on the UNEP Global Environment Outlook process, a multi-scaled policy review mechanism. In addition, the capacity of UNEP to assist in scientific research and the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements would be enhanced by reinforced regional offices, desk officers or national offices with more financing for capacity-building and technology-transfer activities.

D.   Weighing the three options

43.   In general terms, establishing UNEP as a specialized agency has the advantages of providing autonomy for environmental decision-making in the United Nations system and establishing a formal agreement between UNEP and the Secretariat or General Assembly; universal membership, which would allow for more legitimacy when decisions are taken in the governing body; clarifying the relationship between UNEP and other specialized agencies, including in terms of financing; and enabling UNEP to adopt treaties and set standards.

44.   Another advantage would be that environment ministers would have a platform for considering stronger synergies between multilateral environmental agreements, overcoming the disparity between the membership of the conferences of the parties to the agreements and the UNEP Governing Council. As the authoritative body on environment that sets the system-wide agenda on environment, UNEP could make recommendations to the conferences of the parties. There would also be scope for establishing a permanent science-policy mechanism that would better address members' information and capacity-building needs. If properly considered, a mandate for a stronger implementation arm would also be of clear benefit to members, particularly developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Besides normative activities, such as acting as a forum for discussions, analytical functions and information dissemination, UNEP could become more involved in operational activities: it could respond to the increasing requests from countries to assist with national implementation of internationally agreed environmental commitments.

45.   As a specialized agency, however, UNEP would no longer receive an allocation from the United Nations regular budget and would have to rely on contributions from member States for up to 60 per cent of its budget. In addition, establishing UNEP as a specialized agency would require substantial investment in time, depending on the speed of negotiations. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to overcome would be agreeing on the elements of the constitution or articles of agreement for UNEP.

46.   Alternatively, enhancing UNEP through a General Assembly resolution would have many of the same benefits as a specialized agency and would not require the same amount of negotiation that would be required if the treaty route were taken. An enhanced UNEP could provide for universal membership to increase the legitimacy of decisions taken by the Governing Council, clarify the relationship between UNEP and other subsidiary organs of the United Nations and increase the regular budget. Passing such a resolution could be achieved relatively swiftly, possibly during one General Assembly session. The process for implementing the resolution would probably take two years in the UNEP programme of work cycle.

47.   UNEP would, however, continue to derive its legal personality from the United Nations General Assembly and its decisions would not become effective until they had been reviewed and adopted by General Assembly. UNEP would continue to lack the clear division of labour and standing afforded to the specialized agencies and would be unable to adopt treaties and standards.

48.   Strengthening the functions of UNEP by enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining existing structures would be relatively easy to accomplish and central to this would be the establishment of a system-wide strategy for environmental activities within the United Nations. This option would not, however, deal with the issue of authority over environmental activities within the United Nations system, nor the financial fragmentation of funding for the environment. Improvements could be made to the existing science-policy mechanisms and to assistance for national implementation of environmental commitments, but without an enhanced mandate the changes would be less effective.

VI.   Sustainable development governance at the national level

49.   The basis for sustainable development action at the national level is derived from international policies, in particular Agenda 21,[4] in which the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development envisaged that the necessary harmonization and extension of existing policies and plans would occur through the adoption of an identifiable strategy for sustainable development, with the overall objective being "to improve or restructure the decision-making process so that consideration of socio-economic and environmental issues is fully integrated and a broader range of public participation assured".[5] In 2006, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, in cooperation with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, carried out a study to assess the efforts of 21 countries[6] in designing and implementing national sustainable development strategies. The authors of the study examined six crucial governance elements and produced associated effectiveness criteria.[7]

50.   The principal challenges for sustainable development governance at the national level are that national authorities tend to view sustainable development as dealing mostly with environment, rather than as one of three equally important pillars of sustainable development, and, by the same token, to place responsibility for sustainable development solely within the environmental authorities of Governments, which are usually among the weakest of line ministries. A strong environmental pillar at the national level along with a clearly defined domain could be a way of ensuring that there is greater clarity between sustainable development and the mandate of environment and that integration takes place across all pillars.

51.   Following the ratification of multilateral environmental agreements, many Governments face an implementation challenge at the national level. This gap is generally the result of a lack of

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4   *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, *Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: Resolutions adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex II.

5   Ibid., para. 8.3.

6   Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Czech Republic, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, South Korea, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, Portugal, Slovakia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

7   Darren Swanson and László Pintér, "Governance Structures for National Sustainable Development Strategies: Study of Good Practice Examples", 2006, p. 5. Available from www.iisd.org/pdf/2006/measure_gov_structures.pdf.

technical, human, and financial resources, among others. This is particularly prevalent in developing countries, whose leaders argue that, the political will to implement their obligations under the multilateral environmental agreements notwithstanding, they lack the expertise, institutions, human and financial resources to do so.

52.   There are two clear reasons to call for increased country responsiveness: first, the recognition that a "one-size-fits-all" approach is inadequate in achieving development and environmental goals; and second, that implementation of policies requires a country to have the necessary capacity to do so. Any global or international environmental policy ultimately needs to be implemented at the national level. At the same time, Governments need to be able to implement environmental policies according to the commitments that they have made and the priorities that they have set. Global policies cannot take account of individual countries' needs. Different countries have different natural resource bases and face different environmental challenges that affect their development paths. If countries wish to embark on a sustainable development path, their individual situations need to be taken into account. Equally, while political will often exists, the lack of capacity, be it human, institutional, technological, or financial, prevents governments from implementing their commitments in many cases.

53.   There is a need for increased and tailored support to countries includes support for: carrying out scientific assessments and establishing a science-policy interface; implementing their obligations under the multilateral environmental agreements (from drafting necessary environmental laws to devising appropriate institutions and increasing human capacity to follow through); and linking environmental sustainability with developing strategies and plans. The current governance structure does not meet these needs sufficiently and as such institutional reforms are required.