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International Environ- mental Governance for the 21st Century

Challenges, Reform Processes and
Options for Action on the Way to Rio 2012

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**International Environmental Governance for
the 21st Century
Challenges, Reform Processes and
Options for Action on the Way to Rio 2012**

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is supposed to be the principal body within the framework of international environmental governance (IEG). However, a poorly coordinated, enormously complex system of almost 500 multilateral environmental agreements (MEA) has been built up around the programme, which is itself inadequately equipped in terms of finances and staff. At the same time, other international organisations have developed an ever-growing portfolio of environmental activities, which is barely coordinated with UNEP. Despite this abundance of activities, global environmental conditions continue to worsen, and the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) has to date been unsatisfactory, in particular Goal 7 on ensuring environmental sustainability. In view of this situation, we need to assess what form an institutional architecture could take that promises greater success in the environmental sector, and how we could reach international agreement on the reforms necessary to achieve this.

Starting in 2006, three successive intergovernmental consultative processes have been initiated. They discussed in detail the strengths and weaknesses, necessary functions and desired objectives of the IEG system. It was only through these discussions that the diplomatic focus could ultimately shift to concrete reform measures. This approach helps to build trust, it conforms to the enduring “form follows function” principle of environmental governance, and ensures that a compromise, once reached, can actually be implemented. During the most recent of these processes, in July and in November 2010, delegates from nearly 60 countries met to gauge for the first time the options for a comprehensive environmental governance reform, after having previously discussed step-by-step and incremental changes.

In addition, the preparatory phase for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) began in May 2010. Known as Rio+20 for short, the conference aims to depict pathways of transforming the global economic system into a green economy. At the same time, the meeting will see dis-

cussions on a potential redesign of the institutional architecture for sustainable development – and with it international environmental governance.

As one result of these long-standing discussions, the international community has reached a consensus on the fact that the current environmental governance system is no longer capable of meeting its goals and that it is in urgent need of reform. The parties involved have now also agreed on the core functions that the system should fulfil. As a result there now is a rare window of opportunity, lasting at least until the Rio conference in 2012, to reform the underlying governance architecture.

To date, fundamental reforms have foundered on conflicting interests of key players. Europe is calling for strong multilateral institutions; both diplomatically and through significant financial contributions, it has demonstrated its willingness to upgrade UNEP to a UN Environment Organisation (UNEO). The US, however, is sceptical of an extensive institutional restructuring, emphasising the need to make the existing system more cost-efficient before creating another specialised agency. However, Washington generally appears to be open to considering comprehensive restructuring measures. For its part, China does see the potential advantages of reforming the environmental governance structure, if it involves more effective ways of developing environmental policy capacities in emerging and developing countries. However, it objects to control mechanisms – the Chinese government has made it clear that it would never endorse an institution that was designed to monitor national environmental policies. Finally, Brazil has underlined the need to create closer links between environmental and development policy issues. With its model for an umbrella organisation for sustainable development and the environment, Brazil has made a vitalizing and constructive suggestion in this regard.

To make use of the current window of opportunity, the member states of the EU, and the German government in particular, need to turn their attention to devising practical, internationally compatible solutions for enhancing the IEG system. Europe should demonstrate political leadership and refine and advance upon existing reform concepts. At the same time, European delegates must show sensitivity, and ensure that more hesitant countries are incorporated effectively. Probably the biggest challenge in setting up a UNEO lies in clearly demonstrating its added value in light of the varying interests of different states. Deliberations on the relationship between a UNEO and ex-

isting MEAs must take into account their legal and institutional autonomy. As a precautionary measure, should the UNEO concept fail once again to be realised, thought also needs to be given to possible, useful alternatives and to ways in which central features of the model could still be implemented. The clustering of the three chemical conventions provides a successful example of how coordination between MEAs can be improved and how a process can be actively advanced, regardless of whether a UNEO is set up.

Europe has to show developing countries, China and India in particular, how a restructured environmental governance system can support their need for growth and prosperity in a more ecologically sustainable way. The chances to succeed in this are higher if the reform includes meaningful improvements to the services provided by UNEP, for example by upgrading its regional offices. Other sensible measures might include pooling competences and reducing red tape by intensifying clustering efforts or driving forward the One UN Program. However, any steep controlling or monitoring mechanisms that could be interpreted as interference in national sovereign rights should be avoided. Although such mechanisms may well be justifiable normatively, they also risk blocking the reform process once more.

It is clear that the upcoming IEG reform must be linked to any changes in the governance architecture for wider sustainable development. Europe should therefore work with Brazil to identify ways of smartly combining the models favoured by each side. This could take the form of an umbrella organisation serving as a coordinating platform for the different UN organisations and a venue for political guidance to the UN system, and of a UN Environment Organisation working as a central hub within the dense network of multilateral environmental agreements.

Europe also needs to convince the US that simply making the IEG system more cost-effective will not be enough to tackle the challenges we currently face. The systems needs to be enhanced, and this cannot be achieved at zero net cost.

Challenges facing international environmental and sustainable development governance

In spite of all efforts, the global trend towards deteriorating environmental conditions remains unchanged, and the world's natural resources are being placed under ever increasing pressure.¹ Our resource-intensive consumption and production patterns have already stretched the biosphere's capacity beyond its limits.² This overuse means that our ecosystems are increasingly inhibited in their ability to perform essential functions such as filtering water, providing food, and purifying the air.³

The proportion of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has continued to grow rapidly in the first decade of the 21st century, only slowing down temporarily during the economic and financial crisis of 2008/2009. The loss of biodiversity continues on a dramatic scale.⁴ More positive trends can only be seen in a few areas. Global deforestation, for example, has slowed down, mainly due to Brazil's successful forest conservation measures and to China's massive afforestation programmes.

The deterioration of ecosystems has serious consequences for human health and food security, and it also impairs economic development opportunities.⁵ Environmental problems therefore pose a direct threat to realising the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).⁶

This demonstrates how closely environmental protection and sustainable development are connected – something that, particularly from the point of view of developing countries, has so far received too little attention in both environmental and sustainable development governance. As a result, the environment today is the least well-managed pillar within the sustainable development framework and needs significantly more attention.⁷

Emerging and developing countries face the challenge of combining ecological sustainability with the build-up of a strong economy. This situation differs significantly from that of developed countries, whose priority must be to foster an ecological modernisation of their national economies. Combined with the disparities in national capacities of developed and developing countries, including their respective financial power, this results in different conceptions of what international environmental governance should actually achieve. While industrialised countries believe it should first and foremost be concerned with protecting global environmental goods through regulating pollution or protecting ecosystems, the approach of emerging and developing countries is mainly influenced by their need for economic development. Poverty is such a fundamental problem in these countries that they will try to overcome it at all costs, even if that means causing immediate damage to the environment. In this context, environmental governance should primarily serve to develop a sustainable growth model that does not jeopardise the environmental basis for combating poverty and boosting prosperity.

One of the major causes for the lack of success in IEG are multilateral agreements that are incapable of facilitating the necessary changes because they lack

1 United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Environment Outlook 4*, Nairobi 2007; Convention on Biological Diversity, *Global Biodiversity Outlook 3*, Montreal 2010; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2007. Fourth Assessment Report*, Cambridge 2007; Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, *State of the World's Forests 2009*, Rome 2009; idem, *State of the World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2008*, Rome 2009.

2 Johan Rockström et al., "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity" in: *Nature*, 461 (2009), pp. 472–475; WWF International/Global Footprint Network/Zoological Society of London, *Living Planet Report 2010. Biodiversity, Biocapacity and Development*, London 2010.

3 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Ecosystems and Human Well-being. Synthesis*, Washington, DC, 2005.

4 Stuart H.M. Butchart et al., "Global Biodiversity: Indicators of Recent Declines", in: *Science*, 328 (2010) 5982, pp. 1164–1168.

5 Pavan Sukhdev et al., *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity. Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature. A Synthesis of the approach, conclusions and recommendations of TEEB*, Malta 2010.

6 Cf. Lucas Donat Castelló et al., "The Environmental Millennium Development Goal. Progress and Barriers to its Achieve-

ment" in: *Environmental Science & Policy*, 13 (2010), pp. 154–163; Germanwatch, *The Millennium Development Goals and Climate Change: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead*, Berlin 2010.

7 United Nations General Assembly, *Progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits in the area of sustainable development, as well as an analysis of the themes of the Conference*, Report of the Secretary General, A/CONF.216/PC/2, 1.4.2010.

sufficiently ambitious goals and proper instruments.⁸ Moreover, the structure of the entire IEG system is far from ideal. In 2008, the UN Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) concluded in a major review of the UN's environmental governance system: "The current framework of international environmental governance is weakened by institutional fragmentation and specialization and the lack of a holistic approach to environmental issues and sustainable development."⁹ High administrative costs, duplicated institutional structures and an unclear allocation of responsibilities mean that the financial resources – which are already inadequate – cannot be used effectively enough.

Effective with limited resources: the United Nations Environment Programme

Since the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was founded in 1972, observers have been divided in their assessment of its effectiveness. Some came to the conclusion that despite unfavourable conditions, the programme has achieved remarkable results and has therefore earned an estimable reputation. Others, however, stressed the difficulty of fulfilling a "hopeless mandate" with far too few resources.¹⁰ According to its mandate, UNEP forms the central pillar of environmental policy within the United Nations system. The programme aims to develop normative frameworks and promote international negotiations, thereby serving as a catalyst for developing multilateral environmental agreements. It is responsible for monitoring environmental conditions, documenting the effects of environmental policy efforts, and driving the integration of environmental protection as an interdisciplinary task into other UN institutions. Its scope also covers supporting countries in implementing environmental agreements and documenting the progress thus achieved.

⁸ Cf. James Gustave Speth, Peter M. Haas, *Global Environmental Governance*, Washington, DC, 2006.

⁹ Tadanori Inomata, *Management Review of Environmental Governance within the United Nations System*, Geneva: Joint Inspection Unit 2008, JIU/REP/2008/3, p. iii.

¹⁰ Ken Conca, "Greening the United Nations: Environmental Organisations and the UN System" in: *Third World Quarterly*, 16 (1995) 3, pp. 441–457; Steffen Bauer, "The Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme. Tangled Up in Blue" in: Frank Biermann, Bernd Siebenhüner (eds.), *Managers of Global Change. The Influence of International Environmental Bureaucracies*, Cambridge 2009, pp. 169–202.

The UNEP Governing Council (GC) comprises 58 members and forms UNEP's main decision-making committee. At its annual meetings, held back to back with the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF) since 2000, the GC takes fundamental decisions regarding the work of the UNEP. Although its composition takes into account the principle of equitable regional representation, the limited number of members is a legitimacy issue for the Council. Nevertheless, several attempts have so far failed to introduce universal membership, which would involve giving all members of the UN a seat in the Council.¹¹

The Secretariat of UNEP, which since 2006 has been under the management of Executive Director Achim Steiner, is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya. Although UNEP has seen its team there grow considerably in recent years, at 600 employees it is still relatively understaffed. The Bonn-based Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a similar size, employing around 400 staff. Compared with organisations such as the World Food Programme (WFP, approx. 9,100 staff) and the Geneva-based World Health Organisation (WHO, approx. 9,000), UNEP looks very modest indeed.

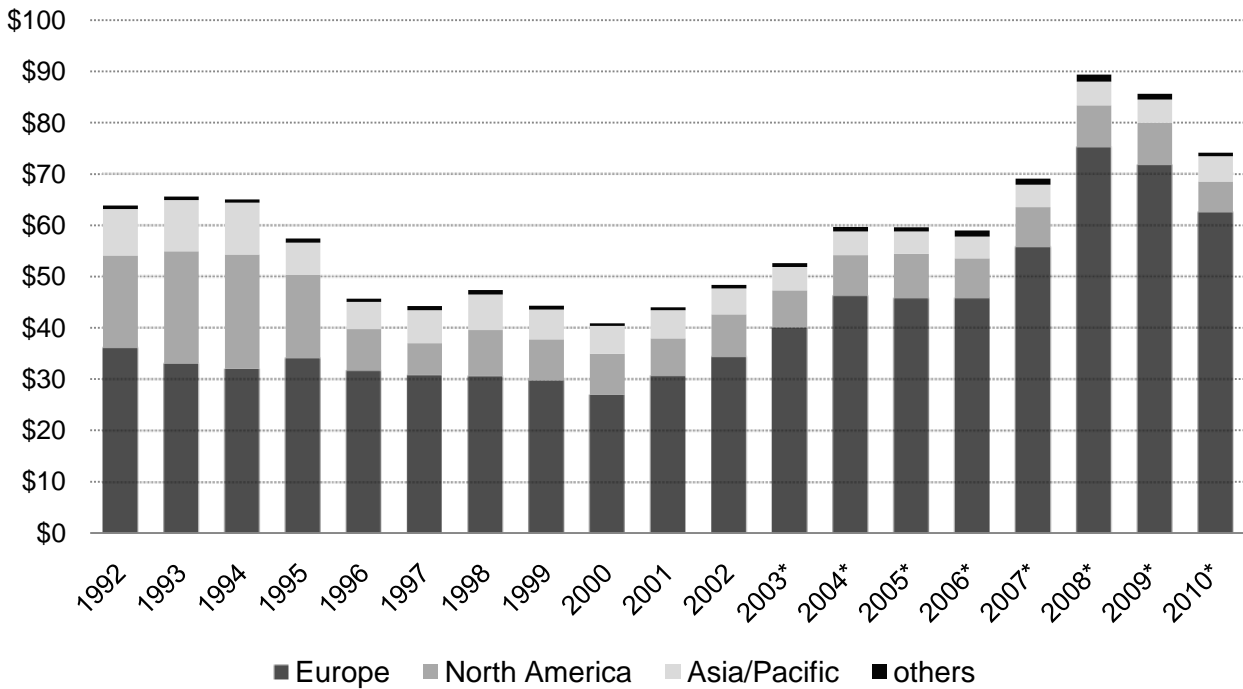
The 2008/2009 biannual budget allotted funds totalling USD 406.4 million to the Environment Programme; for 2010/2011 it is expected to be USD 434 million.¹² This means that, after reaching a low point in the 1990s, UNEP's budget has risen considerably. However, it is still low compared to other organisations. The UN Development Programme, for example, received over USD 4.1 billion in 2008 – over ten times more than UNEP – which is mainly a result of the UNDP's operational mandate and the increased resource requirements this entails.

The regular budget provided by the UN is extremely tight and currently accounts for less than four percent of UNEP's budget. This means that the Programme is highly dependent on other sources of financing, a feature characterising UNEP from the beginning. The Environment Fund (EF), which was set up in 1972 together with UNEP, is the Programme's main financing

¹¹ Cf. UNEP Governing Council, *Synthesis of views of Governments concerning the question of universal membership of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum*, Nairobi: UNEP/GCSS.VIII/INF/6, 15 March 2004.

¹² UNEP, *Environment in the UN System. Information Note by the Executive Director*, Draft 4, 7 June 2010, p. 24.

Fig. 1
Nominal contributions to the Environment Fund from 1992 to 2010 (in USD million),
by regions of origin (* 2003–2010 includes pledges)



Source: Contributions by Regions to UNEP’s Environment Fund 1992–2009, <www.unep.org/rms/en/Financing_of_UNEP/Environment_Fund/Table_Regions/index.asp> (accessed on 10 August 2010).

mechanism.¹³ After contributions to the fund had been falling sharply in the mid-1990s, a new financing measure was introduced in 2002 in the form of the Voluntary Indicative Scale of Contributions (VISCI), which successfully enabled contributions for the EF to be put on a broader, more reliable footing.¹⁴ Since the turn of the millennium, Europe in particular has been more willing to make contributions, which has considerably increased the size of the fund once again.¹⁵ The latest high-point was reached in 2008, when the fund received USD 89.4 million, four-fifths of which

came from Europe (see Fig. 1). In 2008/2009 the Fund provided 42 percent of the total UNEP budget.

UNEP has furthermore secured additional sources of financing through numerous trust funds, earmarked contributions and the below-mentioned Global Environment Facility.¹⁶ These sources accounted for over half of the UNEP 2008/2009 budget, reflecting the general trend in the United Nations to increasingly finance activities through voluntary contributions rather than fixed budgets.¹⁷ This enables fund providers to better monitor how beneficiary organisations use the funds. However, this also reduces the Secretariats’ independence and makes their budgets less stable. UNEP is therefore increasing its efforts to motivate fund providers to give non-earmarked contributions.

¹³ Maria Ivanova, “Designing the United Nations Environment Programme: A Story of Compromise and Confrontation” in: *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 7 (2007), pp. 352–355.

¹⁴ Muhammad Yussuf, Juan Luis Larrabure, Cihan Terzi, *Voluntary Contributions in United Nations System Organisations: Impact on Programme Delivery and Resource Mobilization Strategies*, Geneva: Joint Inspection Unit 2007, pp. 7; UNEP, *UNEP Annual Report 2009. Seizing the Green Opportunity*, Nairobi 2010, p. 90.

¹⁵ Yussuf et al., *Voluntary Contributions in United Nations System Organisations* [see Footnote 14], pp. 7.

¹⁶ UNEP, *Financing of UNEP*, <www.unep.org/rms/en/Financing_of_UNEP/index.asp> (accessed on 10 August 2010).

¹⁷ Yussuf et al, *Voluntary Contributions in United Nations System Organisations* [see Footnote 14], p. iii.

Problems in coordination and efficiency caused by fragmentation

There are 44 different UN institutions with mandates for environmental activities and almost 500 multilateral environmental agreements in place, plus nearly 400 amendments and close to 200 protocols, bringing the total number above 1,000. These figures are striking examples of the high level of institutional fragmentation that is characteristic of international environmental governance. It is a result of the international community preference to create new institutions rather than equipping existing ones with more resources and increased competences. The fragmentation creates substantial problems, affecting coordination between international organisations and among multilateral environmental agreements.

Coordination between international organisations

One of the main challenges facing international environmental governance is the coordination of environmental activities within the United Nations. Proof of just how necessary this is can be found in a 2004 study, which showed that the UN has 60,000 ongoing environmental projects but no database capable of providing an overview of these activities.¹⁸ The result is an unmanageable collection of projects that are difficult to use for developing countries and that are almost impossible to assess in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

The task of coordination is the prime responsibility of the Environment Management Group (EMG), which was set up in 1999 and is chaired by the UNEP Executive Director.¹⁹ However, responsibilities are not clearly laid out for the EMG and the various adjacent coordinating bodies. The EMG comprises 44 members, many of whom are also on the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB), the central coordinating committee of all UN institutions. With UN Water, UN Energy and UN Oceans, there is an additional institutional layer with several inter-organisational mechanisms clearly linked to the environment. Furthermore, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) unites 32 members responsible for sustainable development,

¹⁸ Inomata, *Management Review of Environmental Governance* [see Footnote 9], p. 19.

¹⁹ United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/53/242*, 10 August 1999.

and UNEP is among them. The fields of activity and composition of all these forums therefore overlap at least partially, leading to an unclear division of labour between them. As a result, the EMG has failed to achieve any notable success even in areas for which it has clearly assumed responsibility.²⁰ This led the Chinese government to declare in 2007 that the EMG was incapable of fulfilling the role it had been assigned, a view shared by many.²¹ To build a more successful IEG architecture, we must therefore find solutions to these coordination problems.

Multilateral environmental agreements

The international community has passed almost 500 multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) to combat global environmental problems. Of those, 70 percent have a regional focus, while the remaining 30 percent are global in scope.²² Although the absolute number of agreements still continues to increase (Fig. 3, p. 13), the number of agreements added each year has dropped significantly since it peaked in the mid-90s, following the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio (Fig. 4, p. 14). Likewise, the number of new protocols levelled out, while amendments have become a more important instrument within environmental governance.

The international community has commonly responded to environmental problems by creating new institutions – without UNEP as the central institutional basis. This decentralised approach to governance fundamentally differs from the more centralised management concepts followed by international bodies such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) or the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).²³ Within the IEG system, this solution has led to disproportionately high bureaucratic costs. The UN Joint Inspection Unit calculated that the administrative costs for

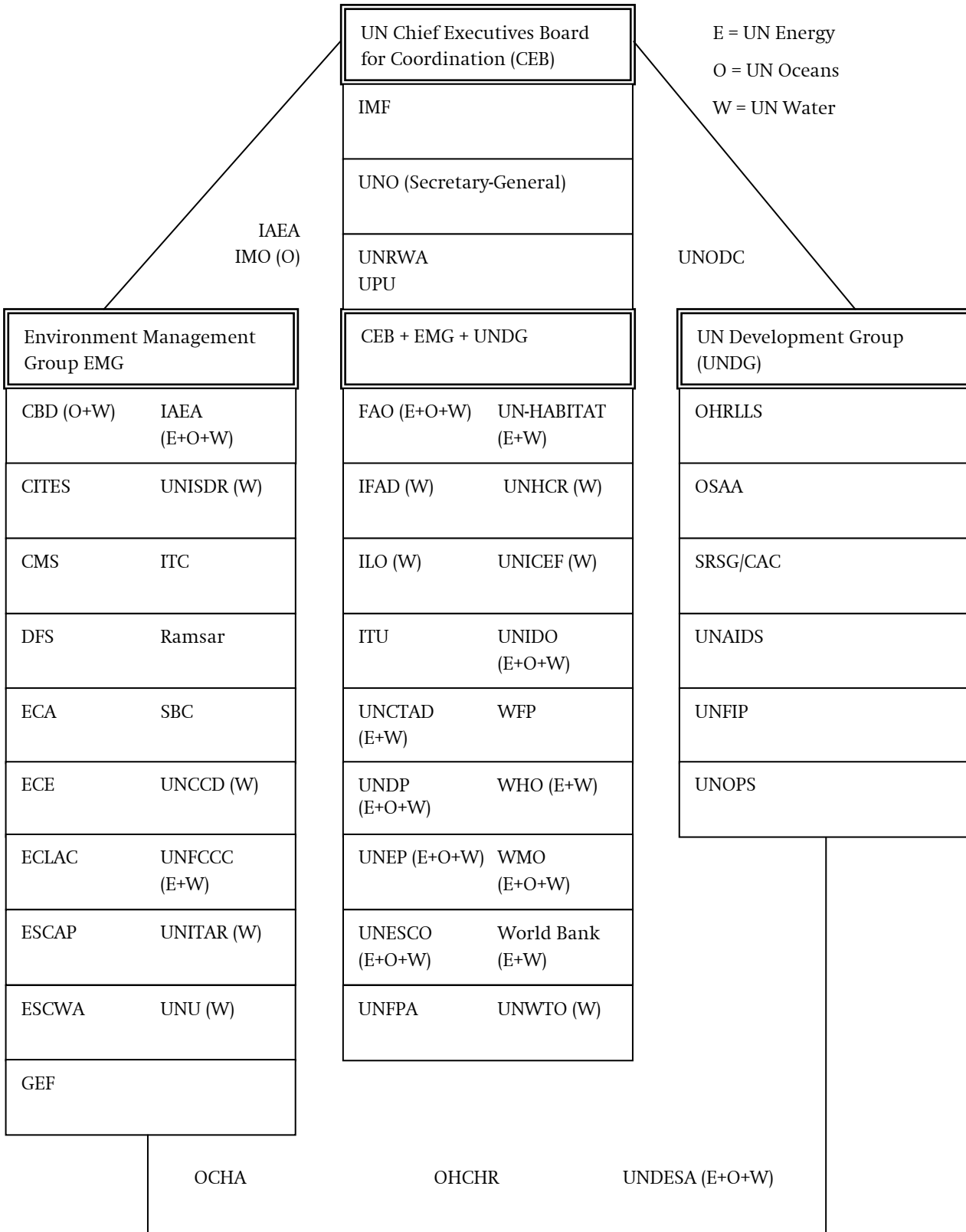
²⁰ Inomata, *Management Review of Environmental Governance* [see Footnote 9], p. 19.

²¹ Statement of the Chinese Delegation on the UN Systematic Framework for Environmental Activities, 23 January 2007 <http://www.un.org/ga/president/61/follow-up/environment/statements/jan07/statement_China.pdf> (accessed on 5 November 2010).

²² Inomata, *Management Review of Environmental Governance* [see Footnote 9], p. 10.

²³ Sophia Gödel, *Das Umweltprogramm der Vereinten Nationen (UNEP) und seine Rolle im System der International Environmental Governance*, Frankfurt a.M. 2006, pp. 255.

Fig. 2
Overlapping responsibilities of UN coordination bodies for the environment and sustainable development
(Not included are UN regional commissions. World Bank, UNFIP and OCHA have UNDG observer status)



the IEG system were four times as high as in other governance areas.²⁴

The decentralised approach also exacerbates the diplomatic workload. Between 1992 and 2007, 18 of the bigger MEAs alone were responsible for 540 meetings and rounds of negotiations, which resulted in 5,084 decisions.²⁵ In an average year, just ten major MEAs involved around 115 days of negotiations that led to 185 individual resolutions.²⁶ This level of regulation is extremely difficult to manage for developing countries, and it curbs the effective participation of NGOs. The high degree of fragmentation also causes coordination problems and makes it more difficult to integrate the different domains of environmental policy.²⁷

There are unquestionably advantages to such a differentiated governance structure – such as the possibility of ambitious states moving forward with specific solutions, or the fact that a partially redundant network might be better secured against institutional failures of some of its parts – but we have paid a high price for these. The international community could increase the effectiveness and efficiency of multilateral agreements if it defined responsibilities more clearly, merged capacity building efforts and pooled the work of MEA secretariats more decisively. This would avoid institutional duplication and cut costs. Of course it has to be considered that international law sets a number of boundaries for a comprehensive reform because every environmental agreement has its own set of procedures and differs in membership. Centralisation by merging MEAs is therefore only conceivable in individual cases at best – it would be impracticable to apply this approach to the whole system.

Problems of financing

The funding structure of international environmental governance consists of a barely coordinated range of different funds, each with their own targets, application procedures and control mechanisms. This results in a lack of transparency and oversight, and even uncertainty as to the overall amount of money that is available in the IEG system to perform its manifold tasks.²⁸ In this regard it must be noted that, as the JIU put it, funding for the numerous environmental agreements is “often unpredictable and inadequate”.²⁹

One of the few well-working areas in terms of funding is the ozone regime, which, thanks to the Multilateral Fund established in 1990, has an effective and well-equipped funding mechanism.³⁰ However, the situation in other fields is much bleaker. Funding for climate governance alone now comprises of at least 25 bilateral and multilateral funds.³¹ This multiplicity is the result of political negotiations, it did not develop from the perspective of finding the most effective way possible to fund the reduction of greenhouse gases and efforts to find long-term responses to climate change.³² The High Level Advisory Group on Climate Change Financing (AGF), created by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, said in November 2010 suitable ways could be found how to raise USD 100 billion per year for climate change financing from 2020 onwards as has been agreed upon in the Copenhagen Accord. Given the numbers currently circulating in IEG discussions – a similar magnitude as in the Copenhagen Accord was put on the table, though not agreed upon, at the Convention on Biological Diversity COP 10 in Nagoya in October 2010 – there is one particularly wicked problem with environmental financing: If the pledged investments do not materialise, there is a risk of a serious loss of trust between developed and devel-

24 Inomata, *Management Review of Environmental Governance* [see Footnote 9], pp. 11.

25 UNEP/GC.25/16/Add.1, *Background Paper for the Ministerial Consultations. Discussion Paper Presented by the Executive Director. Addendum. International Environmental Governance and United Nations Reform*, Nairobi 2008, pp. 5.

26 Miquel Muñoz, Rachel Thrasher, Adil Najam, “Measuring the Negotiation Burden of Multilateral Environmental Agreements” in: *Global Environmental Politics*, 9 (November 2009) 4, pp. 1–13.

27 Steinar Andresen, “The Effectiveness of UN Environmental Institutions”, in: *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 7 (2007), pp. 317–336.

28 Adil Najam/Miquel Muñoz, *Tracking Global Environmental Financing*, Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development, April 2008 (Global Environmental Governance Working Paper 1).

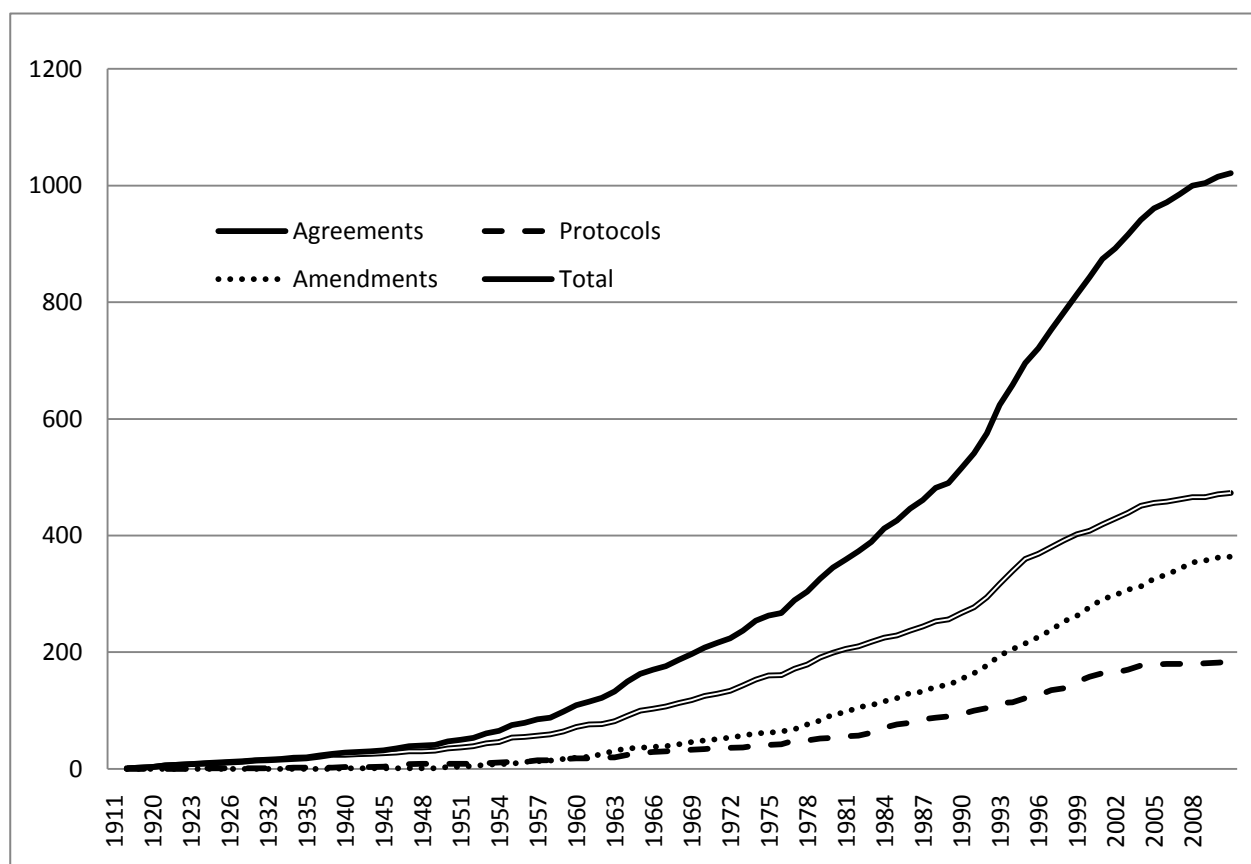
29 Inomata, *Management Review of Environmental Governance* [see Footnote 9], p. v, see also esp. pp. 21.

30 Ralph Luken, Tamas Grof, “The Montreal Protocol’s Multilateral Fund and Sustainable Development” in: *Ecological Economics*, 56 (2006), pp. 241–255.

31 Climate Funds Update, *Climate Funds* <www.climatefundsupdate.org/listing> (accessed on 20 January 2011).

32 Cf. Liane Schalatek et al., *Where’s the Money? The Status of Climate Finance Post-Copenhagen*, Washington, D.C., Heinrich Böll Foundation North America, Overseas Development Institute 2010.

Fig. 3
Absolute increase in multilateral environmental agreements since 1911



Source: Own graph, data from Ronald B. Mitchell. 2002–2010. International Environmental Agreements Database Project (Version 2010.3), <http://iea.uoregon.edu/page.php?query=summarize_by_year&yearstart=1911&yearend=2010&inclusion=MEA> (accessed on 3. November 2010).

oping countries. However, if the funds are made available, the existing institutions will seriously struggle to facilitate them, and they would likely overstretch the intake capacities of most developing countries.

The Global Environment Facility

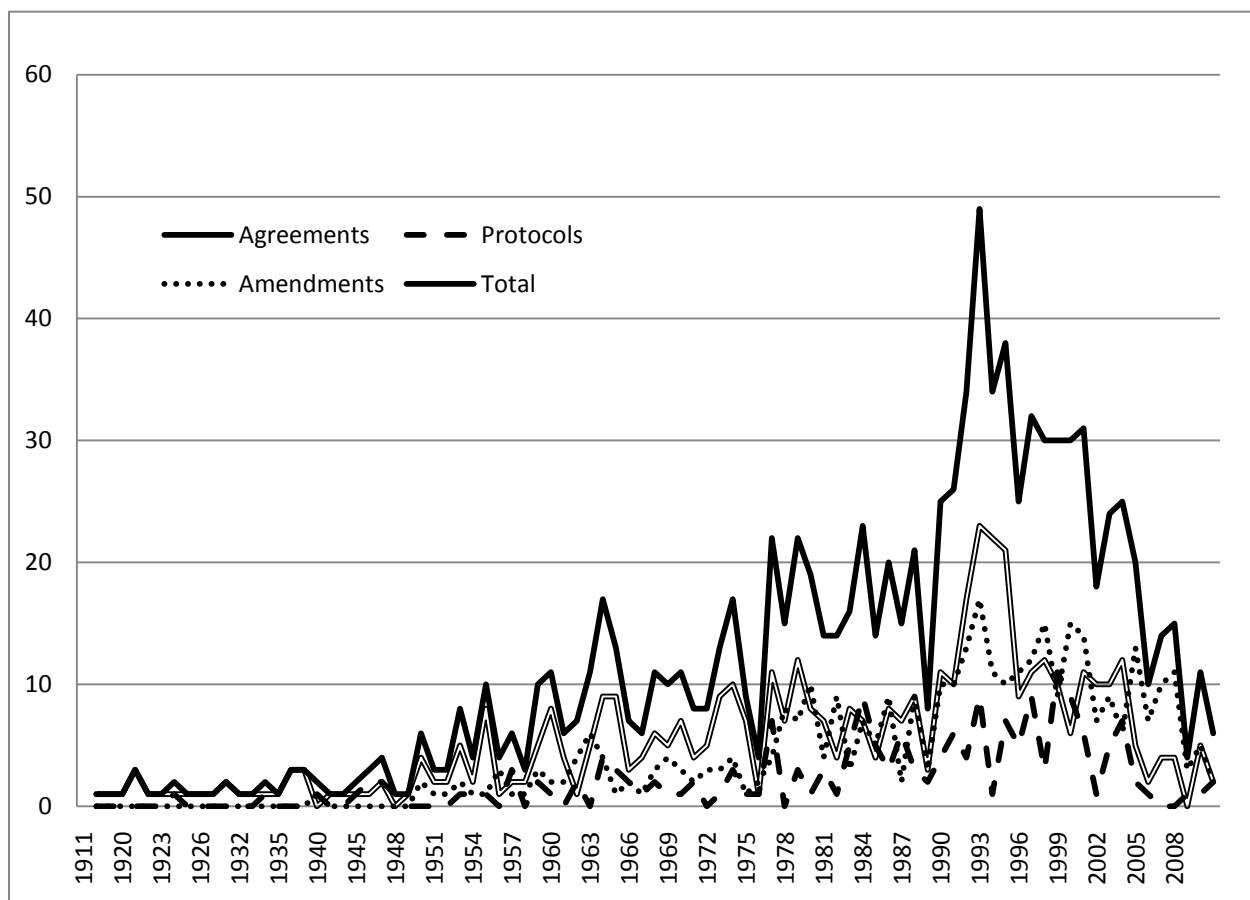
In 1991 the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established as an institution for the allocation of funds for environmental sustainability. It does not have an operational mandate, but rather functions as a fund manager for the international community. One of its roles in this regard involves providing a funding mechanism for the Framework Convention on Climate Change and for the Convention on Biological Diversity. Based not on an international treaty but on the Instrument, the founding document of the GEF, it is

not a classical international organisation, yet it comprises many features of one.

Between 1991 and 2010 the GEF provided funds totalling USD 9.2 billion to over 2,700 projects that were implemented in more than 165 newly industrialised and developing countries. According to data from the GEF Secretariat, this was supplemented by USD 40 billion in co-financing. This makes the GEF the largest funder of international environmental governance schemes.³³ With a budget of USD 4.25 billion for the period 2010–2014, the international community has nominally provided considerably more money to the GEF than ever before (see Table 1, p. 15). In real terms, however, the latest replenishment means that the level of funding will at best have remained constant since the GEF was founded.

³³ Global Environment Facility, *What is the GEF?*, <<http://thegef.org/gef/whatisgef>> (accessed on 20 January 2011).

Fig. 4
Relative increase in multilateral environmental agreements since 1911 (new agreements per year)



Source: Own graph, data from Ronald B. Mitchell. 2002–2010. International Environmental Agreements Database Project (Version 2010.3), <http://iea.uoregon.edu/page.php?query=summarize_by_year&yearstart=1911&yearend=2010&inclusion=MEA> (accessed on 3. November 2010).

According to a study by the Paris-based Institut français des relations internationales, there is a discrepancy between what is expected of the GEF and what its actual financial and institutional resources provide. The GEF also faces problems in terms of efficiently managing and allocating funding. The study concludes that the Facility should have long-since adapted better to the new environmental governance landscape, which now comprises considerably more institutions and stakeholders than when it was created.³⁴

Multilateral collaboration can only function if mutual trust exists between North and South. This mutual trust, in turn, depends to a large extent on

funding pledged to recipient countries actually being made available. Proposed reforms to solve these problems include introducing a comprehensive GEF register, which would remedy the shortcomings in information management.³⁵ The GEF should provide more precise and transparent information on available sources of funding and further simplify access to funding. In July 2010, the GEF Council agreed on some important steps in this direction. Developing countries now have direct access to GEF funds, and there are plans to top up the GEF Country Support Program and modernise project management.³⁶

³⁴ Emma Broughton, *The Global Environment Facility. Managing the Transition*, Paris: Institut français des relations internationales, June 2009 (Health and Environment Reports No. 3), esp. pp. 75.

³⁵ Najam, Muñoz, *Tracking Global Environmental Financing* [see Footnote 28].

³⁶ GEF Secretariat, *Highlights of the Council's Discussions, GEF Council Meeting June 28–July 1, 2010*, 7 July 2010, <www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/C.38_Highlights_FINAL.pdf>, p. 4f (accessed on 26 August 2010).

Table 1
Development of nominal contributions to the GEF since 1991 (in USD billion)

| Phase | Total funding | Funding per year |
|----------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| GEF-Pilotphase (1991–1994) | 1.30 | 0.43 |
| GEF-1 (1994–1997) | 2.00 | 0.67 |
| GEF-2 (1998–2002) | 2.00 | 0.50 |
| GEF-3 (2002–2006) | 2.92 | 0.73 |
| GEF-4 (2006–2010) | 3.13 | 0.78 |
| GEF-5 (2010–2014) | 4.25 | 1.06 |

The international community must also make some elementary decisions. It must clarify whether IEG financing should retain its current fragmentary structure, and whether the community wants to keep creating new funds, or whether it makes more sense to reform institutions like the GEF, which has two decades of experience in the field, and expand their capacities to deal with the expectedly increasing financial flows. As an institution it is ideally positioned to effectively drive forward the integration of environmental protection and sustainable development within its field of activity. What's missing is the decision to actually tap into this potential.

Environmental assessments and science-based policy advice

Effective environmental governance must be built on appropriate institutional solutions to combat environmental problems. These solutions must be based on scientific insights if they ought to be well-targeted and sustainable. As a result, Global Environmental Assessments (GEA) have become much-used tools over the past few decades.³⁷ They typically provide an overview of current scientific knowledge on the causes and effects of environmental changes, and formulate possible responses. This information on the general features of environmental change, usually combined with detailed regional studies, allows political decision-makers to better evaluate what type of regulation would make the most sense. GEAs are therefore an essential component of science-based policy-making, and their importance has steeply increased over the

years. Between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, two to three GEAs were usually produced every year; since 2000, up to a dozen have been conducted annually.³⁸ The most well known of these include the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), and the Global Environment Outlook (GEO), a series of assessments produced under the aegis of UNEP. The decision to establish the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) will further strengthen the environmental science-policy interface.

As analyses of past assessment processes show, there is a lot to learn from earlier attempts and hence a large range of possibilities for improvements. It is crucial that the relevant institutions and governing bodies take these into account. They include, in particular, clearly outlining and explaining scientific uncertainties, taking greater account of non-quantitative and interdisciplinary approaches, giving more consideration to local and regional characteristics, increasing public involvement, increasing dialogue with political decision-makers, and improving the continuity of processes to ensure that valuable experiences are made available for future assessments.³⁹ By applying such measures, the frequent misapprehensions between decision-makers who insufficiently base their decisions on scientific insights, and scientists who inadequately take into account the importance of producing policy-relevant products might be overcome to some degree.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ronald B. Mitchell et al. (Hg.), *Global Environmental Assessments*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2006.

³⁸ William C. Clark et al., *Evaluating the Influence of Global Environmental Assessments*, in: Mitchell et al. (ed.), *Global Environmental Assessments* [see Footnote 37], p. 4.

³⁹ Dale S. Rothman et al., "How to Make Global Assessments More Effective. Lessons from the Assessment Community", in: *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 1 (2009), pp. 214–218.

⁴⁰ Juergen Weichselgartner/Roger Kaspersen, *Barriers in the Science-Policy-Practice-Interface. Toward a Knowledge-Action-System in Global Environmental Change Research*, in: "Global Environmental Change", 20 (2010), pp. 266–277.

Succeeding through failure? Reform processes from Rio 1992 to Rio 2012

Since UNEP was set up in 1972 and even more so since the 1992 Rio Conference, the Environment Programme's organisation and mandate, its working methods and effectiveness, funding and efficiency, and, in a wider sense, the entire surrounding environmental governance structure have been subject to controversial reform discussions. Beside all calls, so far no move has successfully led to comprehensively overhaul the Programme. Observers have cited a number of reasons for this.⁴¹ These include, firstly, the sluggishness of the UN system and the inflexibility of established institutions. Once existing institutions acquire competences, they are unwilling to give them up and therefore wary about calls to improve inter-institutional coordination. However, decisions on the division of responsibilities and working methods of international organisations naturally rest with their member states, which pass the relevant resolutions at regular Conferences of the Parties (COP). Therefore, political factors are ultimately more important than the dynamics within institutions, and responsibility to resolve any institutional fatigue lies with the respective member states.

Taking the Rio Conference in 1992 as a starting point, we can divide the reform process into three phases. The first, which lasted until 2000, involved considerable expansion of the structure of international environmental governance up to the mid-90s, when the system stumbled into a crisis that ended with an inadequate package of reforms. The second phase began in 2001 and was characterised by sharp polarisation. Europe in particular was committed to developing far-reaching reform concepts, while the US blocked any move to achieve ambitious institutional overhaul. In parallel, EU Member States were gradually drawing closer to some developing countries. One of the reasons for this was Europe's willingness to agree to even small-scale reforms without giving up

its vision of a radical reorganisation. At the same time, the emerging and many developing countries were placing more value on effective environmental policy, particularly due to its significance for sustainable development. This was especially evident in China and Brazil. A significant development at the diplomatic level was an informal consultative process on IEG reform lasting from 2006 to 2008 that should become the first in a series of such processes. With lively participation from numerous states, it involved identifying essential functions and prevalent weaknesses of the IEG system.

This consultative process, which was in line with the central paradigm of "form follows function", paved the way for the third phase, which began in 2009 and is still ongoing. It is characterised by constructive considerations and open discussions on how to develop the necessary functions of international environmental governance, and what form IEG would need to take in the future for delivering them.

There is now a rare window of opportunity for a comprehensive reform of the IEG system. First, the US has rekindled its interest in multilateral agreements, though its ability to actually ratify any agreements remains impaired; second, emerging economies in particular, but also most developing countries now have firmly established environmental policies as part of their sustainable development efforts and are interested in substantial support by the UN system; third, there is a clear consensus that the current system is not adequately designed, staffed, and financed to deliver the necessary results; and fourth, the consecutive consultative processes were marked by a consensus-oriented approach, and they have increased trust among parties. The window will remain open at least until the 2012 Rio Conference. This means that probably for the first time, there is a real opportunity for a comprehensive improvement of the IEG system.

⁴¹ Adil Najam, Mihaela Papa, Nadaa Tayib, *Global Environmental Governance. A Reform Agenda*, Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2006, pp. 21; Marjanke Vijge, *A World/United Nations Environment Organisation? An Explanation of the Non-decisions on the Reform of the International Environmental Governance System*, Wageningen University, MSc Thesis, August 2009.

1992–2000: Expansion, crisis and restructuring

The first phase of the reform process lasted from 1992 to 2000 and began with a considerable expansion of the IEG system. However, the much-hoped-for breakthrough following the 1992 *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro failed to materialise. Although the conference brought with it three major new environmental agreements – the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) – these proved to be ultimately insufficient in reversing the trend of global environmental degradation. At the same time, setting them up as independent conventions exacerbated the already serious coordination difficulties that existed within international environmental governance, and it diminished the relevance of UNEP. In combination with a dramatic decrease in funding contributions from the US, this plunged the Environment Programme into a serious crisis. The US was at the time creating enormous pressure to take action by unilaterally reducing payments to all UN institutions.

In 1997 environment ministers responded to these combined crises by passing the Nairobi Declaration, which was intended to renew UNEP's mandate and strengthen its role. Two years later the UN created two new – albeit so far only moderately successful – forums aimed at improving the situation: the Environment Management Group (EMG) and the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF).⁴² The GMEF met for the first time in Malmö, Sweden, in 2000. The participating government officials declared in the resulting Malmö Declaration that there was an urgent need to revive international environmental collaboration. Despite all successes achieved thus far, the destruction of global environmental goods was continuing at an alarming rate. To combat this, the environment ministers suggested substantially upgrading the institutional architecture of international environmental governance. It was hoped that this would secure the environmental basis for sustainable development, and would help countries pursue their economic interests in an environmentally friendly way. However, the jointly agreed goals contained in the Malmö Declaration masked the fact that no agreement existed on the

⁴² See General Assembly Resolution 53/242, 28 July 1999.

question of the appropriate means of achieving them. In fact, prevalent dissent within the international community on the future of environmental governance would become increasingly evident in the following years.

2001–2008: Between far-reaching reform plans and political blockade

Many observers soon saw that the few compromises on reform reached in the late 1990s would be insufficient to resolve the fundamental weaknesses of the governance architecture. In a sense, the IEG system had outgrown its own framework, and the once-adequate governance structure increasingly struggled to manage the enormous organisational complexities and breadth of tasks.⁴³

In light of this, the UNEP Governing Council decided in 2000 to establish the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives (IGM). This put a group of high-ranking experts in charge of identifying weak spots in the IEG system and developing targeted reform measures to combat these. However, it quickly became clear that the delegates were very much divided in their opinions. Despite a number of meetings, no agreement was reached on the future model for a reliable financial basis for the UNEP, on the issue of universal membership, on the possibility of reorganising the locations of MEA secretariats, and on ways of monitoring obligations arising from existing environmental agreements.⁴⁴

In mid-February 2002, the Governing Council and the GMEF met in Cartagena, Colombia. Delegates adopted the IGM's unfinished final report and agreed a compromise under the aegis of the EU. The so-called Cartagena Package envisaged, among other things, upgrading the GMEF so that it would be able to provide more political leadership within the UN system in future.⁴⁵

⁴³ Najam, Papa, Tayib, *Global Environmental Governance* [see Footnote 41], pp. 1.

⁴⁴ International Institute for Sustainable Development, *Earth Negotiations Bulletin: Summary of the Seventh Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council, Third Global Ministerial Environment Forum and Final Open-Ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or their High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance: 12–15 February 2002. GMEF-3 FINAL*, Vol. 16, No. 24, 18 February 2002.

⁴⁵ Decision SS.VII/1 of the UNEP Governing Council adopted at its seventh special session in Cartagena, Colombia, 15 February 2002. Cf. Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommission des

But after George W. Bush took office as President of the United States in January 2001, US foreign policy changed course dramatically.⁴⁶ The new approach became most evident when Washington pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol, which the US had signed under Bill Clinton, but never ratified. International climate policy was not the only area to suffer; President Bush also ensured that for eight years his country, once a pioneer in environmental policy, posed an almost insurmountable obstacle to any far-reaching reform of the IEG system.

Nevertheless, expectations were high when the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD or Rio+10) was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. But the meeting left many participants disappointed.⁴⁷ It failed to generate any significant momentum for reform and produced no tangible results besides the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI). Paragraph 140 of the JPOI simply calls for sustainable development to be further integrated into the work of UN organisations and for the different organisations' duties to be better coordinated. The decisions of the UNEP General Council in Cartagena were to be fully implemented, although the question of universal membership was passed to the General Assembly – which has deferred the issue six times so far.

After the non-outcome of the World Summit, the progress of IEG reform was hanging by a thread. It was now impossible to conceive of anything other than making gradual and small-scale reforms to the system. At the 2005 Governing Council, delegates passed the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building (BSP).⁴⁸ This plan focuses on providing, through UNEP, joint support in the field of technology and capacity-building to interested countries. The BSP was designed to remove major weaknesses in this area and simplify access to new technologies. However, to this day, delegates from developing countries are still

calling for the plan to be finally and fully implemented.

The same year, another stage in the reform process came about in the form of the 2005 World Summit.⁴⁹ In Paragraph 169 of its outcome document, the UN General Assembly declared once again that it was willing to explore the political prospects for establishing a coherent institutional structure in the environmental sector.⁵⁰ With this in mind, plans were made to launch an informal consultative process, which would give the participating national representatives a platform to present and align their different positions. Yet before this process could fully begin, the first intergovernmental talks to be held on IEG reform since the World Summit ended without result at the UNEP GCSS-9/GMEF in February 2006 in Dubai.⁵¹ The discussions had focused on the possible founding of a United Nations Environment Organisation (UNEO) and on universal membership in the UNEP Governing Council. France was the driving force behind these two options, which were also supported by other European countries. Countries opposing them included the US, Brazil, India, Australia and Russia. Ostensibly, the lack of outcome was linked to the report, expected in autumn 2006, of the High-level Panel on System-Wide Coherence, which had been established by the then Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and to the upcoming informal consultative process. It was claimed that it would be unwise to act until the outcome of these formats was clear. In fact, two key requirements were missing at this stage, making it impossible to even consider such far-reaching steps as founding a UNEO and introducing universal membership to the Governing Council. Firstly, the weaknesses of the present system had not been analysed and discussed thoroughly, and secondly, there was no solid intergovernmental consensus on the necessary functions of the IEG. It was only during the informal consultative process that these requirements were gradually becoming fulfilled.

Deutschen Bundestags, *Globalisierung der Weltwirtschaft*, Berlin 2002, pp. 377; Andreas Rechkemmer, *Globale Umweltpolitik 2005. Perspektiven im Kontext der Vereinten Nationen*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, November 2004 (SWP-Studie 45/2004), pp. 20.

⁴⁶ Maria Ivanova/Daniel C. Esty, "Reclaiming U.S. Leadership in Global Environmental Governance", in: *SAIS Review*, 28 (2008) 2, pp. 57–75.

⁴⁷ Rechkemmer, *Globale Umweltpolitik 2005* [see Footnote 45], pp. 11.

⁴⁸ International Institute for Sustainable Development, *Earth Negotiations Bulletin: Summary of the 23rd Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum: 21–25 February 2005. GC-23 FINAL*, Vol. 16, No. 47, 28 February 2005.

⁴⁹ Joy Hyvarinen, "The 2005 World Summit: UN Reform, Security, Environment and Development" in: *Review of European Community & International Environmental Law*, 15 (2006) 1, pp. 1–10.

⁵⁰ UN General Assembly, *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 60/1. 2005 World Summit Outcome, A/RES/60/1*, New York, 24 October 2005.

⁵¹ International Institute for Sustainable Development, *Earth Negotiations Bulletin: Summary of the International Conference on Chemicals Management and Ninth Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum: 4–9 February 2006. GCSS-9 FINAL*, Vol. 16, No. 54, 13 February 2006.

Successful failure: The 2006–2008 informal consultative process

In line with the mandate of the UN General Assembly, the President appointed in 2006 two co-chairs for the *Informal Consultative Process on the Institutional Framework for the United Nations' Environmental Activities*. This process was led by Enrique Berruga, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UN and later replaced by his successor Claude Heller, and Peter Maurer, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN.

The first stage involved a series of workshops in which delegates discussed in detail the existing problems of the environmental governance architecture.⁵² These meetings succeeded in bringing about a much-needed agreement on present shortcomings. The key functions that the IEG system should perform were also discussed.⁵³ Both are essential components for any attempt at reform, which is why they raised expectations of further progress in the mid-term.

From January 2007, the process moved on to drawing up a draft paper that would list options for reforming environmental governance. Completed in June 2007, the Co-Chairs Options Paper is divided into two parts. The first focuses on gradually strengthening existing institutions, while the second deals with comprehensively transforming the system.⁵⁴ This approach was designed to offer the international community flexibility in choosing between incremental and far-ranging reform.

The Options Paper contains seven thematic blocks designed to strengthen the IEG. These are:

- ▶ Scientific assessment, monitoring and early warning capacity
- ▶ Coordination and cooperation at the level of agencies
- ▶ Multilateral environmental agreements
- ▶ Regional presence and activities at the regional level
- ▶ Bali Strategic Plan, technology support and capacity-building
- ▶ Information technologies, partnerships and advocacy
- ▶ Funding

⁵² 2005 World Summit Follow-up: *Informal Consultations of the Plenary on Environment*, <www.un.org/ga/president/60/summitfollowup/enviro.html> (accessed on 24 March 2010).

⁵³ UNEP, *Letter from the co-chairs of the informal process of the General Assembly on the strengthening of international environmental governance*, UNEP/GC.25/INF/35, 17 February 2009.

⁵⁴ *Informal Consultative Process on the Institutional Framework for the United Nations' Environmental Activities, Co-Chairs' Options Paper*, New York, 14 June 2010.

For each block, the co-chairs recommended several measures aimed at gradually improving the status quo. Heller and Maurer claimed that this “ambitious incrementalism” was the only way that consensus within the international community could be achieved.

The final stage involved drafting a resolution that was scheduled to be submitted for approval at the 63rd General Assembly in autumn 2008. On the basis of previous discussions, which by now had been running for two years, the co-chairs began drawing up a number of interim drafts in April 2008. However, they underestimated the degree to which opinions still differed. Only during the concluding discussions did it become clear that it would be impossible for the national representatives to reach a consensus that differed significantly from the status quo. Faced with this situation, the co-chairs decided not to file a resolution. Instead they gave the delegates the somewhat disheartening advice to “make the best of upcoming intergovernmental meetings”.⁵⁵ With that, it was clear that once again the attempt had failed to find agreement on how to reform international environmental governance. Seen differently, though, there were more positive outcomes visible beneath the surface. Most importantly, and for the first time, a consensus had been reached on what functions the IEG system should actually perform. This would prove crucial for further developments.

Reform drive gains momentum in 2009

The formula of “ambitious incrementalism” had been identified as the lowest common denominator in the informal consultative process. Still it included elements that went beyond what had been agreeable just a few years before. The long-awaited turning point in the IEG reform process finally came in 2009. Marked shifts in the positions of a number of nations that are essential for any governance reform, notably the US, China and Brazil, were decisive in bringing this about.

As recently as 2006, the US had issued the following comment on possible IEG reform: “The existing system of multilateral environmental agreements reflects a good balance of coordination and decentralisation.

⁵⁵ Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, *Letter from the co-chairs of the informal process of the General Assembly on the strengthening of international environmental governance*, UNEP/GC.25/INF/35, 17 February 2009.

A supranational authority must not interfere with the good work of these MEAs by exercising control over them or by adding additional bureaucratic layers.”⁵⁶ The US saw no urgent need for reform, though it did express the opinion that more environmental concerns should be incorporated into development work. The statement issued by the US delegation at the 64th UN General Assembly in November 2009, after Barack Obama had assumed office as President, took on quite a different tone: “In the context of international environmental governance, the UN Environment Program has made immense progress in the areas where we have achieved consensus, such as strengthening its science function, cooperation within the UN system, emphasis on capacity building, and institutional reform. The number of positive developments, including UNEP’s reorganisation and reform successes, are the initial results of our efforts to improve environmental governance.”⁵⁷

In the case of developing countries, the shift in position had less to do with a change in government and more with the fact that the importance of effective environmental policy for sustainable development became increasingly recognised. Thus China stated as far back as 2007: “As a matter of principle, China supports strengthening ties and coordination between different environmental agencies and improving international environmental governance. [...] However, the environmental question is at heart a question of development. Therefore [IEG] reform must take place with an eye to the broader goal of sustainable development and within the general framework of UN reform in regard to economic and social development. [...] The focus should be on further strengthening and reforming the UNEP, [...] to increase its effectiveness and efficiency.”⁵⁸ Brazil, for its part, had assumed a leading role in pushing for reform as early as 2007, when it called for the founding of an umbrella organisation for environment and sustainable development (see below). Thus the political climate appeared conducive for the start of the Belgrade Process in 2009.

⁵⁶ Statement by Michael G. Snowden, United States Mission to the United Nations, USUN Press release #302(06), New York 2006.

⁵⁷ Statement by Michael G. Snowden, United States Adviser, on Agenda Item 53: Sustainable Development, before the Second Committee of the Sixty-Fourth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 2 Nov. 2009.

⁵⁸ Statement of the Chinese Delegation on the UN Systematic Framework for Environmental Activities, 23 Jan. 2007.

The Belgrade Process in 2009

Although the draft resolution on the reform of international environmental governance developed on the basis of the Co-Chairs’ Options Paper had not been put to the vote, it did result in extensive and fruitful debate. This led Serbia to propose the establishment of a Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance at the 25th Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC-25/GMEF) held in Nairobi in February 2009.⁵⁹ The new committee was charged with preparing a joint draft proposal for the reorganisation of the environmental governance architecture in time for the next session of the Governing Council (GCSS-11/GMEF) in February 2010. In the new political climate, chances were good that the consultative group would be able to achieve real progress, though nobody expected consensus on the more far-ranging issues. It was clear to European delegates that any reform measures would need to be discussed extensively, and that reaching a consensus would be difficult.

It was decided at the outset that the familiar dictum “form follows function” should serve as a guiding principle for the consultative process. In addition, it was agreed that a thorough discussion of the key functions of IEG should serve as a point of departure for negotiations on what new forms IEG could take. These might conceivably be affected through steps ranging from incremental changes to comprehensive institutional reforms.

The consultative group convened for the first time with 39 delegations on 27/28 June 2009 in the Serbian capital, the location giving rise to the name “Belgrade Process”. Its second meeting was held in Rome on 28/29 October 2009, this time with 43 delegations attending. Before the second session, the group’s two co-chairs – Stefania Prestigiacomo and John Njoroge Michuki, the environmental ministers of Italy and Kenya, respectively – had jointly published an opinion piece in the British daily *Guardian* in which they advocated setting up a UN Environment Organisation.⁶⁰ Remarkably, no delegation at the meeting objected to

⁵⁹ International Institute for Sustainable Development, *Earth Negotiations Bulletin: Twenty-Fifth Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum: 16–20 February 2009.GC-25/GMEF FINAL*, Vol. 16, No. 73, 23 Feb. 2009.

⁶⁰ Stefania Prestigiacomo/John Njoroge Michuki, “Why We Need a World Environment Organisation”, in: *The Guardian*, 28 Oct. 2009.

this, though it has to be noted that the proposal was not officially put on the table. Discussions proceeded very constructively, and in the outcome document the group laid out key objectives of the IEG system and their relevant functions and listed a number of steps by which those could be achieved.⁶¹ The options for reform laid out in the paper can be divided into incremental changes, incremental reforms and broader institutional reform.

The incremental changes relate to measures that are covered by the UNEP's current mandate and that can be realised directly, such as the implementation of the Cartagena Package and the Bali Plan, the role of UNEP within the UN Development Group, partnerships with civil society and the private sector, supporting interested nations in devising more sustainable economic strategies and strengthening UNEP's regional offices.

The incremental reforms constitute the largest block of options for strengthening IEG. Some of these are covered by the UNEP's existing mandate, while implementing others would require a special resolution by the UNEP Governing Council, the UN General Assembly or some other body.

Finally, the paper also lays out possible options for comprehensive governance reform, without going into specifics. The building blocks described in Table 2 were identified as possible options, which are not mutually exclusive.

Table 2
Options for reforming international environmental governance based on the Belgrade Process, updated after the Nairobi meeting in July 2010

- a. Enhancing UNEP
- b. Establishing a new umbrella organisation for sustainable development
- c. Establishing a specialised agency such as a world environment organisation
- d. Possible reforms of ECOSOC and the Commission on Sustainable Development
- e. Enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining present structures

⁶¹ *International Environmental Governance: Outcome of the Work of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives*, UNEP/GCSS.XI/4.

Thus the delegates acknowledged the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the governance system in principle, without committing themselves to a particular option or specific measures. It was proposed that the discussion be continued in a further round of consultations at the GCSS-11/GMEF in February 2010. This paved the way for further tackling the controversial issue of comprehensive reform.

The Nairobi-Helsinki Process 2010

Many observers expected that the Global Ministerial Environment Forum held in Bali from 24 to 26 February 2010 and the parallel special session of the UNEP Governing Council (GCSS-11/GMEF) would give fresh impetus to the IEG reform process.⁶² It was hoped that the incremental reforms that had been specified in the discussions up to that point – including the outcomes of the Belgrade Process – could finally lift off and that it would be possible to reach a decision on further discussions on the transformation of the environmental governance architecture. In a sense, the Bali meeting did deliver.

In its decision SS.XI/1, the Governing Council formally adopted the results of the Belgrade Process and thereby acknowledged the options for an environmental governance reform. UNEP was directed to collaborate with the government representatives in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to determine which of the incremental changes in the list of options specified by the Belgrade Process were covered by UNEP's mandate and could be implemented immediately. The Governing Council said it would like to see UNEP implement these reforms as part of its current work programme 2010/2011, if possible; measures that could not be implemented within this period should be incorporated into the work programme for 2012/2013. These resolutions represented an important building block in the current incremental reform model, also known as UNEP Plus.

Another step forward was the Council's decision to establish a further high-level consultative group. The Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on Broader International Environmental

⁶² International Institute for Sustainable Development, *Earth Negotiations Bulletin: Summary of the Simultaneous Extraordinary COPs to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and the 11th Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum: 22–26 February 2010*. GCSS-11 FINAL, Vol. 16, No. 84, 1 March 2010.

Governance Reform, as it was called in the beginning, was to focus exclusively on the more comprehensive reform options, with Finland's Minister of the Environment, Paula Lehtomäki, and her counterpart from Kenya, John Njoroge Michuki, acting as co-chairs. The fact that this committee was formed confirmed the impression won during the Belgrade Process, namely that virtually all of the involved national representatives were essentially willing to undertake the task of restructuring the IEG system extensively.

The first meeting of the new consultative process was held in Nairobi in July 2010. The meeting turned out to be very constructive and, with 59 delegations present, was even better attended than the previous ones. All the delegations proved open to discussing all the options that had been proposed and agreed to consolidate the list of 24 options for comprehensive transformation of IEG⁶³ compiled by the UNEP Secretariat at the end of the Belgrade Process. Each of the nine remaining options was assigned to one of the five previously agreed objectives of effective environmental governance and the functions associated with it, as shown in Table 3.

The group reconvened in Helsinki from 21-23 November for a second meeting, bringing together delegates from 44 nations. The outcome document of what would now be known as the Nairobi-Helsinki-Process contains some progressive language with regards to the IEG systems' functions, yet remains vague on form-related aspects. The UNEP Governing Council will discuss these results at GC-26/GMEF in February 2011, as it did with the outcomes of the previous Belgrade Process.

Since some of the options put forward are strictly speaking beyond the mandate of the consultative group, the Helsinki meeting followed a suggestion of the co-chairs to split the five options for broader reform laid out in Table 2, so that

- a) Enhancing UNEP
- c) Establishing a specialised agency such as a world environment organisation
- e) Enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining present structures

would be discussed within the context of IEG, while

- b) Establishing a new umbrella organisation for sustainable development
- d) Possible reforms of ECOSOC and the Commission on Sustainable Development

would be handed over to the Preparatory Committee for the UNCSD and become discussed under the sustainable development governance (SDG) framework. Therefore, reform discussions have been split into two tracks, one for IEG comprising the environmental community, and one for SDG comprising the wider sustainable development community. At GC-26/GMEF, reform proponents will try to secure political momentum for the IEG track, while trying to get agreement on how it should be linked with the SDG track. Ultimately, it has become a likely scenario that both tracks will see further talks but no far-ranging decisions before Rio+20, and that there is a realistic chance to overcome only some of the remaining contentious issues until then.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development 2012

On 24 December 2009 the UN General Assembly decided to accept Brazil's offer and hold the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. As the General Assembly decided:

"The objective of the Conference will be to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development and addressing new and emerging challenges. The focus of the Conference will include the following themes to be discussed and refined during the preparatory process: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development."⁶⁴

That UNCSD – which also goes by the name Rio+20, in reference to the Earth Summit 1992, or Rio 2012 – is taking place is by no means self-evident, nor is its focus on the two specific key themes. After the disappointing World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, no

⁶³ UNEP, *Ideas for Broader Reform of International Environmental Governance*, Background Paper by the Executive Director, Nairobi, 7 June 2010.

⁶⁴ United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution 64/236. Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, Resolution passed by the 68th General Assembly on 24 Dec. 2009, A/RES/64/236, 31 March 2010.

Table 3

Objectives and functions of, and options for, a broader reform of the IEG system, based on the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance, October 2010 (abbreviated)

| Objectives | Functions | Options |
|--|---|--|
| a) Creating a strong, credible and accessible science base and policy interface | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Acquisition, compilation, analysis and interpretation of data and information ▶ Information exchange ▶ Environmental assessment and early warning ▶ Scientific advice ▶ Science-policy interface | 1. Create a multi-scaled and multi-thematic global information network of national, international and independent scientific expertise for keeping the impact of environmental change on human wellbeing under review and issue early warnings |
| b) Developing a global authoritative and responsive voice for environmental sustainability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Global agenda setting and policy guidance and advice ▶ Mainstreaming environment into other relevant policy areas ▶ Promotion of rule making, standard setting and universal principles ▶ Dispute avoidance and settlement | 2. Establish a global policy organisation with universal membership to set, coordinate, and monitor the global environmental agenda |
| c) Achieving effectiveness, efficiency and coherence within the United Nations system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Coordination of policies and programmes ▶ Efficient and effective administration and implementation of MEAs ▶ Facilitating interagency cooperation on the environment | 3. Clustering secretariat functions and common service; establish a mechanism for global, overall coordination among existing MEAs 4. Establish a UN system-wide medium-term strategy for the environment, coordinating all environmental activities for the UN |
| d) Securing sufficient, predictable and coherent funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Mobilising and accessing funds for the global environment ▶ Developing innovative financing mechanisms to complement official funding sources ▶ Utilising funding effectively and efficiently in accordance with agreed priorities | 5. Widen the donor base, e.g. establish mechanism for receipt of private/philanthropic donations 6. Establish a joint management mechanism for all major trust funds for the environment with equal roles for project selection, appraisal and supervision of environment-related activities, in accordance with the respective spheres of expertise 7. Link global environmental policymaking with global environmental financing |
| e) Ensuring a responsive and cohesive approach to meeting country needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Human and institutional capacity building ▶ Technology transfer and financial support ▶ Mainstreaming environment into development processes ▶ Facilitating South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation | 8. Establish environment-development country teams and/or desk in existing intergovernmental offices in developing countries around the world 9. Develop an overarching framework for capacity building and technical assistance for the operational activities of MEAs, UN agencies and IFIs |

Source: Co-Chairs of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance, *Elaboration of Ideas for Broader Reform of International Environmental Governance*, 27 October 2010.

resolution was passed and no process had been envisioned that would have automatically led to a conference in 2012. Thus the decision to hold Rio+20 can be seen as evidence that the participating nations acknowledge the necessity of multilateral cooperation, at least to some degree. In many formalised negotiation rounds like the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change and in the WTO trade negotiations, stagnation has become the norm rather than an exception. Holding a major international conference therefore should be seen as a serious attempt to overcome this permanent stalemate. The two key themes have been wisely chosen, with the green economy providing an economy-based paradigm to support the implementation of sustainable development, and the institutional framework for sustainable development underpinning the to-be-improved UN's approach in tackling the same challenge.

A series of working meetings are planned before the conference, organised by a Preparatory Committee (PrepCom). The first meeting took place in mid-May 2010 and focused mainly on procedural issues relating to the UNCSD. Initial views on the core topics were also exchanged. With regards to IEG, the published statements demonstrate basic agreement on the necessity for reform, though opinions diverged on the scope and specific shape this should take. The fact that most of the delegates referred to the ongoing consultative process demonstrates that it is currently the key forum for intergovernmental talks.

In January 2011, an Intersessional Meeting took place and provided delegates with an opportunity to share their views before the upcoming PrepCom II, scheduled for March 2011, which is supposed to deal more intensively with issues of content. Furthermore, the report of the High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability is expected for the second half of 2011. Initiated by Ban Ki-moon and co-chaired by Finnish President Tarja Halonen and South Africa's President Jacob Zuma, the 21-member panel ought to develop recommendations on how the challenges of sustainable development can be successfully dealt with in the 21st century. The UN Secretary-General has called on the panel to "think big" and come up with plans that are both ambitious and pragmatic.⁶⁵ There are certainly parallels to the World Commission on Environment and Development's report published

in 1987. The so-called Brundtland Report had been decisive in shaping a definition of sustainable development that is still valid today, and it had had a major impact on the political debate in the run-up to the Rio Summit in 1992. The expectations the new panel faces are accordingly high.

⁶⁵ UN News Centre, *Ban urges high-level panel to meet global sustainability challenge*, 19 Sept. 2010, <www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35989> (accessed on 25 Sept. 2010).

Options for a reformed governance architecture

In light of the latest consultations and ongoing discussions, the existing reform options for international environmental governance can only be portrayed as snapshots. Over the course of 2010, the number of options officially discussed decreased from 24 to nine and can be expected to fall further. Hence, I will below describe three broader options that are of particular for the future of IEG. The clustering of multilateral environmental agreements is an already ongoing process. Transferring the principle to other environmental regimes is not easy and requires individual and concise planning. Likewise, a topical integration across individual environmental regimes is already taking place, yet there is still much room for significantly stronger institutionalization and procedural improvements. Finally, a UN Environment Organisation or an umbrella organisation for environment and sustainable development represent two distinct yet interrelated measures for upgrading UNEP and/or reforming the broader governance architecture.

Clustering of multilateral environmental agreements

In the search for innovative reform options, political scientist Konrad von Moltke had suggested a clustering of multilateral environmental agreements, that is, better coordination and dovetailing of related environmental agreements.⁶⁶ Clustering holds the promise of harnessing synergies between MEAs suffering from overlapping competencies. Examples of the concrete measures depicted by von Moltke include holding simultaneous conferences of the parties to reduce the costs of negotiations, sharing administrative work among the secretariats, or pooling reporting duties, which would be of particular help to developing coun-

tries.⁶⁷ Clustering is not designed to cut funding – which would meet stiff resistance from developing countries – but rather to make more cost-efficient use of existing funds. The aim is to fund more implementation measures and less administrative tasks.⁶⁸ The excessive costs of bureaucracy in the MEA field, as diagnosed by the Joint Inspection Unit, could hereby be reduced.

A first promising clustering process was initiated in the chemicals and waste sector during the mid 2000's. The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions regulate the transboundary movements of hazardous waste and toxic chemicals, but they were set up independently of each other. In 2006, a consultation process was established by the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). A working group set up within this framework began exploring options for a clustering process. This Ad Hoc Joint Working Group on Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (AHJWG) consisted of 45 participants and met three times. Following its final meeting in March 2008, it presented the Conferences of the Parties of each convention a list of recommendations for the clustering process.⁶⁹ The AHJWG functioned in a comparable way to the IEG consultative processes, as a forum for an open exchange of views, and helped to build up trust between the states. On the basis of the results produced by the AHJWG, the Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (ExCOP) decided in Bali in February 2010 to intensify cooperation between all three conventions significantly.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Co-Chairs of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance, *Draft Elaboration of Ideas for Broader Reform of International Environmental Governance*, draft of 7.9.2010, p. 18 et seq.

⁶⁸ Ministry of the Environment, *Report from a Nordic Symposium on Synergies in the Biodiversity Cluster*, Helsinki, 8./9.4.2010, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Henrik Selin, *Global Governance of Hazardous Chemicals. Challenges of Multilevel Management*, Cambridge, Mass., etc.: MIT Press, 2010, p. 179 et seq.

⁷⁰ Report of the simultaneous extraordinary meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, UNEP/FAO/CHW/RC/POPS/EXCOPS.1/8, 7.4.2010.

⁶⁶ Konrad von Moltke, "Clustering International Environmental Agreements as an Alternative to a World Environment Organisation", in: Frank Biermann/Steffen Bauer (eds.), *A World Environment Organisation*, Aldershot 2005, pp. 175–204; Sebastian Oberthür, "Clustering of Multilateral Environmental Agreements: Potentials and Limitations", in: *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 2 (2002), pp. 317–340.

One result of the ExCOP was that a new Joint Head of all three conventions was appointed. While this post is set up for a limited period of time, some participants nevertheless feared that improved coordination could mean more bureaucracy rather than greater efficiency. However, if the working processes and procedures of the three conventions are indeed further modernized as planned, the clustering process will contain considerable potential for overcoming the prevailing fragmentation at the level of multilateral environmental agreements in the chemicals and waste sector.

UNEP itself played a significant part in this, as the secretariat in Nairobi, along with the FAO, advanced the clustering process from the outset. Through the joint meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, UNEP showed that it is in a position to successfully initiate and drive synergy processes – an important experience if the Environment Programme is to take on a similar role in other policy fields.⁷¹

On the state side, members of the EU in particular have advocated this process as long-term supporters of multilateral chemical policies.⁷² Developing countries need effective support in order to be able to build up their national capacities in chemicals management, and clustering promises to pool respective efforts. The consent of the G-77 was made possible by clarifying that clustering would not lead to any reduction of the financial contributions by the developed nations.

The US is not a member to any of the three chemicals agreements. While it signed all three conventions, it has not ratified any of them. However, clustering is also regarded by the US, which took part in the ExCOP as an observer, as an example of successful cooperation within IEG.⁷³

In June 2010, negotiations on an international mercury convention were finally able to start; Europe had urged these talks for a long time, but they could not begin because of refusals by the US.⁷⁴ However, Washington opposed the obvious option of extending one of the existing chemicals conventions, which would be complex from a technical point of view, but possible in principle. This reveals a certain inconsistency typical to environmental governance. On the one hand, the US constantly demands the best possible cost efficiency from the IEG system. On the other hand, it has just obstructed this by insisting on a new standalone convention, which will involve a cost-intensive negotiation process and set up new bureaucracy.⁷⁵ This is even more unfortunate since it is doubtful whether the US will ultimately accede to the expected mercury agreement.

The situation reveals an essential dilemma, which the EU states repeatedly face in international forums. On the one hand, the US is regarded as a crucial actor, without whom a new IEG architecture is hardly conceivable.⁷⁶ On the other hand, the US only allows itself to be persuaded to get actively engaged within internationally binding agreements with great difficulty, if at all. Europe therefore repeatedly faces the choice of producing and implementing an agreement without American support, or rather waiting and thereby risking considerable dilution and delays. As long as the US is not a signatory to a subject area, but is only represented as an observer, matters remain comparatively clear. However, with a comprehensive IEG reform, a scenario can certainly be envisaged whereby Europe negotiates a workable compromise with the majority of emerging and developing countries, which the US then refuses to join. Should this be the case, it would be necessary to check carefully what consequences an abstention or even a rejection by Washington would

⁷¹ Steinar Andresen/Kristin Rosendal, "The Role of the United Nations Environment Programme in the Coordination of Multilateral Environmental Agreements", in: Frank Biermann/Bernd Siebenhüner/Anna Schreyögg (eds.), *International Organizations in Global Environmental Governance*, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 133–150.

⁷² Selin, *Global Governance of Hazardous Chemicals* [as in Footnote 69], p. 170 et seq. The EU had even demanded that the SAICM be used as a legally binding instrument. However, this did not come about as a result of resistance from the USA and developing countries (see pp. 60).

⁷³ Statement by Daniel A. Reifsnnyder, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment and Sustainable Development, Department of State, at the Preparatory Committee Meeting of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, May 17–19, 2010, *Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development*,

<www.uncsd2012.org/files/other_pdfs/statements_19may/institutional_framework/USA.pdf> (accessed on 10.9.2010).

⁷⁴ Environment News Service, *Obama Shifts U.S. Policy Back to Global Mercury Control Treaty*, 16.2.2009 <www.ens-newswire.com/ens/feb2009/2009-02-16-02.html> (accessed on 20.9.2010).

⁷⁵ UNEP estimates that the current negotiation process will cost at least US\$ 12.5 million.

⁷⁶ Pier Vellinga/Richard Howarth/Joyeeta Gupta, "Improving Global Environmental Governance", in: *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 2 (2002) 4, pp. 293–296; Pamela S. Chasek, "US Policy in the UN Environmental Arena: Powerful Laggard or Constructive Leader?", in: *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 7 (2007), pp. 363–387.

entail, and whether the rest of the world would be willing to go ahead without the US.

In sum, clustering processes provide a model with which the fragmented landscape of numerous environmental agreements can be carefully yet substantially restructured. Experiences to date are encouraging. As a bottom-up process, clustering must be driven forward by the various signatory states and fostered in accordance with the characteristics of the individual regime complexes. A glance at other regimes, for instance biodiversity, shows that there cannot be a universal blueprint for MEA clusters.⁷⁷ Clustering clearly is a one size fits nobody approach. To the contrary, tailor-made and step-by-step proceedings for each regime complex appear to be most promising.

Clusters are currently largely formed within a given subject area. Therefore, the question arises of how the likewise necessary integration can be achieved beyond the limits of specific issue areas.

Coordination and integration across issue areas

The causes of global environmental change and the approaches to solve the associated problems are often closely interconnected, which means that an integrated policy approach is required.⁷⁸ Forestry policy provides a good example of this – it shows both the increasing relevance of policy approaches that transcend the limits of individual environmental regimes and the importance of individual key actors in IEG, in this case, Brazil. In the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), established in 2000, Brazil had rejected a legally binding multilateral agreement on forest conservation. As a result, it was only possible to ultimately adopt a non-binding agreement in 2007.

The Amazon area above all is of great importance to Brazil, which is why the country strictly insists on retaining sovereignty of its forests and firmly rejects any form of international control. In the past, the Brazilian government regarded the forest primarily as a resource to be exploited, which made it unlikely that it would deal more profoundly with alternative approaches to forest use. However, over the course of

the 2000s, Brazil's attitude to forest policy changed, first subtle and then profoundly. As a result, the country's negotiating position in international forums shifted as well. The change was sparked by an increased awareness in the national government, last but not least pushed forward by domestic civil society organisations, that sustainable forest management, with its many co-benefits like improved ecosystem services, had many advantages over the then current approach of uncontrolled deforestation and intensive land use.⁷⁹

Brazil subsequently presented its own proposal for integrating sustainable forest management in climate change talks in 2006, after similar earlier attempts had failed for example in Marrakech in 2001.⁸⁰ Since then, surprisingly successful negotiations have been held under the acronym REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), exploring how to integrate climate and forestry policies.

These talks have become a test case for the increasing integration of policy areas that were previously largely tackled individually. Such integrated mechanisms become all the more important, the clearer the interdependence of individual phenomena of global environmental change and environmental and development policy aims becomes. With the expansion of REDD to REDD+, negotiations now also touch on the importance of forests for biodiversity as well as developmental aspects through the formula of "sustainable management of forests".⁸¹ While a future forest agreement could be anchored under the umbrella of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, where talks already take place, it would have to be negotiated in intensive coordination with other institutions already responsible for forest issues.⁸²

Within the scope of IEG reform, the question arises as to what extent such integration processes that go beyond individual environmental regimes should occur ad hoc or be further institutionalized. The Joint Inspection Unit has recommended reviving the system-wide planning process in the environmental field

⁷⁹ Onil Banerjee et al., "Toward a Policy of Sustainable Forest Management in Brazil. A Historical Analysis", in: *The Journal of Environment and Development*, 18 (2009) 2, pp. 130–153.

⁸⁰ Laura Ximena Rubio Alvarado/Sheila Wertz-Kanounnikoff, *Why Are We Seeing "REDD"?* Paris: Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales (IDDRI), 2008 (IDDRI Analyses 1/2008).

⁸¹ Alan Grainger et al., "Biodiversity and REDD at Copenhagen", in: *Current Biology*, 19 (2009) 21, p. R974 et seq.

⁸² Claudio Forner et al., "Keeping the Forest for the Climate's Sake. Avoiding Deforestation in Developing Countries under the UNFCCC", in: *Climate Policy*, 6 (2006), pp. 275–294.

⁷⁷ Niko Urho, *Possibilities of Enhancing Co-operation and Coordination among MEAs in the Biodiversity Cluster*, Copenhagen, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2009.

⁷⁸ Frank Biermann et al., "Environmental Policy Integration and the Architecture of Global Environmental Governance", in: *International Environmental Agreements*, 9 (2009), pp. 351–369.

(SWMTEP), which was in place until 1999. Such an UN-wide medium-term strategy could be able to tackle the many interdependencies between individual regimes and initiate working processes that would facilitate reaching many different targets in parallel. However, it remains to be seen whether the existing medium-term strategy of the UNEP can be upgraded to this kind of UN-wide instrument, as suggested by the Executive Director Achim Steiner, or whether a new instrument needs to be devised.⁸³

In its response to the JIU Report, the Chief Executives Board, chaired by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, recognized the need for a better division of tasks. In view of the failure of top-down processes in the past, however, it argued that this would best be achieved by a cooperative bottom-up process.⁸⁴ This view is in line with the reality of international environmental governance and takes into account the differences in the individual regimes' approaches to governance. In fact, there are quite different phenomena of institutional interaction, ranging from synergy and cooperation to conflict and fragmentation.⁸⁵ It is clear that simply tackling institutional fragmentation and overlapping responsibilities won't suffice. Successfully harnessing synergies among multilateral institutions requires innovative approaches. And beyond a system-wide planning instrument and solutions for improved coordination going beyond the limits of individual regimes, an even more fundamental question arises of what relationship the multilateral environmental agreements should have with the UN Environment Programme – or with a new international environmental organisation.

An international environmental organisation

The foundation of an international environmental organisation was already debated in the preparatory meetings of the 1972 United Nations Conference on

the Human Environment in Stockholm, as a result of which the UN Environment Programme was established.⁸⁶ Precisely twenty years later, New Zealand's Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer put the topic back on the agenda when he suggested establishing an international environment organisation. Brazil, France, Germany and South Africa were among the countries that subsequently discussed their own suggestions for creating a UN environment organisation, among them a 1997 initiative by Helmut Kohl, then Federal Chancellor of Germany.⁸⁷ Since then, a number of different models for such an institution have been developed, and their respective advantages and disadvantages have been the subject of controversial debates.⁸⁸ Given the wide range of concepts and diplomatic activities, observers wonder – not without reason – why the foundation of a UN environmental organisation is still on the waiting list.⁸⁹ The most obvious answer is that an international consensus has not yet been reached, with the negative stance of the US being of particular importance. Beyond this, a closer look reveals that for a long time there was no clarity on what the central functions of IEG should actually be, and hence no agreement on a restructured form could be struck. Moreover, the idea always suffered from a crucial shortcoming in the past: the advantages of a specialized agency for the environment over UNEP as a programme could not be conveyed with sufficient conviction to all parties. This was mostly the case because existing models were too vague in order to prove their potential vantage.

Following the successful rapprochement during the three consultation processes since 2006, those in favour of reform are now concentrating on developing the concrete structure of an international environmental organisation. Two models are currently heading the debate: A UN environment organisation (UNEO), as advocated by the Europeans, and an umbrella organisation for the environment and sustainable development, as suggested by Brazil.

⁸³ Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, *Comments by the Executive Director on the management review of environmental governance within the United Nations system carried out by the Joint Inspection Unit*, UNEP/GCSS.XI/5, 2.12.2009, p. 5 et seq.

⁸⁴ United Nations General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, *Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on Management review of environmental governance within the United Nations system, note by the Secretary-General*, A/64/83/Add.1, 24.6.2009.

⁸⁵ Frank Biermann et al., "The Fragmentation of Global Governance Architectures: A Framework for Analysis", in: *Global Environmental Politics*, 9 (November 2009) 4, pp. 14–40.

⁸⁶ Ivanova, "Designing the United Nations Environment Programme" [as in Footnote 13].

⁸⁷ Wissenschaftlicher Beirat der Bundesregierung Globale Umweltveränderungen, *Welt im Wandel. Neue Strukturen globaler Umweltpolitik*, Berlin 2000, pp. 138.

⁸⁸ Cf. Biermann/Bauer (eds.), *A World Environment Organisation*, Aldershot 2005; Andreas Rechkemmer (ed.), *UNEO – Towards an International Environment Organisation*, Baden-Baden 2005.

⁸⁹ Vije, *A World/United Nations Environment Organisation?* [as in Footnote 41].

A UN Environment Organisation (UNEO)

This suggestion involves upgrading UNEP to a fully fledged United Nations specialized agency in accordance with Article 57 of the UN Charter. The formal status of the new institution would be comparable with that of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Such a United Nations Environment Organisation (UNEO) would thus occupy a higher ranking position than UNEP in the institutional hierarchy.⁹⁰ It would be an autonomous subject under international law and could itself become a party to international agreements, thereby entering into legal relationships with other bodies. According to some models, UNEO would receive a fixed proportion of the UN budget for its administrative activities, giving it a more stable financial footing. According to its proponents, UNEO would be able to coordinate global environmental governance more effectively, arrange better scientific services, further develop international environmental law more forcefully, and support the implementation of ratified agreements more effectively.⁹¹

Vested with universal membership, a UN Environment Organisation would have greater legitimacy than the UNEP now has. The regionally balanced structure of the Governing Council to date appears no longer appropriate. Because of the different mandates of the GMEF and the Governing Council, repeatedly the somewhat awkward situation can be witnessed whereby over 100 environment ministers take part in the GMEF, but only 58 states can actually exercise their right to vote. Apart from an annual General Assembly of all members, which could take over the functions of the GMEF, it would also be possible to establish a committee that would correspond more or less to the current Governing Council in terms of structure and convene several times a year. The foundation of UNEO would require the ratification of a foundation agreement by a specific number of states and a corresponding resolution by the UN General Assembly to transfer UNEPs resources and staff to UNEO.

⁹⁰ Cf. UNEP, *United Nations Specialized Agencies versus United Nations Programmes*, Note by the Executive Director, 7.6.2010.

⁹¹ Nils Meyer-Ohlendorf/Markus Knigge, "A United Nations Environment Organisation", in: Lydia Swart/Estelle Perry (eds.), *Global Environmental Governance: Perspectives on the Current Debate*, New York: Center for UN Reform Education, 2007, pp. 124–141.

A UN Environment Organisation is de facto scarcely conceivable without consensus among the international community. In the absence of broad-based support, a UNEO would be delegitimized from the very beginning, and the new organisation might be in a worse position than the old Programme. The Europeans, particularly Germany and France, have long lobbied for the foundation of an international organisation for the environment.⁹² In 2005, the European Council expressed its support for "a more integrated international environmental governance structure, based on existing institutions."⁹³ According to the European Council, current UN reform should form the framework for the creation of a "UN agency for the environment", located in Nairobi. This agency should be based on UNEP and have a "revised and strengthened mandate, supported by stable, adequate and predictable financial contributions and operating on an equal footing with other UN specialized agencies". The Council of Environment Ministers agreed on 22 December 2009 to continue its "political engagement" in this matter.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the Europeans have found an important strategic partner for comprehensive IEG reform in Brazil.⁹⁵

The stance of the US has changed over time. While Washington originally firmly rejected the foundation of a UNEO, more moderate scepticism on this issue is now prevalent. Since the inauguration of the Obama government, America's relationship with the United

⁹² Recently in, for example: "Gemeinsamer Brief von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und Präsident Sarkozy an den Generalsekretär der Vereinten Nationen, Ban Ki-moon", press release by the German Federal Government, 18.9.2009, (Joint letter by Federal Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon), <www.bundeskanzlerin.de/nn_915656/Content/DE/Pressemitteilungen/BPA/2009/09/2009-09-18-brief-merkel-sarkozy.html> (accessed on 29.3.2010).

⁹³ Conclusions of the European Council of 16./17.6.2005, 10255/1/05, REV 1 of 15.7.2005, paragraph 39.

⁹⁴ Council of the European Union, *International Environmental Governance (IEG). Reform of the system*, 17524/09, ENV 898, 16.12.2009.

⁹⁵ France diplomatie, *Common position of France and Brazil on climate change*, Paris: 14.11.2009, <<https://pastel.diplomatie.gouv.fr/editorial/actual/ael2/bulletin.gb.asp?liste=20091117.gb.html#Chapitre3>> (accessed on 20.7.2010); joint press release on the occasion of the visit by the Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Germany and his meeting with the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Angela Merkel, <<http://brasilianische-botschaft.de/2009/12/09/besuch-des-brasilianischen-prasidenten-luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva-in-deutschland/>> (accessed on 20.7.2010).

Nations has improved considerably though fundamental reservations towards international bureaucracies still exist.⁹⁶ A UNEO would initially mean an increase in organisational structures – and the US therefore regards this model with suspicion. The central criticism is that a UN specialized agency would not genuinely be of greater benefit than the existing programme. That said, the stiff resistance of the US in the past has ironically demonstrated that there apparently would be a real change in positional ranking due to the status of UNEO as a specialised agency, since otherwise the objections brought forward would be hard to fully understand.

A UN Environment Organisation would have advantages for emerging and developing countries in that it would entail a clearer operating mandate, improved and more transparent environmental funding, and preferably better staffed UNEP regional offices.⁹⁷ For its part, China – along with other newly industrialized and developing countries in the G-77 – primarily expects financial assistance, technology transfer, capacity building and other forms of targeted support from a reformed IEG system. However, Beijing has no interest in the establishment of an environmental inspection organisation and will firmly reject such suggestions.

The Europeans are thus faced with the challenge of clearly demonstrating the added value of a UN Environment Organisation. Apart from the above-mentioned and long-familiar arguments, this requires more specific proposals on the possible structure of this organisation, and an intensive dialogue on these options. This process demands a certain amount of sensitivity. If the plans are too ambitious, there is the risk of alienating the more hesitant negotiating partners. However, if they do not go far enough, the added value of a UNEO is more difficult to highlight, and discussions would risk to hardly advance at all.

A renewed failure of the proposal must also be anticipated. It is conceivable that Europe will be largely successful in its recommendations on governance re-

form, but that the international community will ultimately reject the foundation of a new international organisation. Hence, it must be considered whether some of the anticipated benefits of a UNEO could not also be achieved within the framework of a differently reformed UNEP.

An umbrella organisation for environment and sustainable development

Over the past 40 years, the attitudes of emerging and developing countries towards international environmental governance have undergone a remarkable transformation. Before the foundation of the UN Environment Programme in 1972, they at times vehemently contested a multilateral agenda allegedly dominated by the global North. Their position had changed by 1992 when, at the Earth Summit held in Rio, they participated in part reluctantly, and in part actively. Since then, their level of participation has increased further; political scientist Adil Najam now describes it as “active engagement”.⁹⁸ This is a remarkable process, which reached an interim high point when Brazil suggested founding an umbrella organisation for environment and sustainable development in 2007.

The Brazilian initiative has considerably enlivened the debate on reform. At the same time, it underlines the aspiration of the largest South American country to play a part in setting the multilateral agenda.⁹⁹ Brazil, which has already advocated fundamental governance reform for a long time, tends to regard the model of focussing a new UN specialized agency exclusively on the environment with scepticism, as do many other emerging and developing countries. Since 2007 Brazil favours an integrated structure instead, in which the environment and sustainable development should be addressed jointly.¹⁰⁰ In May 2010, Brazil de-

⁹⁶ Johannes Thimm, *Whatever Works. Multilateralism und Global Governance unter Obama*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, September 2010 (SWP-Studie 23/2010).

⁹⁷ Frank Biermann, “Strengthening Green Global Governance in a Disparate World Society. Would a World Environment Organisation Benefit the South?”, in: *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 2 (2002), pp. 297–315; Nils Meyer-Ohlendorf/Markus Knigge, *Potential benefits for developing countries. Design options for a UNEO*, Berlin: Ecologic, 24.1.2005.

⁹⁸ Adil Najam, “Developing Countries and Global Environmental Governance: From Contestation to Participation to Engagement”, in: *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 5 (2005), pp. 303–321.

⁹⁹ Susanne Grätius, *Die Außenpolitik der Regierung Lula*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2004 (SWP-Studie 7/2004).

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of External Relations and Ministry of the Environment, *Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Sustainable Development. Challenges for International Governance. Co-chairs' summary*, Rio de Janeiro, 3./4.9.2007, <www.sustentavel.mre.gov.br/resumo_english.html> (accessed on 25.3.2010); also published as *Letter dated 18 September 2007 from the Permanent*

scribed its proposal as follows: “The need for coherency, efficiency and effectiveness makes it necessary to redefine the role and mandate of the current institutions, with an emphasis on ECOSOC, UNEP and CSD, with an ‘umbrella’ or ‘roof’ as a superordinate structure. This kind of superordinate structure would have the task of coordinating these institutions and MEAs, with an emphasis on the integration of the economic and social pillars.”¹⁰¹

Brazil sees its proposal as an incremental option, which should be further developed by the international community. The central question in this approach is likely to be how to integrate the institutions. In the case of an umbrella organisation, among the first considerations must be how the relevant coordination committees – that is, the Environment Management Group and the UN Development Group – could be restructured and separated from the Chief Executives Board.

Brazil’s proposal would also require rethinking the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), and possibly even that of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). On this point, the Secretariat of the UN Development Programme has suggested merging CSD and ECOSOC into a Council on Sustainable Development, which would then be under the control of the UN General Assembly. This council could report to a UN Commission on Environment, which would emerge from UNEP’s Global Ministerial Environment Forum.¹⁰² Among the things that would need to be considered more closely is a better connection between the international community and the UN system, so that governments could provide better guidance to UN organisations, in turn enabling organisations to develop more targeted approaches to serving country needs.

The strength of Brazil’s concept is that it may improve the integration of organisations working on environment and sustainable development. A restruc-

turing of the institutional framework for sustainable development governance will be under discussion in Rio 2012 anyway, and the Brazilian proposal offers a promising starting point. Yet care must be taken to not only think broadly, but also deeply and in a targeted manner in order to explore more solid and concrete arrangements. Given experiences with IEG reform to date, it is doubtful whether the international community will really be able to approve a broader sustainable development governance reform in such a short time frame. However, as a model from the South, the suggested umbrella structure is at least not burdened with the caveat of only serving the interests of the developed countries. Since it is the developing countries in particular that actively champion the integration of the environment with sustainable development, chances are that considerable support could be rallied around an umbrella structure.

Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, A/62/356.

101 Statement by Brazil, delivered by Maria Teresa Mesquita Pessôa, Minister, Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations, *Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development*, First Meeting of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom 1) for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, New York, 18.5.2010.

102 *Compendium of views on broader reform of international environmental governance from members of the Environment Management Group. UNDP’s input to the EMG compendium for the ministerial IEG process, UNEP, 7.7.2010.*

Conclusions

The system of international environmental governance will be reformed. Its shortcomings are too conspicuous, alternative concepts too present, and the fundamental will of central actors for reform too evident for the status quo to be maintained. After global trade and climate policy have been coming to a near standstill, notoriously unwieldy environmental governance, of all things, may be able to breathe new life into multilateralism. With the setup of new organisations and institutions such as the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), with the promising launch of the chemicals clustering process, and with the breakthrough 47 decisions at the Convention on Biological Diversity COP in Nagoya in October 2010, we can witness some substantial signs for this.

Stiff political resistance against far-reaching changes to the IEG system was the main cause of failure in earlier reform debates. This emanated particularly from the US, whose scepticism towards international organisations can generally only be overcome with difficulty. Many newly industrialized and developing countries also had reservations against upgrading the IEG system, fearing that this might be driven forward at the cost of institutions for sustainable development. The fact that Europeans concentrated mainly on new organisations like UNEO, while the debate on the system's overall functions was neglected also created problems. It came close to "organisational tinkering", as Adil Najam put it, while unsolved problems with the whole institutional architecture remained. In hardly any other political field is the pre-eminence of "form follows function" as elementary as in environmental governance. While it has to be noted that occasionally, this principle has been put forward by parties merely interested in leaving things unchanged, an intensive discussion about the necessary tasks of the IEG system was indispensable before its architecture can be comprehensively altered. The merit of the various consultation processes is that they gave states the necessary room for this kind of debate and thus the possibility of mutual convergence. The discussions about institutional reforms were becom-

ing more targeted and constructive while this trust-building exercise was accomplished.

Furthermore, multilateral forums were revived following the inauguration of US President Obama, which has also benefited IEG processes. The European and Brazilian proposals on a new governance architecture put two wide-ranging reform models on the agenda, whose appeal significantly enlivened the political debate. Finally, the institutional status quo in the form of UNEP Plus has been generating its own dynamic, undermining the viability of adhering to the existing parameters. It can be stated that among the international community, the status quo of the IEG system is no longer seen as an option.

There is no doubt that UNEP should remain based in Nairobi, whatever form it may one day take. However, apart from this constant, there are many different possibilities for developing a new and more effective environmental governance architecture. Nine potential options have been agreed upon over the course of the consultative process on comprehensive governance reform after the Nairobi and Helsinki meetings in 2010. As a result, a wide range of tools is available, with which an overall solution reflecting the various national interests can be found.

Hence, the question that will be on the agenda until 2012 is not *whether*, but rather *how* the architecture of international environmental governance can be restructured. It is plain that previous endeavours have not proved sufficient to confront ecological problems and to provide enough financial, technological and administrative resources for developing countries to both combat poverty and achieve green economic growth. While UNEP is in a better financial position than ever before – thanks, above all, to increased European contributions – this should not hide the fact that there is still a wide gap between funding needed and funding provided, and that key tasks such as coordinating UN activities in the environmental domain still can't be managed with the available institutional and financial resources. The fragmentation on both the level of international organisations and between multilateral environmental agreements drives the costs of the system up and leads to an equally inefficient and ineffective fulfilment of tasks. This is bothering devel-

oped and developing nations alike, since it means that the funding provided is not allocated most efficiently, and that capacity building efforts are therefore hampered.

Europe has developed an impressively wide range of specially designed governance solutions on internal steering, and no other region in the world has made similarly intensive experiences with both pragmatic and experimental arrangements.¹⁰³ As a result Europeans should be ideally equipped to develop innovative compromises that have the potential to reach consensus on a global level. Against this background, key EU states like France, Germany, Belgium and Finland should function as drivers of IEG reform within the European Union. They should continue developing their ideas on transforming UNEP into a UN Environment Organisation in consultation with other interested states. Setting the right pace is decisive here. It should be fast enough that a working draft is in place by the 2012 Rio Conference, but also slow enough to win over more hesitant states. An open dialogue with Brazil is advisable, since it could help to mutually develop both models and even, perhaps, to interconnect them. While an umbrella organisation, as proposed by Brazil, could drive the integration of the environment and sustainable development forward, a UNEO would provide the opportunity to shape the coordination between MEAs more efficiently and to improve services to emerging and developing countries.

The US will only agree to a comprehensive reform, and particularly to a UNEO, if the benefits of such steps are clearly pointed out. The advocates of reform must demonstrate precisely what the added value of a new governance architecture is and how the solutions identified would yield both more effective environmental protection and more cost-efficient institutions. However, the US will have to realise that the reform can't be combined with an overall funding cut to the UN system, and that making environmental governance more effective will not be for free.

The main priority for China and most of the other G-77 states is that UN institutions support national measures effectively. With better staffed and more generously funded regional offices, UNEP could react to the needs of the individual regions in a more targeted way, thus contributing more to capacity build-

ing in developing countries than it has done so far.¹⁰⁴ If the reform facilitates the implementation of environmental agreements and offers practical solutions for the complex field of environmental funding – as direct access to GEF funds now possible has done – then emerging and developing countries have little reason not to agree to an IEG reform.

It should be clear to the advocates of a comprehensive reform that even if the process does not lead to the foundation of a UNEO, this does not necessarily equal failure. The functions that a new environmental governance architecture could fulfil are more important than its specific form. As a precautionary measure, thought also needs to be given to a compromise scenario that would entail more resources and a broader mandate for UNEP that would finally be put to full use, but that leaves it below the threshold of a UN specialized agency in organisational terms. If the reform options that have been developed so far can be firmed up during the ongoing consultative processes and in the preparations for Rio+20 so that they can subsequently fulfil the necessary functions of IEG better than the present system and accommodate the interests of the central actors, then the long overdue restructuring of international environmental governance would be within grasp.

103 Charles F. Sabel/Jonathan Zeitlin, "Learning from Difference. The New Architecture of Experimentalist Governance in the EU", in: *European Law Journal*, 14 (2008) 3, pp. 271–327.

104 Mark Halle, *The UNEP That We Want. Reflections on UNEP's Future Challenges*, Geneva: International Institute for Sustainable Development, IISD Commentary, October 2007, p. 3.

Abbreviations

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| AGF | High Level Advisory Group on Climate Change Financing | OSAA | Office of the Special Advisor on Africa |
| AHJWG | Ad-Hoc Joint Working Group on Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions | PrepCom | Preparatory Committee |
| BSP | Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building | Ramsar | Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat/ Ramsar Convention |
| CBD | Convention on Biological Diversity | REDD | Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest-Degradation |
| CEB | United Nations Chief Executives Board | SAICM | Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management |
| CITES | Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora | SBC | Secretariat of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal |
| CMS | Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals | SRSG/CAC | Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict |
| CPR | Committee of Permanent Representatives | SWMTEP | System-Wide Medium-Term Environment Programme |
| CSD | Commission on Sustainable Development | UNAIDS | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS |
| DFS | UN Department of Field Support | UNCBD | United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity |
| EBRD | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development | UNCCD | United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification |
| ECOSOC | Economic and Social Council | UNCED | United Nations Conference on Environment and Development |
| EF | Environment Fund | UNCSD | United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development |
| EMG | Environment Management Group | UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| ExCOP | Extraordinary Meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions | UNDESA | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organisation | UNDG | United Nations Development Group |
| G77 | Group of 77 | UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| GC | Governing Council | UNEO | United Nations Environment Organisation |
| GCSS | Governing Council Special Session | UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| GEA | Global Environmental Assessment | UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility | UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |
| GEO | Global Environment Outlook | UNFIP | United Nations Fund for International Partnerships |
| GMEF | Global Ministerial Environment Forum | UNFF | United Nations Forum on Forests |
| IAEA | International Atomic Energy Agency | UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| ICAO | The International Civil Aviation Organisation | UN-HABITAT | United Nations Human Settlements Programme |
| IEG | International Environmental Governance | UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| IFAD | International Fund for Agricultural Development | UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| IGM | Open-Ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives | UNIDO | United Nations Industrial Development Organisation |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation | UNISDR | United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund | UNITAR | United Nations Institute for Training and Research |
| IMG | Issue Management Group | UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| IMO | International Maritime Organisation | UNOPS | United Nations Office for Project Services |
| IPBES | Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services | UNU | United Nations University |
| IPCC | Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change | UPU | Universal Postal Union |
| ITC | International Trade Centre | UNRWA | United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East |
| ITU | International Telecommunication Union | UNWTO | World Tourism Organisation |
| JIU | Joint Inspection Unit | WFP | World Food Programme |
| JPoI | Johannesburg Plan of Implementation | WHO | World Health Organisation |
| MA | Millennium Ecosystem Assessment | WIPO | World Intellectual Property Organisation |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goals | WMO | World Meteorological Organisation |
| MEA | Multilateral Environmental Agreements | WSSD | World Summit on Sustainable Development |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation | WTO | World Trade Organisation |
| OCHA | Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs | | |
| OHRLLS | Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries & Small Island Developing Countries | | |