

A Non-institutional Proposal to Strengthen International Environmental Governance

by Franz Xaver Perrez and Daniel Ziegerer*

Introduction

During the last decades, the environment has emerged as one of the main policy areas that need international attention. Today, it is well recognised that threats to the environment undermine the resource base of human development and well-being. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan held, “[w]e fundamentally depend on natural systems and resources for our existence and development. Our efforts to defeat poverty and pursue sustainable development will be in vain if environmental degradation and natural resource depletion continue unabated”.¹ In order to address the challenge of global environmental degradation and natural resource depletion, a complex and multi-layered environmental governance structure has materialised over the past few decades. However, today there is widespread agreement that the current international environmental regime is too complex and inadequate to effectively address the global environmental challenges. Thus, the Co-chairs of the UN General Assembly’s informal consultative process on the institutional framework for the UN’s environmental activities, ambassadors Enrique Berruga and Peter Maurer, have concluded that “[t]here is wide recognition that we have so far been unable to stop and reverse environmental degradation and that the current environmental system is fragmented, duplicitous and lacks coherence, thereby reducing its capacity and efficiency”.²

The current efforts to strengthen international environmental governance (IEG) generally focus on institutional aspects. However, the experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) shows that international regimes not only benefit from strong institutions, but also from a convincing set of clear goals. In fact, the MDGs have had a strong impact on the international development regime. They have provided focus, enhanced visibility, ensured accountability, affirmed commitment and stimulated the provision of new means of implementation. Building on this experience, the Swiss President Moritz Leuenberger has suggested at the 2006 Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Dubai that UNEP should develop a list of Global Environmental Goals.³

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This article will, after a brief description of the challenges of today’s international environmental regime and the ongoing efforts to strengthen international environmental governance, present the proposal for Global Environmental Goals. According to this proposal, such Global Environmental Goals would not have to be negotiated by the international community. They could consist of the gist of previously agreed global commitments to safeguard the environment. The existing commitments could be organised into a set of overarching goals and specific targets that are accompanied by indicators to facilitate their implementation and monitoring. The article will conclude that being the central pillar of the international environmental architecture, UNEP would be best suited to conduct the task of compiling the global environmental commitments and developing the Global Environmental Goals policy tool.

The Challenges of Today’s International Environmental Regime

In the eighteenth century the international community started to address issues that would today be considered as part of international environmental policy and law⁴ and, by the nineteenth century, conflicts about environmental resources had already become international in scope.⁵ More definitively, environmental issues entered the global arena in the 1960s. With increasing environmental pollution caused by industrialisation and alarming scientific findings, environmental concerns gradually became international and global. The first approaches by states to addressing environmental concerns at the international level were typically bilateral *ad hoc* solutions, used a command and control approach to address specific challenges and were limited in terms of subject matter, the region they covered and the measures they provided for. Later, international environmental policy moved gradually from bilateral towards multilateral approaches, addressing multifaceted issues such as climate change or biodiversity protection through more complex instruments and making increasing use of economic and trade tools.⁶ As it became clear that many of the most pressing environmental problems could not be addressed unilaterally or through traditional transboundary and bilateral approaches, international cooperation became a key element of environmental policy and as such an expression of the state’s authority and responsibility to promote and safeguard well-being.⁷

This evolution can be characterised as a globalisation of international environmental policy and law, leading to several results:⁸ first, issues that were traditionally perceived as local such as the protection of endangered species, biodiversity or forests, have increasingly been perceived as international and have thus become matters of international regulation. Second, while bilateral and

regional problems remain important, international environmental policy and law is focusing more and more on global issues such as the protection of the ozone layer and climate change. Third, efforts are increasing to integrate or mainstream environmental concerns into other policies such as development, trade, financial or investment policies. And finally, the considerable efforts undertaken by the international community to face the challenge of protecting the environment have led to a mushrooming of environmental agreements, institutions and processes.

Several hundred Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) have been negotiated over time in a fragmented and *ad hoc* manner, each addressing specific environmental problems and each with its own "mini-institutional machinery", including a Conference of the Parties, a secretariat and technical and legal subsidiary bodies.⁹ In 1993, Brown Weiss counted nearly 900 international legal instruments that were primarily geared towards environmental issues or contained important environmental provisions,¹⁰ while in 2001 UNEP reported that the number of core MEAs had risen to at least 502 international treaties and other agreements related to the environment, of which 323 were regional and 302 dated from the period since 1972.¹¹ In addition to these MEAs, numerous international organisations, institutions, programmes and processes have emerged which deal with the protection of the environment. Like the MEAs, these international environmental organisations seem to have been developed in a somewhat *ad hoc* manner without any coherent strategy.¹² Several bodies such as UNEP, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), or the Global Environment Facility (GEF) were specifically created to address environmental issues. Most, however, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), were established with a non-environmental focus but have increasingly started to address environmental issues either directly or indirectly. In fact, it seems that today almost all international organisations and processes have some environmental competences or responsibilities.

Considered by itself, this development could be seen as an encouraging sign of a determined international community which is committed to addressing environmental degradation through international cooperation. However, despite the fact that the international community has tried for more than 50 years to tackle environmental problems, environmental degradation continues in an unprecedented manner. Thus, UNEP's fourth *Global Environmental Outlook* (GEO-4), so far the most comprehensive UN report on the environment, prepared by about 390 experts and reviewed by more than 1000 others across the world, concluded in 2007 that the major environmental threats

remain unresolved and put humanity at risk.¹³ Analyses throughout the GEO-4 highlight that there is a sharp and continuing rise in greenhouse gas emissions, that the current rate of biodiversity change is the fastest in human history, that the release of harmful and persistent pollutants such as heavy metals and organic chemicals remains a problem for terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, that there is continued deforestation in the tropics, and that the *per capita* availability of fresh water is declining. Launched twenty years after the publication of *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland report, by the World Commission on Environment and Development, the GEO-4 indicates that "environmental degradation continues to threaten human well-being".¹⁴

Today, there is widespread agreement that the current international environmental regime has outgrown its original design and that it is too complicated, incomplete, incoherent and inadequate to address effectively the global environmental challenges. Several factors contribute to the lack of effectiveness of today's international environmental governance:

- *Fragmentation*: The phenomenon of fragmentation of international law and the difficulties arising from its expansion and diversification have been extensively analysed by the International Law Commission (ILC) for the international law system as a whole,¹⁵ but it is undoubtedly also a key challenge for the current international environmental regime.¹⁶ The fact that the international community has dealt with environmental problems on an *ad hoc*, piecemeal and issue-by-issue basis has led to institutional proliferation, with partial solutions on the one hand, and important gaps in international environmental policy on the other hand. This proliferation of institutions is not only costly, it also leads to duplications, overlaps, turf battles and contradictions. A survey by the UN High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence revealed in 2006 that the three Rio Conventions alone had up to 230 meeting days each year alone and that if seven other major global treaties were added, that number would rise to almost 400 days per year. Effective participation at all these meetings poses a fundamental challenge for countries, especially for developing countries.
- *Dilution*: This institutional mushrooming and fragmentation within the global environmental regime is further worsened by the fact that many of the most important decisions affecting the environment occur outside the complex web of international environmental treaties, institutions and processes. Thus, the decisions of institutions like the WTO, the World Bank or UNDP may have a more important direct or indirect impact on the global environment than many of the deliberations within UNEP or one of the specific environmental processes.
- *Imbalance between the environmental regime and other regimes*: The international environmental regime is significantly weaker than other regimes such as *e.g.*, the international trade regime established by WTO. Thus, the environmental regime generally provides for rather weak obligations, is not equipped with the same

quantity of resources and effective structures as other regimes, and lacks an effective dispute settlement mechanism. Moreover, UNEP – unlike the WTO for trade or the WHO for health – has not succeeded in becoming the central forum for debate and deliberation in the environmental field.¹⁷

- *Lack of institutional leadership within the international environment regime:* UNEP was created in 1973 to coordinate international policies and efforts to protect the environment, and to “provide the center of gravity for environmental affairs within the UN system”.¹⁸



Courtesy: MDG

While UNEP has been relatively effective with regard to monitoring and assessment, and launching environmental agreements, it has fallen short in managing policy processes in a coherent and coordinated manner.¹⁹ Today, there is no sufficiently strong and authoritative institution able to give overarching policy guidance on policy development and on concrete action for the protection of the environment and to successfully promote coherence, effectiveness and efficiency in the international environment regime. Several factors have contributed to UNEP’s inability to fulfil its role, including the limitation of its authority due to its formal status as a Programme rather than a specialised Agency and the limited membership of its governing body; its lack of adequate, stable and predictable financial resources; its governance structure; and its location in Nairobi.²⁰

- *Lack of and inefficient use of limited resources:* Clearly, there are not sufficient resources available both in developed countries and to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition to implement effective environmental policies. Moreover, limited resources are not always managed efficiently. And the global environmental governance system loses money through funding contradictions, overlaps due to fragmentation and lack of synergies, lack of transparency, and duplications.²¹

- *Lack of political will and commitment:*²² Systemic shortcomings are not sufficient in themselves to explain why environmental deterioration continues to threaten life on earth. There are many examples of a lack of political commitment in international environment policy: existing MEAs are not ratified by important actors; most environmental agreements are not supported with the necessary funds and means to fulfil their purpose; significant gaps still remain such as in the field of heavy metals, forests, water and liability rules; and several of the existing processes and MEAs still lack accepted rules of procedures or an agreed compliance mechanism. Strong and effective regimes and institutions can to a certain extent trigger and support political will and can function even in the absence of political will.²³ If the reasons for non-performance lie primarily in the lack of collective political will to effectively address environment challenges, then institutional design will not of itself solve the problems. At the same time, lack of political will is no good excuse for non-action as it is not a given factor but one that can be influenced.

All these factors pose a fundamental challenge to the effectiveness and efficiency of the current international environmental regime. They lead to a lack of coordination, cooperation and synergies among relevant international actors; to duplications, overlaps, inefficiencies, turf battles, inconsistencies, contradictions and conflicts; to a lack of an overarching vision, of a common orientation and strategy, and of coherence and focus; to a lack of visibility; and finally to inadequate goals and measures.²⁴ Today, there is, as formulated by the UN General Assembly, broad recognition of “the need for more efficient environmental activities in the United Nations system, with enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance, strengthened scientific knowledge, assessment and cooperation, better treaty compliance ... and a better integration of environmental activities in the broader sustainable development framework” and agreement “to explore the possibility of a more coherent institutional framework to approach this need, including a more integrated structure”.²⁵

Options and Proposals

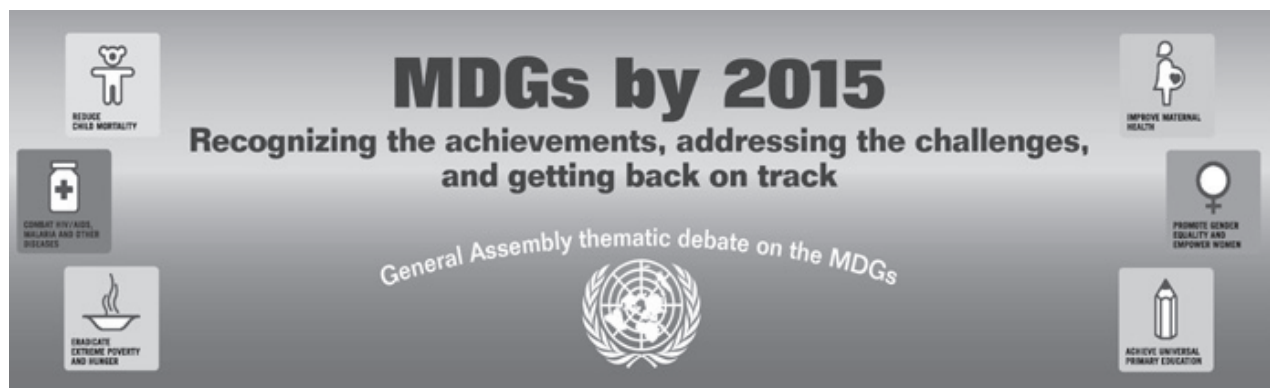
The recognition that the shortcomings of the international environment regime need to be addressed has led to several initiatives to strengthen international environmental governance.²⁶ The 1999 decision of the UN General Assembly to establish the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF) as an inter-governmental high-level body

for policy dialogue within UNEP was a first significant effort to address the challenges of the international environmental regime and is seen as “a bold political initiative to revive the sagging fortunes of UNEP” and “to regain policy coherence in the field of the environment”.²⁷ Two years later, UNEP decided to launch a process “to undertake a comprehensive policy-oriented assessment of existing institutional weaknesses as well as future needs and options for strengthened international environmental governance”.²⁸ This UNEP process led to the adoption of a landmark decision on international environmental governance which was subsequently endorsed by the world’s leaders at the WSSD.²⁹ With this decision, the international community agreed to strengthen international environmental governance through a series of measures related to:

- improving coherence in international environmental policy making, including by strengthening the role and authority of UNEP and the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF), ensuring universal participation and considering universal membership at the UNEP Governing Council (UNEP GC), and strengthening the scientific base of UNEP’s work;

tation process of the Cartagena package began to founder. It seems that the re-launching of the proposal for a World Environment Organization made by the French President Jacques Chirac at the fifty-eighth UN General Assembly in 2003,³⁰ has given rise to concerns that full implementation of the Cartagena decision would be a first step towards such an organisation.

In April 2006, based on the outcome of the 2005 World Summit Conference, where the world leaders again recognised the need for more efficient environmental activities in the UN system, enhanced coordination, and improved policy advice and guidance, and agreed to explore the possibility of a more coherent institutional framework,³¹ the President of the sixtieth UN General Assembly launched a process of informal consultations on the institutional framework for the environmental activities within the UN.³² These consultations addressed the same issues that were at the heart of UNEP’s IEG process.³³ In June 2007, the co-chairs of the informal consultations presented an options paper with building blocks on: (1) scientific assessment, monitoring and early warning capacity; (2) cooperation and coordination at the agency level; (3) multilateral environmental agreements; (4) regional



Courtesy: MDG

- securing more financial resources for UNEP and its activities, including by introducing an “indicative scale of contributions” for the States’ financial support for UNEP;
- improving coordination among and effectiveness of multilateral environmental agreements;
- supporting capacity building, technology transfer and country-level coordination; and
- enhancing coordination across the UN system, including by strengthening the role of the Environment Management Group (EMG).

The Cartagena decision on international environmental governance constitutes so far the most substantial reform effort in the history of international environment policy. It is a comprehensive and ambitious package that addresses most of the shortcomings of the current system. After initial successes with the introduction of the indicative scale of contributions and the development of UNEP’s Bali Strategic Plan on Capacity Building, the implemen-

presence and activities at the regional level; (5) capacity building and technology support; (6) information technology, partnerships and advocacy; and (7) financing.³⁴ In May 2008, the co-chairs circulated a draft UN General Assembly resolution which suggested in an approach of “ambitious incrementalism”³⁵ to agree rapidly on a limited number of concrete measures covering the same themes as the options paper, and to address “the broader transformation of the IEG system”, including the roles and mandates of, and interaction among, the different inter-governmental bodies, in a subsequent phase. It remains to be seen how successfully this initiative within the UN will address the shortcomings of current international environmental governance and provide for effective remedies.

These inter-governmental approaches to strengthen international environmental governance have been complemented at the intra-institutional level of the UN system. UNEP started to convene coordination meetings for MEA secretariats in 1994 and to offer administrative services to MEA secretariats in 1998. However, given the

strong relationships between MEAs and their COPs, and the expectation that UNEP would not be able to provide significant support, these efforts to facilitate coordination between and provide coherent support to MEAs were not very successful.³⁶ Given the continuing need for enhanced coordination and cooperation, the UN General Assembly had established the EMG in 1999 as a coordination mechanism for environmental activities.³⁷ The EMG is chaired by the UNEP Executive Director and has a small secretariat in Geneva. It brings together UN agencies active in the field of the environment, the secretariats of MEAs, and other relevant institutions with the purpose of facilitating information sharing and enhancing inter-agency coordination and efficient collaboration within the UN system. However, apart from initial achievements with regard to identifying difficulties and obstacles for harmonisation of reporting on biodiversity-related issues and developing a comprehensive overview of capacity building on chemicals management,³⁸ the EMG has had only limited success in promoting joint action among its members and in enhancing coherence. The reasons for the EMG's difficulties include the fact that firstly, there has been little high-level engagement in its work; secondly, the EMG was perceived by other institutions as a tool of UNEP to assert control over their work; and thirdly, a clear sense of benefits and outcomes of its work was lacking.³⁹

The need for continued institutional reform for a more effective global protection of the environment also expressed itself through a number of other initiatives from individual states and in a series of substantive contributions from civil society and research. The most prominent of these initiatives is the call for a World Environment Organization. It seems that the US foreign policy strategist George F. Kennan in the 1970s was the first to call for an International Environmental Agency with organisational personality.⁴⁰ Since then, the proposal has further evolved. While some call for a global World Environment Organization or a UN Environment Organization,⁴¹ others favour a G8-centric World Environment Organization under the leadership of the most powerful countries.⁴² A third proposal suggests that there is no need for a new international bureaucracy and therefore recommends the creation of a more flexible "Global Environmental Mechanism" with three core capacities: (1) the provision of adequate information, (2) the creation of a policy space for environmental negotiation and bargaining, and (3) sustained capacity building for addressing issues of agreed-upon concern and significance.⁴³

At the political level, Germany made a proposal for a World Environment Organization in 1997 at the Rio+5 meeting, and at the time was supported by Brazil, Singapore and South Africa; and in 1999, Renato Ruggiero as WTO Executive Director called for a World Environment Organization as a counterweight to the WTO.⁴⁴ This proposal was re-launched by the French President Chirac at the fifty-eighth UN General Assembly in 2003. The French government proposed transforming UNEP from a UN programme into a UN Environment Organization or specialized UN agency, and established an informal working group of selected developed and developing countries for

this purpose.⁴⁵ Building on the French initiative, in September 2007 Brazil organised an informal ministerial conference where it proposed the creation of an umbrella institution with broader responsibility for sustainable development.⁴⁶ However, so far, no consensus has emerged from these consultations.

Others view the proposal of a new World Environment Organization critically and propose a more bottom-up approach as an alternative. Thus, it has been suggested that clustering the numerous international agreements in order to tackle institutional overlaps and fragmentation would be a more effective alternative.⁴⁷ The idea of clustering MEAs was first promoted at the political level during the IEG process: Switzerland strongly supported the aim of improving coordination among, and the effectiveness of, the MEAs; it promoted the concept of clustering related MEAs as an important tool for enhancing synergies, linkages, coordination and cooperation; and called for a structural and organisational integration of related institutions as well as their geographical co-location where appropriate.⁴⁸ Based on the Swiss proposals, the Cartagena recommendations on strengthening IEG included several explicit references to the desirability of clustering related MEAs and to the further strengthening of the chemicals and waste cluster.⁴⁹ After the adoption of the Cartagena IEG decision, Switzerland successfully lobbied for the effective implementation of this decision. Within the process of developing a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), Switzerland made several proposals on further concretising and operationalising the decision to develop an international chemicals and waste cluster.⁵⁰ Underlining the necessity to enhance synergies, efficiencies and effectiveness in the international chemicals and waste cluster, Switzerland offered to co-locate the secretariats of the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) within the emerging chemicals and waste cluster in Geneva.⁵¹

After the successful co-location of the secretariats of the new chemicals conventions in Geneva, Switzerland called for a further integration of the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and convened an informal meeting in 2006 to present its idea about joint management for the three convention secretariats. The same year, Switzerland, supported by Norway and Senegal, presented at the COP 2 of the POPs Convention a draft decision calling for a joint head of the three convention secretariats.⁵² While the proposal for a joint head was not accepted by the COP, the Stockholm, Rotterdam and Basel conventions subsequently established a joint working group to explore further possibilities to enhance synergies between the three conventions. The Joint Working Group concluded its work in March 2008 and submitted a comprehensive package of measures to enhance synergies and cooperation between the conventions, including proposals for joint secretariat services and a simultaneous extraordinary COP of the three conventions.⁵³ ➔

Thus, it can be concluded that the international community has undertaken several efforts to address the shortcomings of the international environmental regime. Inter-governmental and intra-institutional approaches have been supported by proposals and initiatives from individual states, civil society and academic writings. At this stage, the UNEP Cartagena Package has so far been the most comprehensive effort to strengthen international environmental governance. And while proposals for a World or UN Environment Organization have not yet gained sufficient momentum, bottom-up approaches to strengthen cooperation, coordination and synergies between MEAs promise certain progress. All these proposals and initiatives have focused so far primarily on institutional aspects of international environmental governance. However, they have not yet proven sufficient to allow the emergence of a comprehensive, coherent, effective and efficient international environmental regime. Therefore, it seems that institutional measures for strengthening international environmental governance have to be complemented by other approaches, all the more considering that the systemic and institutional deficiencies are not sufficient by themselves to explain the shortcomings of the current regime and current policies.

Proposal for a Set of Global Environmental Goals (GEGs)

In his opening address to the Global Ministerial Environment Forum/UNEP Governing Council 2006 in Dubai, Swiss President Moritz Leuenberger, underlining the crucial necessity of an effective protection of our natural resource base, stressed that “[w]e need two things in order to fulfil our responsibilities and defend our interests better: firstly, strong institutions, and secondly, goals”.⁵⁴ He therefore launched the idea of Global Environmental Goals (GEGs). The core idea of this proposal is to compile a set of goals, targets and indicators for international environmental policy in order to complement institutional measures to strengthen international environmental governance. One year later, during the ministerial discussions at the Global Ministerial Environment Forum/UNEP Governing Council 2007 in Nairobi, several ministers referred to and supported this proposal and the Global Ministerial Environment Forum concluded to assign UNEP the task to “[m]onitor and evaluate existing global environmental objectives and actions”.⁵⁵

The environmental sector does not have a set of common overarching goals and targets as exists for international development policy in the form of the MDGs.⁵⁶ Although the MDGs were not new in the sense that they derived from the global conferences and from the body of international norms and laws that had been codified over the past half-century,⁵⁷ this policy tool had a remarkable integrative effect on the development sector and was able to provide focus and common orientation. It unites the international development policy instruments and institutions behind a common mission. There is broad agreement that “[g]ood institutional design, [...], includes measurable obligations and compliance and enforcement regimes”.⁵⁸ While the MDGs provide a general framework

for the overarching sustainable development agenda with a primary focus on developmental aspects, they do not suffice for serving as a roadmap for the international environmental regime.⁵⁹ Because environmental considerations were included in a superficial instead of an integrative manner, the MDGs did not have a similar effect on environmental policy as on development policy. Goal 7, which resolves to ensure environmental sustainability, is too generic to have any concrete effect on international environmental policy and its institutions. Moreover, the specific targets linked to Goal 7 which include halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and achieving a significant improvement in the lives of slum dwellers further confirms the developmental focus of the whole tool. However, rational pursuit of sustainable development requires orientation, focus and commitment to the environmental policy pillar as well. And this demands “that we have clear goals, that we operationalize those goals in terms of measurable results, that we devise analytical tools for deciding priority actions, and that we monitor and evaluate our progress”.⁶⁰ The Swiss proposal for GEGs consisting of goals, targets and indicators recognises this necessity and builds on it.

Regarding the different elements of the GEGs and their structural logic, the following guidelines should be followed: The *goals* should synthesise key environmental objectives agreed upon earlier at global conferences or in Multilateral Environmental Agreements with global participation and reflect the most important environmental challenges of global concern. They should be general in character and establish a universal objective for safeguarding the environment in a specific field. Potential goals are typically to be found in ministerial declarations or in articles of conventions which outline the principal objective(s) of the instrument. In order to fulfil their purpose, the goals need to be pertinent and comprehensible to a broad public at the same time. The goals should further each be broken down into specific *targets*. These targets should reflect primary international measures or obligations for achieving the overarching goals. In order to keep action focused, they should be limited in number. Where possible, the targets should include a time-frame for their achievement. Again, the targets can largely be drawn from key environmental commitments made earlier at global conferences or in Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Last but not least, the goals and targets should be supplemented with quantifiable *indicators* for monitoring progress in implementation. Regular reviewing of progress at international, regional and national level is a crucial component of the Global Environmental Goals policy tool.

Over the last decades, the international community has agreed to join forces in fighting some of the most serious forms of environmental degradation such as the loss of the earth's biological diversity; global climate change; depletion of the ozone layer; air pollution; decreasing quality and quantity of freshwater resources; pollution and overfishing of marine areas; damages resulting from the production, transport and use of chemicals and the generation and unsound disposal of waste; loss and unsustainable management of forests; as well as unsustainable

use of soils and fragile ecosystems. Respective regulatory regimes have been and still are being gradually developed and contain many important environmental objectives and commitments. The outcomes of the UN Conference on Human Environment (Stockholm 1972), the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992), the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg 2002), and of other relevant global summits and conferences, as well as important international environmental treaties, should therefore be the principal sources for identifying the goals and targets for the GEGs.

Some of the global environmental commitments made by the international community over the last decades (such as the various WSSD targets) include a specific time limit; others do not. Even if there is no specific time limit for the goals and targets, progress should be monitored and reported continuously on the global, regional and country level. To this end, indicators have to be defined for each of the targets. The indicators should be clear and measurable and should show progress in quantitative terms. For many of the targets, such indicators have already been defined or are being developed either by the competent MEA itself or by specialised bodies and statistical experts. Thus, in completing the GEGs proposal with indicators, one can also draw largely on existing work.

Over the last two decades, there has been a lot of emphasis on means of implementation in international negotiations. This is logical, since commitments are not of much use if there are no means to live up to them. It also reflects a growing despair due to the fact that progress on the ground has been very slow. The GEGs would be no different. Success of this policy tool depends on the means made available, both at national and international levels, keeping in mind Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration on common but differentiated responsibilities of developed and developing countries. Financial and human resources are needed as well as scientific and technological means, capacity building and institutional development. The GEGs cannot be a cure-all, but they could greatly facilitate mobilising means of implementation for sustainable development. Raised political importance and public awareness of global environmental challenges will trigger efforts by the international community and by the countries themselves to provide increased means for the environmental contribution to sustainable development and to the attainment of the MDGs. Considering both the existing deficiencies of the international environment policy and the experience with the MDGs, several positive effects of vital importance are to be expected from the GEGs. They will:

- *affirm commitment to environmental protection*: The GEGs will constitute a political signal. They will affirm key commitments of the international community to environmental protection and to sustainable development, and will stimulate concrete action to achieve them.
- *provide common orientation and focus*: The international community has chosen to tackle environmental problems each on its own. This has made it difficult to avoid dispersion and to ensure that everyone pulls in the

same direction. The GEGs will provide the many specialised tools and institutions with a common orientation and will improve cooperation amongst them in addressing global environmental challenges.

- *complement efforts to strengthen international environmental governance*: The GEGs present a remedy for some of the shortcomings of international environmental policy. They could complement ongoing institutional reform processes by emphasising the common overarching objectives of environmental policy and the need for coherent action. By that they would also contribute to strengthening UNEP as the central pillar of the international environment regime.
- *render environmental issues accessible to the wider public*: Environmental problems are often complex in nature. Consequently, instruments that deal with them tend to be technical and complicated. In addition, political commitments are often the fruit of intense negotiations and therefore tend to be difficult to decipher. The GEGs will make international environmental policy more accessible and easier to communicate to a broad audience.
- *increase awareness of environmental challenges*: Responsible stewardship of natural resources and the environment cannot be reached through cooperation amongst countries alone; it must also involve individuals. The GEGs will help to raise public awareness of environmental issues of global concern through increased media attention.
- *ensure accountability of progress*: Words cannot improve the state of the environment if they are not followed up by action. The international community's progress in achieving the goals and targets can be measured and monitored by means of the indicators that accompany them.
- *improve coherence*: Policy makers can only take sound and coherent political decisions if they take into account all relevant information. The GEGs will ensure that environmental considerations are present at the highest political level so that wise and sustainable decisions for a better future can be taken.
- *generate new means of implementation*: The GEGs will have a positive impact on the availability of resources for sustainable development. They will trigger efforts at various levels to provide increased means for the environmental contribution to sustainable development and to the attainment of the MDGs.
- *strengthen the environmental contribution to realising the MDGs*: The GEGs will serve as a compact, practical and useful tool for ensuring the complementarity of international environment and development policy in the interest of present and future generations, and for clarifying the specific contributions of the environmental pillar of sustainable development to the MDGs.

In conclusion, GEGs promise to be a very valuable tool. They can strengthen the environmental contribution to achieving the MDGs, affirm the international community's commitment to the protection of the environment,

generate new means of implementation, provide guidance and focus for international environmental policy institutions, complement efforts to strengthen international environmental governance, render environmental policy accessible to a wider public, increase awareness on global environmental challenges, ensure accountability of progress, and improve coherence in political decision making.

Conclusion: Global Environmental Goals – A Task for UNEP

As mentioned before, the list of GEGs should not be negotiated by the international community. It should contain the gist of previously negotiated global commitments to safeguard the environment. Renegotiating what has already been agreed upon before would only be counter-productive. Negotiating would also be contradictory to the requirements for the GEGs to be clear and comprehensible, given the nature of international negotiations and the custom of reaching compromise through complicated and cryptic formulations. Developing the list of GEGs is primarily a matter of selecting and compiling the most important existing global environmental commitments.

Being the central pillar of the international environmental architecture, UNEP certainly is the institution best suited to perform this task.⁶¹ The UNEP secretariat could therefore play a crucial role in developing the GEGs tool. It could be instrumental in identifying relevant environmental objectives and commitments, and could also assist in identifying the indicators best suited to monitor progress in reaching the goals and targets. UNEP could thereby make use of existing work in this field and cooperate with MEA secretariats, specialised bodies and national statistical experts as necessary. Progress in achieving the GEGs would need to be monitored. The annual session of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum/ UNEP Governing Council would provide the perfect platform for the international community to check regularly if the world is on track to reach the GEGs, and to ensure the environmental contribution to achieving the MDGs.

As environmental degradation continues to threaten life on our planet, the need for strengthening international environmental governance remains paramount. The proposed tool of Global Environmental Goals could complement ongoing institutional efforts and contribute to addressing today's environmental challenges in a more effective manner.

Notes

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ITTO

Putting Sustainability into Practice

by Emmanuel Ze Meka and Steven Johnson*

Introduction

ITTO is an intergovernmental organisation with a mandate to promote the conservation and sustainable management, use and trade of tropical forest resources. ITTO was established in 1986 under the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), 1983, but its origins can be traced back to at least 1976. The long series of negotiations that eventually led to the first ITTA began at the Fourth Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) following the addition of tropical timber to the original list of commodities in the proposed UNCTAD Integrated Programme for Commodities. The ITTA, one of several commodity agreements that eventually materi-

alised out of that programme, was adopted in 1983. But it took another two years for it to enter into force and a further 18 months before the location of the headquarters was agreed upon and an Executive Director appointed.

Thus, ITTO began operating in early 1987. Things changed considerably over the seven years that it took to conclude the ITTA, 1983, and the further four years it took to activate it. World concern over the fate of the tropical forests was intensifying and the international community was being asked to mobilise to avert disaster. Conservation had become at least as important a consideration in the negotiations as trade.

So the ITTA that eventually entered into force was not a conventional commodity agreement; it was just as much an agreement for forest conservation and development as for trade. It contained eight objectives, which fell into three broad groups. Under the first



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