

Bellagio Dialogue: Reimagining Environmental Multilateralism

February 6-10, 2024



The cover features a painting by Innocent Nkurunziza, a renowned Rwandan artist whose work embodies the spirit of our collective aspirations for environmental governance. Although he was unable to join us in person at the Bellagio Dialogue due to visa constraints, Innocent sent three art pieces with the Rwandan delegation. Titled 'Consciousness', the pieces evoke the resilience of art to transcend boundaries. Affectionately called 'Peace,' 'Energy,' and 'Multilateralism' by Elena Gelosa, the Vice President of the Bellagio Center, these artworks not only graced our venue with their inspiring presence but also reinforced our commitment to integrating the transformative power of art into the fabric of our policy work. In recognition of art's ability to inspire and catalyze change, we are honored to feature 'Consciousness I' on the cover of this report.

Innocent Nkurunziza is the co-founder of Inema Art Center in Kigali, Rwanda
<https://www.inemaartcenter.com/>

Many thanks to our sponsors:



Dialogue Co-hosts:



The Global Environmental Governance Project at Northeastern University

Now based in the Policy School at Northeastern University, the Global Environmental Governance (GEG) Project is a collaborative initiative uniting researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the pursuit of enhanced environmental governance. Initiated in 1998 at the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy, the GEG project was co-founded by Professor Maria Ivanova, then a graduate student at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (now Yale School of the Environment), and Professor Daniel Esty. With research emphasis on global environmental governance, global development governance, and organizational sustainability, the Global Environmental Governance Project connects students, faculty, and staff across diverse boundaries. We regularly convene and host distinguished scholars and policymakers worldwide, fostering discussions on environmental policy, implementation, advocacy, and justice. <https://www.environmentalgovernance.org/>



Rwanda Environment Management Authority

REMA holds the legal mandate for Rwanda's national environmental protection, conservation, and overall management, including providing advice to the government on matters concerning the environment and climate change. Responsibilities include mainstreaming environmental and climate change concerns across all sectors to enhance performance and productivity, reducing Rwanda's vulnerability to climate change, and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations for sustainable development. REMA's mission encompasses supervising and monitoring environmental management to ensure environmental issues are prioritized in all national development plans. REMA's vision is for all sectors of Rwandan society to value and practice sound environmental management and the rational use of natural resources, contributing to the country's sustainable development aspirations. <https://www.rema.gov.rw/>



The Present and Future Institute

The Present and Future Institute (PFI) was established to amplify the voices of those often marginalized and to address global challenges comprehensively, including through preventative measures, for the collective benefit of present and future generations. PFI operates on a global scale, adopting a whole-of-society approach. It unites diverse stakeholders across sectors, focusing on result-oriented actions from conception to impact, aiming to create solutions that are fit for purpose. PFI collaborates with proactive states and various stakeholders, enhancing their involvement in multilateral processes to promote sustainable development, safeguard the Earth system's safe and just boundaries, and strengthen global governance, including at the United Nations. This collaboration is geared towards ensuring human welfare and prosperity for all, now and in the future. <https://www.pfinstitute.org/>

“[The Bellagio Dialogue] was a meeting like no other I previously had. It balanced soft skills and personal consciousness and growth with substantive discussions, collaboration and planning to influence the international agenda in a positive way while strengthening the small states for the greater good.” — Participant

Participants

Maria Ivanova, Co-host, Director of the Policy School at Northeastern University and Director of the Global Environmental Governance Project

Patrick Umuhoza, Co-host, Multilateral Cooperation Officer, Rwanda Environment Management Authority, Rwanda

Keisha McGuire, Co-host, Ambassador, President and CEO of Present and Future Institute, Grenada

Carlos Alvarado, President of Costa Rica (2018-2022), Professor at Tufts University

César Aréstigui, Deputy Director of Environment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peru

Claxton Duberry, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations in New York

Maxwell Gomera, Resident Representative of UNDP in South Africa

Isaque Jalilo, Head of Environmental Management, Department of Land and Environment, Mozambique

Peter Katanisa, Consultant; Environment, Natural Resources & Blue Economy, World Bank, Rwanda

Valentina Sierra, First Secretary to the Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations in Geneva, Uruguay

Sandeep Singh, Programme Head for SIDS and LDCs at the International Solar Alliance, Former Director of Environment, Fiji

Kerstin Stendahl, Special Envoy for Climate Change, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland

Jon Stever, Managing Director at Innovation for Policy Foundation, Rwanda

W. Aubrey Webson, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, Antigua and Barbuda

Moira Zellner, Professor, Northeastern University

Clara Copp-LaRocque, Program Manager, Global Environmental Governance Project

Olga Skaredina, Program Manager, Global Environmental Governance Project

Cristina Gabetti, Author, Consultant, and Facilitator, Italy

Overview of Convening

From February 6 to 10, 2024, the Bellagio Dialogue convened at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in Italy. It brought thinkers, doers, and dreamers from "small states" for in-depth discussions and deliberations on environmental multilateralism. Small states are those with small populations, few resources, and limited political clout but who also punch above their weight. The dialogue sought to address capacity constraints and leverage collective energy to reimagine environmental multilateralism. An essential aspect of the discussions was the role of imagination in strategy development and the importance of considering various perspectives and challenges that different regions encounter, particularly emphasizing the unique position of small states in the global context. Attendees included a diverse range of policy experts, NGO and international organizations leaders, and government officials, bringing together a wealth of knowledge and experience. The convening operated under Chatham House rules to facilitate open conversation. As such, no names or affiliations are included in the summary of the dialogues.

Purpose and Objectives

Amplifying the voice and augmenting the capacities of small states in environmental multilateralism was the Bellagio Dialogue's core purpose. The objective was to create a community of committed colleagues working across two substantive multilateral agendas – the forthcoming International Treaty on Plastic Pollution and the Summit of the Future – with the vision to provide trusted support and guidance for years to come. We sought to enable participants to articulate key issues requiring multilateral action, fostering collaboration among states, academia, and others. We connected people from countries with similar capacity, performance, or ambition and identified common needs and actions. We fostered discussions on the governance experience of implementing environmental conventions and articulated strategic governance approaches.

Context and Background

The Bellagio Dialogue grew out of the Global Environmental Governance Dialogues that Professor Maria Ivanova launched at Yale University in 1998 under the leadership of Professor Daniel Esty. In 2000, Esty and Ivanova held a convening on global environmental governance in Bellagio and this work

has continued, including a 2009 Global Environmental Governance Forum convening all five UNEP executive directors. In 2024, the Bellagio Dialogue was set against increasing global environmental challenges and the need for more effective multilateral approaches. The focus was on how small states, often facing the forefront of environmental challenges, can overcome constraints through enhanced collaboration, skill development, and resource acquisition. Their unique position and experiences imbue small states with inherent moral clarity, enabling them to advocate for sustainable practices and policies with a credibility that resonates globally.

The Bellagio Dialogue built on the foundational principles of trust, community building, and strategic collaboration. These principles underpinned the discussions and guided our collective vision for a more equitable, effective, and inclusive global environmental governance. Trust, as the cornerstone of our endeavor, facilitates open, honest dialogue and fosters an environment where innovative solutions can emerge. Community building ensures these solutions are nurtured within a network of committed stakeholders, each bringing diverse experiences and insights. Strategic collaboration, meanwhile, empowers us to harness our collective energies and resources in order to tackle the complex challenges of environmental governance. As we move forward, these principles will continue to guide our actions, ensuring that our collective efforts lead to meaningful, lasting change.

Process

For multilateralism to be effective, it must be inclusive, ensuring that all states, regardless of size or power, have an equitable stake in the outcomes. Empathy and connection are the bedrock of this inclusivity because they encourage a more cooperative and less confrontational approach where mutual understanding and shared objectives guide actions. These principles can level the playing field as they enable small states to protect their interests and contribute meaningfully to the global discourse. Modeling our process on The Present and Future Institute's motto of "think, convene, deliver," we invited participants to engage deeply with each other and the issues at hand. Strong connections are vital for small states' ability to amplify influence and secure necessary support. Connecting meaningfully with other nations can determine resilience and capacity to navigate challenges.

Small States with Big Impact

Small states play a crucial role in environmental multilateralism. They possess a moral authority to infuse global dialogues with urgency and transform rhetoric into concrete actions. Small states often act as norm entrepreneurs by championing international norms and policies that reflect their interests and values. Their often-innovative governance is a model for sustainable solutions, illustrating how agile policy making can address the roots of environmental issues and provide scalable global practices. The agility of small states in policy experimentation and implementation provides valuable lessons and best practices that larger states can learn from and apply.

Their commitment to these issues stems from recognizing that global challenges require collective action and that multilateral forums provide a platform to amplify their voices. For example, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have been instrumental in pushing for stronger action on climate change, highlighting the disproportionate impact of climate-related disasters on vulnerable nations.

Small states shape multilateralism through coalition building and bridge building, through compliance with international obligations, and advocacy for a robust multilateral system. By forming alliances with other nations, they amplify their collective voice, transcending geographic, economic, and political divides to address issues often overshadowed by the interests of more powerful countries. Their ability to act as mediators among conflicting interests, utilizing their diplomatic neutrality and skills, contributes significantly to international stability and cooperation on complex issues.

The Bellagio Dialogue underscored the power of art as the universal language of creativity and culture. Art echoes the experiences of small states in a way that transcends borders and speaks directly to our shared humanity. Art invites engagement, compels reflection and empathy, and can serve as a bridge between policy and the people it serves. In this way, small states and their artistic emissaries play a unique role in bringing to life the abstract concepts of environmental governance, making them accessible and resonant to a broader audience.



President Carlos Alvarado of Costa Rica engaging

“This convening helped me clear my thoughts on priorities in environmental multilateralism and how we as a collective and I as an individual can contribute to addressing some of the identified issues.” — Participant



Artwork by Innocent Nkurunziza

Plastics Treaty

In March 2022, at UNEA-5.2 governments adopted a historic resolution to develop a legally binding instrument to combat plastic pollution. In Bellagio, delegates from Peru and Rwanda provided insights into their nations' roles in leading the global effort to address plastic pollution. Together with participants, they exchanged best practices derived from their respective national contexts and identified key issues for the new international treaty.

1. Lifecycle of Plastics: Discussions highlighted the entire lifecycle of plastics, from oil extraction to production and waste disposal. The complexity of this lifecycle poses challenges in formulating comprehensive strategies and regulations.
2. Negotiation and Operational Challenges: Developing an international plastics agreement has encountered procedural hurdles. Consensus – often understood as unanimity - can slow down and even stall negotiations. Creating a collective commitment to cover the full life cycle of plastics has shaped the process and participants emphasized the need to include obligations related to the production phase of plastics. Developing countries' lack of sufficient recycling infrastructure was noted as a significant operational issue.
3. Data and Modeling: The lack of comprehensive data and effective modeling is a major gap in the negotiation process for the new agreement on plastic pollution. This gap hinders the establishment of legally binding targets and effective policymaking, contrasting with successes in other environmental agreements like the Montreal Protocol or the various chemicals and waste agreements.
4. Technological Solutions and Civic Engagement: The role of technology in addressing the plastics problem emerged as a prominent issue, including the need for technology development and uptake in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and effective civil society engagement. Discussions also suggested a more active inclusion of youth and indigenous communities in these efforts.

5. Broadening the Discussion: Participants noted that the plastics treaty discussions have evolved from focusing solely on marine plastics to encompassing plastic pollution's broader lifecycle and social dimensions. They also involve a much larger group of stakeholders beyond governments, and the circle must widen more.
6. Focus Areas: Plastic production is increasing rapidly and reached 400.3 million metric tons in 2022, an over 700% increase since 1950. A significant portion is single-use plastic, and only 9% is recycled. Shifting the focus from waste and recycling to addressing production, including the numerous hazardous chemicals used, is imperative.
7. Timeline for Treaty Proposal: Despite the ambitious goal to propose a treaty at INC-5 within a two-year timeline, concerns have been raised regarding the feasibility of this timeline due to a lack of consensus among countries. Participants noted that it is crucial to ensure that any extension of the negotiations does not compromise the momentum and ambition of the process.
8. Position Paper Development: Participants proposed creating a position paper to inform and support member states throughout the intergovernmental process, providing a foundation for effective participation and advocacy for an ambitious and effective treaty.



Moira Zellner, Isaque Jalilo, Valentina Sierra, César Aréstigui

Summit of the Future

The Summit of the Future, scheduled for September 22-23, 2024 in New York City, promises action-oriented outcomes to strengthen international cooperation and enhance our collective capacity to effectively address emerging challenges and opportunities for both present and future generations. During the discussions in Bellagio, participants explored the unique contributions that small states could offer through innovative solutions while also identifying areas within the multilateral system where enhancements are needed to amplify their voices and impact.

1. Ambuli Dialogues: “Ambuli Dialogues” emerged as a continuation of the spirit fostered during the Bellagio Dialogues. The term “Ambuli” draws from practices emphasizing mutual recognition and acknowledging one another’s humanity. In this practice, participants not only acknowledge the presence and uniqueness of each other but also cultivate a spirit of camaraderie and deeper connection. By naming the extended discussion series the “Ambuli Dialogues,” we signal our commitment to perpetuating this ethos of recognition and connection. It reflects the participants’ collective aspiration to nurture ongoing engagement characterized by mutual recognition and respect, thereby instilling the very principles of this interaction into the fabric of our future dialogues.
2. Partnerships for Capacity Building: Negotiators in small states face severe capacity constraints. Participants suggested exploring partnerships with UNDP for negotiator training. This initiative would enhance small state representatives’ negotiation skills, ensuring they can actively contribute to global discussions.
3. Scale and Leverage in Action: Effective environmental governance requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between local, regional, and global scales. Tailoring actions to fit these varying contexts ensures that solutions are not only ecologically relevant but also socially equitable. Participants highlighted the need to consider the appropriate scale for actions and solutions to leverage power dynamics in environmental governance.

4. Innovative Negotiating Processes: The idea of creating a parallel plastics negotiating process through a citizens’ assembly was introduced. This parallel process would aim to mirror the existing negotiations, hoping to produce more ambitious outcomes, and could be championed by an inclusive Summit of the Future process.
5. Continuous Stakeholder Engagement: Continuous, consistent, and collaborative engagement of stakeholders, especially those in small states, will be crucial for translation of high-level policy directives into meaningful, on-the-ground actions that drive substantial and sustainable environmental outcomes.
6. Harnessing Art for Environmental Advocacy: The evocative power of art is a powerful communication tool. Art can foster a deeper connection and responsibility towards our planet, inspiring broader multilateral engagement. The Summit of the Future is a significant opportunity for the global art and culture community to contribute to sustainable environmental governance. It underscores the role of creativity and cultural expression in enhancing public engagement and advocacy for a sustainable future.



“The total quality of the space and the people who 100% cared for the guests make [Bellagio] a unique and powerful place to work. The context has a powerful impact on the quality of the work that was carried out. A group who had never collaborated as a whole in less than 4 days matured a profound level of understanding.” — Participant

Challenges and Opportunities

1. Influence in Global Discussions: Small states possess a significant degree of influence in global environmental discussions. Despite their size, these states can shape agendas and contribute meaningfully to international debates on crucial issues, such as environmental policies and climate change strategies.
2. Strategic Issue Selection: Small states must strategically choose and prioritize the environmental issues with which they engage. Due to limited capacity and resources, focusing on specific areas where they can make the most impact is crucial for maximizing their influence in multilateral negotiations.
3. Need for Both Local and Global Solutions: Global environmental challenges require solutions at all levels. Small states play a vital role in highlighting the necessity of local solutions and perspectives in global policy frameworks, ensuring that these policies are effectively implemented at the local level.
4. Integration of Art into Policy: Building on the profound impact of art witnessed during our dialogue, we advocate for intentionally integrating artistic expression into environmental policymaking and public engagement strategies. Initiatives could include art-based awareness campaigns, collaborations with artists to visualize policy impacts, or art installations that bring environmental issues to the forefront of public consciousness.
5. Continuous Engagement and Exchange of Views: Establishing and maintaining platforms for continuous engagement and timely exchange of views is essential. Small states benefit from being part of a process where they can regularly share insights, experiences, and best practices with each other, as well as with larger states, civil society, academia, and other stakeholders.
6. Advocacy and System Reform: Small states should actively participate in appointing ambassadors or envoys to advocate for specific environmental issues. They have done so on climate and could pursue a similar strategy for ending plastic pollution. Systemic reforms are also needed, such as making the United Nations more responsive to the needs and concerns of small states and ensuring that key environmental issues are included in major international agreements and consensus documents like the forthcoming Pact of the Future.



Claxton Duberry, Max Gomera, and Keisha McGuire

Outcomes and Action Points

Mobilizing knowledge, enhancing communication, and solidifying cooperation are key priorities for moving forward. Participants suggested three main actions to this end:

- Cultivating a robust Knowledge Network
- Establishing an authoritative Information Hub
- Fortifying an Institutional Network

Aspirational Goals also translate the insights of the Bellagio Dialogue into concrete actions and enduring initiatives. These are the stepping stones towards equipping small states with the means to exert proportional influence in environmental diplomacy, reflecting a commitment to an inclusive, collaborative, and strategically aligned approach.

Over time, we can develop a blueprint for empowerment, driving forward the dialogue's vision to embolden small states and, by extension, fortify the environmental multilateralism system.

Priority 1 — Knowledge Network:

1. **Ambuli Dialogues:** Participants recommended that the convening should become an annual event, offering a platform for open dialogues, knowledge sharing, and fostering creativity under the title of Ambuli Dialogues. The goal is to develop this momentum into the Ambuli Institute, a think tank within a university that would assist in bringing science, policy, art, and culture into continuous dialogue.
2. **Collaboration with Key Partners:** There should be consistent and systematic collaboration among PFI, Northeastern University, and the Government of Rwanda (and any other partners willing to participate) to convene, think, and deliver impactful outcomes.
3. **Leveraging the Network:** Utilizing the network for peer learning, information gathering, and directed research is essential for the continuous development and sharing of knowledge.
4. **Inclusive Engagement and Advocacy:** Emphasizing inclusive engagement and advocacy in both the planning and execution stages of outcomes to ensure a broad representation of interests and perspectives.

Priority 2 — Information Hub:

1. **Focus on Data and Modeling:** Starting with plastics, there is a need for robust data and modeling to inform policy decisions and negotiations.
2. **Strategic Timeline for Plastics Negotiations:** Establishing a strategic timeline to guide and streamline the plastics negotiations process.
3. **Integrating Technology:** Utilizing technology to increase engagement and improve the effectiveness of the network's initiatives.
4. **Strategic Calendar for Multilateral Engagement:** Developing a strategic timeline or calendar to coordinate engagement and activities in multilateral environmental governance beyond high-level events.
5. **MEA Analysis:** Analyzing Multilateral Environmental Agreement implementation for information sharing, peer-to-peer learning, and collaboration.

Priority 3 — Institutional Network:

1. **Identifying Regional Policy Institutes and Academic Institutions:** To identify (and, where necessary, create) and collaborate with regional policy institutes and/or academic institutions that can contribute to the network's goals.
2. **Establishing Networks for Research and Policy:** Establishing networks that direct and incorporate relevant research into policymaking and advocacy efforts.

Aspirational Goals:

- Implementation of negotiator training programs to enhance the skills and capabilities of individuals involved in environmental negotiations akin to trainings in the climate process but extending to a broader set of environmental agreements.
- Creation of a "Rosetta Stone" for environmental negotiations, providing a "language" resource for negotiators and policymakers.
- Appointment of Special Envoy(s) for Plastics, similar to special envoys for climate, to advocate for and advance policy changes related to ending plastic pollution.

Conclusion

Small states have demonstrated an extraordinary ability to influence multilateral processes not by sheer size or economic power but through moral leadership, innovative policymaking, and strategic diplomacy. The Bellagio Dialogue underscored the necessity of providing these states with the platforms and resources they need to amplify their voices. The Bellagio Dialogue has laid a foundation for a more equitable and effective approach to environmental multilateralism by focusing on action-oriented themes and prioritizing inclusive engagement, knowledge sharing, and capacity building.

The action items proposed, including the establishment of the Ambuli Dialogues, an annual Knowledge Network convening, the creation of an Information Hub, and the development of an Institutional Network, reflect a commitment to understanding the challenges small states face and empowering them. These initiatives aim to enhance small states' capabilities to navigate and influence environmental multilateralism and shape a more effective and equitable environmental diplomacy.

The aspirational goals of the Bellagio Dialogue, encompassing negotiator training and the appointment of Special Envoys for plastics are a testament to the forward-thinking approach required to tackle environmental issues. Small states possess the potential to lead the way in innovative environmental governance and must be supported with the necessary resources and platforms.

In conclusion, the Bellagio Dialogue reaffirmed the need for a recalibrated approach to environmental multilateralism, one that recognizes and harnesses the unique strengths of small states. The Bellagio Dialogue also underscored the untapped potential of art as a catalyst for change. We call upon policymakers, artists, and the global community to embrace and explore the intersection of art and environmental governance. A more inclusive, compelling, and effective movement towards sustainability is one where art and policy work go hand in hand to inspire and enact the change we urgently need. By continuing to foster spaces for dialogue, collaboration, and action, the global community can ensure that small states' voices are heard and instrumental in shaping a sustainable future for our planet and all its people.





“Magical experience. Best place to reflect and find your inner peace.”

— Participant

We are grateful to The Rockefeller Foundation and Carnegie Corporation for their support, which enabled the convening of the Bellagio Dialogue. Our heartfelt thanks always to all participants whose spirited engagement and dedication inspire us, creating a path to tangible change that we are proud to walk together.