

Reforming International Environmental Governance

NOTE: The following represents views expressed at two meetings of stakeholders held at UNEP Governing Council 2007. It does not represent a consensus view.

1. UN system-wide coherence in the area of the environment needs to be considered within the broader context of sustainable development, in which all three pillars of sustainable development are addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner, safeguarding the environment and promoting social equity.
2. To this end, there is an urgent need for a stronger international authority on environment to safeguard the environmental pillar of sustainable development. UNEP's present mandate and resources prevent it from achieving this.
3. The Panel calls for an upgraded UNEP with a renewed mandate and improved funding. If UNEP's current insufficiencies are not remedied, serious consideration should be given to whether UNEP should provide the primary focus for reform of international environmental governance.
4. An upgraded UNEP should have a new mandate. Such a mandate should build greater coherence between environmental and social agendas, making the concept of "environment for development" a reality. It would act as a platform for both standard setting and other interaction with national, international and UN bodies. The principles of cooperation and of common but differentiated responsibilities should be reflected in the implementation of the mandate.
5. An upgraded UNEP needs to play a role in building capacity to implement multilateral environmental agreements.
6. The Panel recommends that efficiencies and substantive coordination should be pursued by diverse treaty bodies to support effective implementation of MEAs. In addition, there is a need for an upgraded UNEP to promote coherence and address gaps and inadequacies in the current convention regime. The case of World Health Organisation and DDT in conflict with Stockholm Convention, and the case of Canada and Kazakhstan undermining Rotterdam Annex 3 in the case of asbestos are cases in point.
7. An upgraded UNEP must be adequately and predictably funded in order to be able to implement its mandate. The current financial situation for UNEP is unacceptable and must be addressed. In comparison, for example, several large environmental NGOs have significantly greater budgets than UNEP.
8. The Panel recommends that the Global Environment Facility (GEF) should be strengthened as the major financial mechanism for the global environment. Significant reforms of the GEF are necessary before it can take on this role. Civil society access to funding must be improved, as must representation of developing countries in the GEF's decision-making processes. A review of GEF governance must be undertaken by a multi-stakeholder network that includes governments, civil society, and intergovernmental organisations.
9. The Panel recommends the establishment of a UN Sustainable Development Board to oversee the One UN Country Programmes. It is essential that the upgraded UNEP be part of and be given a prominent role within this body. The concept of Sustainable Development that guides this Board must be understood as the integration of environmental, economic, and social concerns in accordance with paragraph 1 and 2 above. Allocation of resources should reflect country and regional sustainable development priorities.
10. Many of the panel recommendations, though not specific to the environment or sustainable development, are crucial to strengthening sustainable development within the UN system. This includes, for example, the Panel recommendation to create a dynamic UN entity focused on gender equality and women's empowerment. For this reason, the Panel report must be considered not as a menu of options, but as a whole.