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## Partners or Competitors? Policy Integration for Sustainable Development between United Nations Agencies

The Case of the United Nations Environment Programme and the  
United Nations Development Programme

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyses policy integration and institutional interlinkages within the United Nations system. In particular, we focus on two major UN programmes in the field of sustainable development policies, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). We analyse processes of cooperation and collaboration between both programmes in particular with a view to the integration of their respective policy objectives-environment and development-within the overall framework of sustainable development. We argue that a comprehensive operationalisation of sustainable development must target both poverty reduction and environmental protection; it must not trade off one priority versus the other, since protection of natural resources is a precondition for successful poverty reduction. We highlight strengths and weaknesses of both UN programmes, in particular where they refer to the ecological pillar of sustainable development, and show a lack of coherence in the operationalisation of sustainable development policies within the United Nations. We then discuss how institutional interplay and policy integration between UNEP and UNDP could be adjusted to further implementation of policies for sustainable development that do not trade off environmental concerns for economic growth. Conceptually, our paper draws on a framework on analysing the effectiveness of intergovernmental bureaucracies currently developed within a larger research project on international environmental organizations; politically, our paper attempts to contribute to the current UN debate on the reform of international environmental governance and on the institutional operationalisation of the Millennium Development Goals.

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## **Introduction**

The political goals of environmental protection and poverty reduction-or 'development' however it is being defined-have been problematic ever since the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, when Indira Gandhi voiced her powerful and often quoted warning, "The rich countries may look upon development as the cause of environmental destruction, but to us it is one of the primary means of improving the environment of living. ... How can we speak to those who live in villages and in slums about keeping the oceans, rivers and air clean when their own lives are contaminated at the source?"

Indeed, the evolution of global environmental governance in the last decades can be interpreted as continuous attempt to reconcile the goal of environmental protection-which often implies restrictions on resource use and industrial activity-and the thrust of unfettered, fast and ubiquitous development to lift the deprived masses in the South out of poverty and dejection. While the 1972 Stockholm conference focused largely on pure environmentalism, with development concerns being confined to an earlier meeting in Founex, the 1992 Rio conference had to be broader. Due to insistence of the South and insight of the North, the 1992 Rio 'Earth Summit' addressed environment *and* development. The 2002 Johannesburg Summit has further changed the diplomatic parlour towards the integrative concept of 'sustainable development', which had evolved since the mid-1980s under the influence of the 'Brundtland Commission' (World Commission on Environment and Development; see WCED, 1987).

In the following, we address the roles that have been played by the two United Nations programmes that find themselves at the forefront of the UN's efforts in the field of sustainable development: the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme. The relationship between these two major bureaucracies within the United Nations can also be seen as organisational expression of the long-term juxtaposition of policy goals, stakeholders and visions regarding environment and development.

In the following, we offer, first, a comparative assessment of UNEP and UNDP, focusing on three factors that are relevant for their effectiveness - institutional setting, resource base, and interorganisational relationships within the UN system-before we embark on a first appraisal of the respective influence of both agencies. Against this backdrop, we consider several options how both organisations may come closer to implement their objectives in a more coherent and mutually enforcing manner.

## **Functional Differentiation: The Institutionalisation of Environment and Development within the UN System**

The institutionalisation of development policies and environment policies within the United Nations' system differs markedly in terms of institutional setting and size of the respective bureaucracies responsible for these areas.

### Institutionalising Development Policy: The United Nations Development Programme

The United Nations Development Programme was founded in 1965 through General Assembly Resolution 2029 (XX). It began operations in 1966 at the United Nations offices in New York. The programme is administered through the Economic and Social Council as a subsidiary body to the UN General Assembly. The UN Secretary-General appoints the UNDP Administrator, who has until recently always been a citizen of the United States of America. UNDP was de facto a merger of two technical co-operation bodies that had been operating under the UN flag since 1949 and 1958 respectively: the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance and the Special Fund. The new programme was expected to 'facilitate over-all planning and needed co-ordination of the several types of technical co-operation programmes carried out within the United Nations system of organizations and [to] increase their effectiveness' (UNGA/Res. 2029 [XX], preamble). Today, despite still being a programme rather than a full-fledged specialised organisation, UNDP has evolved into the major UN network for all kinds of developing activities, with 195 member states, field activities in 166 countries, and country offices in 136 countries. It has a staff of 1782 professional officers, 702 of which work in field offices around the globe. This makes UNDP the largest multilateral organisation for technical co-operation.

The programme is directed by an Executive Board of representatives of 36 member states, who are elected by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on a triennial basis, with one third of members being replaced each year. Regional quotas of eight African, seven Asian, five Latin American and Caribbean, four East European and twelve 'West European and Others' members grants technically a voting majority to developing countries. In practice, however, decision-making by consensus is the rule. The board decides, among other things, upon UNDP's 'Country Co-operation Frameworks', which determine the agency's involvement with individual countries, and supervises disbursements from the United Nations Population Fund.

The UNDP Administrator and the UNDP bureaucracy under its supervision run the day-to-day business of the organisation. The current Administrator is Mark Malloch Brown, who succeeded James Gustave Speth in 1999. UNDP also chairs the United Nations Development Group, which was established under Kofi Annan's 1997 reform agenda to co-ordinate the system-wide UN development activities. In addition, the programme is in charge of a number of other UN entities that directly relate to the development sector, including the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) and the United Nations

Volunteers (UNV).

UNDP's budget is financed through voluntary contributions of governments, which complicates long-term budgetary planning since government pledges not always materialise. Over the last decade, UNDP's annual core budget has decreased from USD 1.1 billion in 1990 to USD 917 million (1994) to USD 761 million (1997) to USD 625 million (2001). This decrease not only relates to declining government contributions, but also to substantive administrative reforms initiated under Administrator Speth in the 1990s, when amongst other things UNDP headquarters personnel was reduced by about a third. The restrictive budget policy has been continued by Administrator Malloch Brown who highlights particularly 'painful cuts' for the 2002-2003 biennium that coincide with increasing costs as a result of a weakened US dollar and increased salaries for international civil service posts (UNDP, 2003a). At the same time, the programme's 'non-core' resources have significantly risen from a pre-Rio USD 268 million in 1991 to USD 1.25 billion in 1997 and more than 1.6 billion in 2000, now representing roughly three-quarters of total expenditures (UNDP, 2001; Klingebiel, 2000). These additional 'non-core' resources are a double-edged sword. They add financial impetus to the organisation while allowing governments to exert stricter control over the disbursement of these resources, which are typically administered through trust funds or under co-financed 'cost-sharing' schemes, a tendency that has been criticised as a 'bilateralisation' of UNDP (Klingebiel, 2000).

85-90% of UNDP grants flow into the poorest developing countries with an annual per capita income of less than USD 750. Different from World Bank loans, UNDP grants do not need to be repaid, which makes them attractive to recipient countries. Developing countries also value the comparatively high level of inclusion in the decision-making procedures, for instance through round-table mechanisms or decentralised communication with country representatives, and 'good governance' conditionalities that are perceived as more agreeable and less patronising than many 'structural adjustment' conditionalities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The integration of environmental concerns into UNDP's work has been discussed for long. Today, the programme is active in a number of environmental arenas. For example, UNDP is together with the World Bank and UNEP an implementing agency for the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which gives it significant influence in the financing of environmental development projects. UNDP has also a similar role in the Multilateral Fund set up in 1997 under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (see Biermann, 1997, for details). The impulse for many of these initiatives, however, often stems from the environmental community, with UNDP remaining largely concerned with human development, not with distinct environmental programmes.

Institutionalising Environmental Policy: The United Nations

## Environment Programme

Following the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the General Assembly decided in Resolution 2997 (XVII) to create a distinct environmental programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, and to endow this programme with 'a small secretariat' to be located in Nairobi, Kenya (which was the first time that a major UN agency or programme had been housed in a developing country). Like the United Nations Development Programme, UNEP is designed as a programme that reports back to the General Assembly via the Economic and Social Council and whose Executive Director is appointed by the UN Secretary-General.

The programme is governed by a 58-member Governing Council with regional quotas of sixteen African members, thirteen Asian, ten Latin American, six East European and thirteen 'West European and Others'. Again, this gives a de facto majority to the South, and again, decisions are generally adopted by consensus. The question of universal membership to UNEP has been debated for some years, with supporters arguing that this would increase the programme's weight vis-à-vis the UN specialised organisations. However, the most recent Special Session of the Governing Council, in Jeju in March 2004, indicated that this is still highly contentious and unlikely to be solved soon (IISD, 2004b).

In 2003 the UNEP secretariat employed 456 professional officers (UNEP, 2004), roughly one fourth of UNDP's staff. About half of UNEP's personnel work in the organisation's regional offices (in Bahrain for West Asia, Bangkok for Asia and the Pacific, Geneva for Europe, Mexico City for Latin America, and Nairobi for Africa), and four liaison offices: at UN headquarters in New York, at the seat of the European Union in Brussels, at the seat of the African Union in Addis Ababa, and at the seat of the Arab League in Cairo. The UN regular budget provides for the maintenance of the UNEP secretariat in Nairobi, including the salaries for twenty-seven professional and sixteen general service posts (UNEP, 2004). For programme activities, the UNEP secretariat administers a separate Environment Fund that is filled through voluntary contributions from governments. This fund has contained on average USD 50 million per annum (with a USD 62 million peak in 1992, the year of the Rio conference), with a cumulative total of funds of almost one billion USD in its first two decades. On the one hand, such a small budget is unsurprising, because UNEP is not meant to be a funding agency, which prohibits a direct comparison with the much larger budget of UNDP. Yet given the scope of UNEP's mandate and the demands from governments for UNEP's work, observers have emphasised that the organisation's resource base is all too meagre (e.g. Wapner, 2003; Imber, 1996). In addition, the funds of UNEP as the 'leading global environmental authority'-as it was proclaimed by governments at the organisation's 19<sup>th</sup> Governing Council in the 1997 Nairobi Declaration-are smaller than the budgets of many environmental ministries and some of the larger environmental non-governmental organisations (Biermann, 2002; French, 1995).

After contributions to the Environment Fund had fallen below USD 50 million

per annum in the 1990s, the negative trend appears now halted. Current developments indicate not only an increase in voluntary contributions (USD 52.6 million in 2003, after 48.3 million in 2002 and 44 million in 2001), but also a broadening of the donor base across member states: in 2003, a record 123 governments contributed to the Environment Fund, after 92 in 2002 and an average of 74 in the earlier years (UNEP, 2004). It remains to be seen whether governments will maintain this increasing level of commitment. The current positive trend can partially be attributed to the voluntary 'indicative scale of contributions' introduced after the 2002 Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Cartagena, which allows for some optimism. Since 1994, UNEP also advises, together with UNDP and the World Bank, project disbursements through the Global Environment Facility; it also has established a substantive division within UNEP headquarters exclusively for UNEP's collaboration under the GEF. However, the major share of GEF funds flows to projects of the two big development agencies. It would seem worthwhile to assess more thoroughly the extent of each agency's influence on the disbursement of resources mobilised under the GEF, and how UNEP's role could be better balanced against the traditional operational agencies UNDP and World Bank. In addition to the Environment Fund, extra-budgetary resources that are being allocated to a variety of environmental convention Trust Funds as well as 'earmarked contributions' for *a priori* specified project activities have over recent years gained salience with regard to UNEP's overall activities. For example, the convention Trust Funds alone provide for eighty-nine of the secretariat's professional posts (see UNEP, 2004, for further details).

### UNEP and UNDP within the UN System

Considering UNDP's standing within the UN system, its network of country offices is highly relevant. Each country office is run by a Resident Representative, who in most cases also functions as highest UN representative in this country. UNDP representatives often act as *de facto* ambassadors of the United Nations. This is formally acknowledged in many cases by the UN Secretary-General, who often assigns additional responsibilities to UNDP representatives in declaring them United Nations Resident Coordinators as focal point for all UN agencies operating in this country. Thus, UNDP has more technical-administrative influence in the field than one would expect from a subordinate entity of the Economic and Social Council. This does not, however, imply that UNDP's role is undisputed *vis-à-vis* other UN agencies eager to protect their turf, notably the formally higher-ranking specialised organisations that also deal with development policy, such as the Food and Agricultural Organisation, the UN Industrial Development Organisation or the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Poverty reduction is part of UNDP's mission, the promotion of sustainable human development. However, poverty reduction is also the mandate of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which view themselves as lead agencies.



They have introduced the instrument of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) as a follow-up to the UN Millennium Declaration and made the development and continuous refinement of national PRSP even a prerequisite for developing country governments to be eligible for poverty specific loans. They thus automatically provide a salient point of reference for other agencies that engage in the fight against poverty, notably bilateral donor agencies and the 'Group of 8 (major industrialised countries)', which have linked their debt relief concessions for highly-indebted poor countries to the successful implementation of national PRSP-processes (Eberlei, 2003). UNDP is involved with the development of such PRSP in 60 countries (UNDP, 2001a). While the PRSP approach of the World Bank and the IMF seems to relate to many more of UNDP's own development projects at country level, it appears that this has not yet been subjected to a systematic effort to assess the wider effects of the PRSP initiative on UNDP project activities. On a general level, UNDP itself has criticised PSRP for being a redressed version of structural adjustment conditionalities (UNDP, 2001a). Thus, it may even be the case that UNDP seeks to avoid to be more closely associated with this instrument in order to maintain its good reputation with developing countries. Another explanation might be rivalry and competition between the World Bank, UNDP and other operational donor agencies, which is often found in the field (Eberlei and Siebold, 2002). These, however, are hypotheses that require further systematic research. In particular, it would be desirable to assess interlinkages between the World Bank/IMF-led PRSP-process and the implementation of sustainable development and poverty reduction policies through other agencies, notably UNDP.

UNEP's position within the UN system is quite different. On the one hand, UNEP is expected to be the guiding force for all United Nations' activities that relate to the environment, and it is not surrounded by a host of agencies with similar mandates as is the case with UNDP in the development arena. On the other hand, it has remained a small and formally low-ranking entity ever since it was established, and is struggling to co-ordinate an increasingly fragmented policy arena in which other actors with less comprehensive but nonetheless environmental mandates have mushroomed over the past twenty years. The panacea for effective co-ordination is yet to be found as the most recent attempt to enhance co-ordination, the UNEP-led Environmental Management Group, appears to further none of the desired results. Governments have repeated time and again their commitment to strengthening UNEP financially as well as institutionally (e.g. Nairobi Declaration, 1997; Malmö Declaration, 2000), but generally fail to live up to it when they are expected to. A point in case is the question of universal membership, which has been proposed many times and was formally brought forth to UNEP's Governing Council by the Executive Director after governments failed to address the issue at the Johannesburg summit (UNEP, 2002b). The issue has been debated both at the Governing Councils 22<sup>nd</sup> session and the recent eighth Governing Council Special Session at Jeju only to be adjourned again for further consideration by the UN Secretary-General and the 23<sup>rd</sup> Governing Council in 2005. Opponents to the idea of strengthening UNEP

through universal membership are anxious to create a precedent for turning UNEP into a specialised agency, which they are unwilling to accept (IISD, 2004b). Thus, while UNEP managed to achieve some de facto 'upgrading' by successfully institutionalising the Global Ministerial Environment Forum, it essentially remains in a weak position vis-à-vis other UN agencies.

This is especially the case when the perspective is widened from environmental policy to sustainable development. Here, the environmental issues that are most closely related to socio-economic development and poverty alleviation—climate change and desertification/land degradation—have traditionally been a domain of UNEP, but have now effectively been 'outsourced' with the institutionalisation of the UNFCCC and UNCCD, both of which are administered by distinct UN secretariats (Busch, forthcoming; Bauer, forthcoming; Chasek and Corell, 2003). Similarly, the secretariat to the Convention on Biological Diversity, although formally part of the UNEP bureaucracy, operates from its Montréal office rather independently from UNEP headquarters (Siebenhüner, 2005).

Thus, the closest direct links between UNEP's current activities and poverty reduction are expressed in its focus on water, sanitation and human settlements, all of which aim to improve the immediate living conditions of the poor, as addressed by the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals. Policy development on these issues has been elevated to a major priority within the secretariat after the Johannesburg summit. It has subsequently been endorsed at CSD-11 and now been followed by a number of decisions adopted at the Jeju Special Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (IISD, 2004b). At the same time, the focus on water, sanitation and human settlements touches the turf of agencies such as UNDP and UN-HABITAT, which are often reluctant to let UNEP's global policy perspective interfere with their own work on the ground. In sum, while UNEP is unanimously accepted as the United Nations' lead agency on global environmental affairs, it faces many political challenges in the wider arena of sustainable development and is certainly ill-positioned to directly address poverty. While the secretariat is and has always been sensitive to the links between poverty and environmental degradation, poverty eradication is neither at the heart of UNEP's mandate nor of its project activities.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current Functional Differentiation**

### **Assessment of UNDP's Strengths and Weaknesses**

Given the complexity of UNDP's organisational set-up and the diversity of its activities, it is difficult to evaluate its performance. Stephan Klingebiel's (1998) assessment of the organisation's capacities, efficiency and effectiveness provides a valuable point of departure. Yet at the same time, UNDP's continuous internal

reforms ultimately make it a moving target, with hardly any up-to-date academic study that analyses the recent and current performance of UNDP convincingly. Further research appears thus needed.

This notwithstanding, it appears that the integration of UNDP in the United Nation's overall sustainable development agenda has made progress in the wider context of Kofi Annan's system-wide Programme of Reform, arguably benefiting from the work of two successive administrators. Both Gustave Speth and Mark Malloch Brown, while emphasising different operational priorities, have shown a strong commitment to the internal renewal of the organisation. Despite significantly reducing the organisation's personnel, they appear to have maintained the organisation's relatively high reputation within the developing world. In particular, Southern governments acknowledge UNDP's efforts to put buzzword concepts such as participation and ownership into practice, which is perceived to positively contrast with the more top-down style of the World Bank and IMF. In this respect, UNDP's round table mechanism, typically implemented at the country level, has been highlighted as a particularly useful tool (Klingebiel, 2000). In a similar vein, and much to the credit of its broad organisational network, UNDP is uniquely well positioned to balance international policy priorities with capacity building at the country level (Engberg-Pedersen and Jorgensen, 1997). This is a comparative advantage of UNDP vis-à-vis other developing agencies inside and outside the UN system.

UNDP has made a lasting impact by introducing its Human Development Index as an outcome of its annual Human Development Report, the first of which was published in 1990 and has quickly become a standard reference for the development community worldwide (e.g. UNDP, 2003b). However, the recommendations of the Human Development Reports are not necessarily reflected in the actual operations of UNDP as they often lack support in the governing bodies (Klingebiel, 2000). The Human Development Reports are complemented by a biennial World Resources Report, published by the World Resources Institute as a joint initiative of UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank with a broader scope on sustainable development (e.g. WRI, 2002).

Overall it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which UNDP is effective. While the assessment of worldwide poverty-despite all contention over the arbitrary indicators on which any such assessment is inevitably based-has reached unprecedented levels of sophistication in recent years, it is difficult to link patterns of development to the work of UNDP (on methodological aspects, see Biermann and Bauer, 2004 and forthcoming). Individual project evaluations may indicate a project's efficiency and effectiveness at the local level, but are difficult to be aggregated.

The difficulty of comprehensive, methodologically clear analysis does not hinder governments to routinely call for more efficiency and increased effectiveness. The UNDP administration responds to these external pressures by undertaking more efforts to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Under an overarching scheme of result-based management, UNDP has introduced 'a framework of results-based

planning and performance management instruments that cascades from the organizational level through the unit and country office level to the individual staff member' to improve UNDP's organizational performance (UNDP, 2003a). As this 'major transformation' has only been initiated in 2003, actual effects remain to be seen.

### Assessment of UNEP's Strengths and Weaknesses

Given its limited scope and mandate and its lack of material resources and political clout, the record of UNEP is all in all quite satisfactory. The programme has taken a lead role in facilitating a number of groundbreaking multilateral environmental agreements, including the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer, a whole set of conventions under its Regional Seas Programme, the 'Rio conventions' on biological diversity and climate change, and the 1994 UN Convention to Combat Desertification (in which UNEP had a minor role in forging, but played a pivotal part in bringing the issue of desertification on the international agenda in the first place; see Corell 1999). In its more recent history UNEP can take credit for the finalisation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the convention on persistent organic pollutants, which were negotiated under its auspices. None of these agreements are related to poverty eradication per se. However, many of the governance challenges addressed in particular in the so-called 'Rio conventions' are of paramount importance to the developing world as they specifically touch on issues of socio-economic development or trade concerns.

In line with its role in promoting legal institutionalisation of international environmental governance, UNEP has been active to improve inter-agency co-operation in order to enhance its own influence and to integrate environmental policies within the UN system (Bauer, 2001). Such 'joint programming' includes partnerships with United Nations specialised agencies such as the World Meteorological Organisation, the International Maritime Organisation and the World Health Organisation; smaller entities of the UN system that operate close to its own mandate, notably UN-HABITAT (formerly UNCHS); hybrid organisations such as the World Conservation Union (IUCN); or expert bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Moreover, UNEP has been lauded for its role in monitoring and assessing the state of the world environment through maintaining its Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) and the related Global Environment Outlook reports (e.g. UNEP, 2002a), the first of which was published in 1997. At the same time, governments expect UNEP to further strengthen the scientific base of its monitoring, assessment and early warning activities, although there are divergent opinions how this should be achieved. Actual reforms are pending further intergovernmental consultations that are beyond the grasp of UNEP, which has expressed its willingness to move ahead, 'aware that it is the state of the environment that tells us whether our policies and programmes are effective' (Töpfer, 2002).

The ecological impact of UNEP's activities is naturally hard to measure, and it

appears virtually impossible to establish direct causal links between the activities of one political actor, such as UNEP, and changes in the ecological environment, which are generally highly complex. In fact, political science research indicates that the connection between effective implementation of environmental agreements and actual environmental improvements is hardly straightforward (e.g. Brown Weiss and Jacobson, 1998). This holds in particular for assessing the effectiveness of international organisations that address global environmental change, including convention secretariats and UNEP (Biermann and Bauer, 2004 and forthcoming; Siebenhüner, 2003). More theoretical and empirical research in this area is clearly needed.

### Integration of Environment and Development within the United Nations

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development confronted all UN agencies with a demand for policy integration and mainstreaming to realise the sustainable development objectives of Agenda 21, namely 'to strengthen cooperation and coordination on environment and development in the United Nations System' (ch. 38, para 8.c). Considering the diversity of vantage points for the myriad entities operating within the UN system, this general demand relates differently to every agency's mandate. While it implied for UNEP to incorporate more comprehensively the goals of sustainable development as opposed to pure environmental protection, it required UNDP to 'green' its operational activities by integrating distinct environmental components into its policies (Timoshenko and Berman, 1996).

This is no different regarding poverty reduction, although it can be argued that this objective is narrower and more specific than the overarching concept of 'sustainable development'. Again, the challenge is different for UNEP and UNDP. The target of poverty reduction is closer to UNDP's original mandate than to UNEP's. Whereas UNEP can point to poverty as a structural factor that exacerbates environmental challenges, UNDP can claim that the ultimate objective of poverty eradication has been inherent in their mandate to promote economic growth and sustainable human development. Against this background, a lack of coherence in both agencies' efforts to address poverty reduction does not come as a surprise.

As main organisational outcome of the Rio conference, the Commission on Sustainable Development was set up in 1992 to put into organisational practice the idea of sustainable development within the UN system. Since the creation of CSD, some 'greening' of UNDP has in fact occurred, but co-ordination at policy and project levels appears to remain the exception to the rule. CSD is hardly the effective co-ordinator it was meant to be. Indeed, the full integration of environment and development with relevant broader issues-in particular financial and economic policy-never succeeded. The CSD became a debating arena for environment and development ministers, their respective representatives and the various stakeholders

within civil society, ranging from the cement industry association to environmentalist lobbying groups. As a response to its many critics, governments sought to 'revitalise' the commission after the Johannesburg summit in adopting a multi-year work programme that builds on the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. This plan includes a series of biennial 'action-oriented Implementation Cycles' until 2017, with the 2004/2005 implementation cycle addressing water, sanitation and human settlements (IISD, 2003).

Many scholars argue that at the time of its conception, the creation of CSD has further undermined the status and authority of an already weak UNEP instead of strengthening system-wide co-ordination (e.g. Elliott, 2005; Henry, 1996). While UNEP has managed to reclaim its centrality in international environmental governance, notably since the introduction of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum in 2000, the overall lack of co-ordination that characterises the United Nations' sustainable development policies continues.

Against this backdrop of often vague, incoherent and overlapping mandates and declarations that UNDP and UNEP (as well as other UN agencies) are confronted with, individual organisational leadership is particularly important. Current research indicates that leadership plays a crucial role regarding not only to the authority and reputation of an organisation, but also their policy preferences. While governments retain formal control over the organisations they establish to improve intergovernmental co-operation, the international bureaucrats they delegate to do so tend to develop remarkable skills if it comes to refining or even shaping the mandates and objectives of the bureaucracies they are supposed to 'run' on a technical basis (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999 and 2004; Bauer, 2004).

Thus, changes in organisational leadership are often crucial moments. In the case of UNEP, which had arrived at a reputational low in the years following the Rio summit, UN Secretary-General Annan provided for a fresh impetus by appointing the former chairman to the Commission on Sustainable Development, Klaus Töpfer, to succeed Elisabeth Dowdeswell as Executive Director in 1998. Töpfer restructured the UNEP secretariat along functional divisions as opposed to the former sectoral design that had featured departments specialising on distinct environmental problems (UNGA 1999). Regardless of different views on this fundamental reform, the Executive Director finds himself lauded both in- and outside his bureaucracy for regaining UNEP's authority as the United Nations' lead agency in the environmental field and for increasing the secretariat's efficiency, now even with positive repercussions in terms of financial contributions.

Regarding UNDP, the change from Administrator James Gustave Speth to Mark Malloch Brown in 1999 was also significant, among other things in terms of shifting policy priorities. Malloch Brown included crisis prevention and recovery into the UNDP's portfolio (see Wright, 2004, for details). With the elevation of new issues at the senior level of an organisation, other policy priorities are relegated in comparison to the *status quo ante*. In the case of UNDP, this holds in particular for environmental policy. While UNDP's environmental agenda has always been rather

marginal considering its development mandate, the environment received more attention as a consequence of Agenda 21 (Timoshenko and Berman, 1996) and ranked particularly high on the agenda of Administrator Speth, who has an academic background in environmental economics and has advocated the creation of a world environment organisation as a counter-weight to the World Trade Organization. Quite contrastingly, during Administrator Malloch Brown's first term it was discussed whether UNDP should dispose of its environmental responsibilities in order to free resources for issues that were seen as more central to the programme's mandate. Although such radical steps did not materialise, the very discussion indicates that individual leadership matters much regarding the preferences of organisational actors and subsequently how they perform.

While the role of environmental protection has thus been rather oscillating at UNDP, the role of poverty reduction appears to have been marginal at UNEP. This does not surprise. While UNEP officials have always been affirmative of the crucial links between poverty reduction and effective implementation of environmental policies, UNEP basically lacks the most essential provisions that one would commonly associate with combating poverty. Its material resources are minimal, and it is not a funding agency. Moreover, it is largely restricted to operate on global and regional levels, while policies aiming to curb poverty need to be implemented at the local level to become effective. Notwithstanding certain wider reaching aspirations within the organisation's rank and file, the United Nations Environment Programme is hence largely confined to activities of awareness raising, agenda setting and policy development at global and regional levels. With its limited institutional presence and lack of operational capacities, the organisation can hardly be expected to actively contribute to the implementation of poverty reduction strategies at country level.

### **Policy Integration within the United Nations? Assessing Reform Proposals**

How can environmental and developmental concerns better be integrated in the United Nations system? This question has been debated as far back as 1972 during the 1972 Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, when US foreign policy strategist George F. Kennan called for 'an organisational personality' in international environmental politics (Kennan, 1970). Dozens of new proposals for an international environment organisation have been published since then, and its prospective relationship vis-à-vis international efforts to promote development and growth have always been part of the debate, significantly so in the wake of the Rio conference when the concept of 'sustainable development' was declared a universal paradigm. In view of the plethora of reform proposals, the United Nations established in February 2001 an Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives on International Environmental Governance to assess existing institutional weaknesses, identify future needs and consider feasible reform options. This process included consultations with academic

experts at a workshop in Cambridge, with representatives from civil society groups at workshops in Nairobi (UNEP 2001a), as well as the involvement of the United Nations University (UNU/IAS 2002). The current view of governments-as summarised in 2002 by the then president of UNEP's Governing Council, David Anderson of Canada-appears to be that a new UN agency on environmental policy could be an option for consideration, but only in the longer term (see UNEP 2002b, para. 12). In this vein, the Malmö Declaration of the UNEP-initiated first Global Ministerial Environment Forum called upon the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development to 'review the requirements for a greatly strengthened institutional structure of international environmental governance based on an assessment of future needs for an institutional architecture that has the capacity to effectively address wide-ranging environmental threats in a globalizing world' (Malmö Declaration 2000, para. 24).

Johannesburg, however, did not deliver. Hardly any aspects of institutional reform were addressed in a meaningful way. In retrospect, it seems that institutional reform was an issue under continuous consideration in the years leading to Johannesburg, then essentially neglected at the summit, and now re-emerging again as an item of substantive debate. The French government has now taken the lead again by circulating a proposal to transform UNEP into an 'Organisation spécialisée des Nations Unies pour l'environnement', which follows up on earlier French initiatives to replace UNEP by an 'Organisation mondiale de l'environnement' or an 'impartial and indisputable global centre for the evaluation of our environment'. Germany has joined the French proposal. The European Council of Environmental Ministers, too, now supports the idea of a new agency (cf. for example the final declaration of its 2457. session on 17 October 2002 in Luxemburg), as does the European Council (so at its session of 20-21 March 2003 in Brussels).

As is evidenced by the recent French initiative, much of the reform debate takes the state of UNEP and the lack of co-ordination in international *environmental* governance as a vantage point for crafting far-reaching reform proposals. The salience of development policy-UNEP's status and relationship vis-à-vis the UNDP and other implementing agencies-is ubiquitous in the discussion of most proposals. Calls to merge UNDP and UNEP-which may have appeared obvious prior to the creation of the CSD-have remained the exception to the rule. Rather it was argued, for instance by the German Advisory Council on Global Change (2001), that both programmes should be kept functionally separate but institutionally strengthened within the overall UN system. In light of the failure of the CSD to effectively promote policy integration between the two agencies and recent developments, including the 2002 Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development and recent calls for a world organisation on sustainable development, this position might need to be revisited. It is in this respect that we will address three different theoretical options: The merger of UNEP and UNDP into a world organisation (or programme) for sustainable development; the upgrading of UNEP to a world organisation for sustainable development with continuing existence of UNDP; and the upgrading of UNEP to a



world environment organisation.

### A World Organisation (or Programme) on Sustainable Development as a Merger of UNDP and UNEP?

Some participants in the debate have come to the fore with the proposal of creating a 'world organisation on sustainable development', instead of a 'world environment organisation'. Given the status of its proponents, this proposal warrants careful deliberation. Theoretically, this proposal could imply that the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme would be merged—an idea that had found the support of the current UNEP Executive Director, Klaus Töpfer, in the run-up to the Johannesburg summit and hence deserves special attention (Töpfer, 2001). In principle, two organisational options are available:

- An integrated United Nations Programme on Sustainable Development based on the merger of UNEP and UNDP, which could legally be established by the United Nations General Assembly;
- A new international organisation, for example a World Organisation on Sustainable Development, which would require, on the one hand, a constitutive act of a group of states and, on the other hand, a decision by the United Nations General Assembly to transfer and merge both programmes into this new organisation. Institutional models *cum grano salis* could be the creation of the UN Organisation for Industrial Development or the creation of World Intellectual Property Organisation.

We view both options as problematic. A merger of UNEP and UNDP would be a marriage of unequals that is likely to harm, in the long run, environmental interests without necessarily strengthening development goals. First, UNDP and UNEP are unequal regarding their sheer size and resources. Taking into account the twelve-fold core budget of UNDP vis-à-vis the UNEP Environment Fund as well as a ratio of roughly four to one in professional staff, a merger of both programmes would come close to the dissolution of UNEP within the significantly larger UNDP. Theoretically, this could either lead to a strengthening of environmental goals within the development community or result in the slow degrading and watering down of environmental goals in a larger new, development-oriented agency. Key factors will be organisational culture and learning processes as well as leadership, both of which are important factors that help to explain organisational behaviour of international agencies (Leiteritz and Waever 2002; Siebenhüner 2003; Bauer, 2004). Both UNEP and UNDP are marked by distinct organisational cultures that are tuned to the goals of the respective programmes. Given differences in size and resources, it is difficult to believe that the much smaller 'environmental' community will eventually prevail in changing the much larger 'development' community within an overall new organisation. In addition, the leadership of such a new overall organisation will necessarily be dominated by representatives of the larger development community, with the representatives of environmental objectives be refined to a structural

minority. It seems certain that the strength and independence of environmental concerns will be weakened over time. Moreover, this would reflect the current trend in the international political economy where the environment has lost much of the prominence it enjoyed in the early 1990s with trade and security taking precedence instead.

Second, UNEP and UNDP are unequals regarding their functions within their respective governance areas. UNEP has an important role in norm-setting and knowledge-management, for example with a view to the initiation of new treaties, the organisation of international diplomatic conferences, the training of national administrative and legal personnel, or the initiation, synthesis and dissemination of new knowledge, regarding both fundamental and applied environmental science. UNDP's core functions, on the other hand, are operational. It is mandated to generate and implement projects, with less regard to international standard-setting or knowledge-generation. This differentiation is historically grown, with UNEP having been created as the catalyst of environmental awareness and activities within the existing group of implementing agencies, including UNDP. A merger of UNDP and UNEP hence runs the risk that the different functions of UNEP will lose their influence within such a larger new agency.

Third, functional differentiation in governance systems between socio-economic development and environmental protection makes sense. This is supported by the fact that hardly any country has opted for the administrative merger of 'economic development' and 'environmental protection' as policy areas at the national level, whereas national environmental legislation has become increasingly important on a global scale (e.g. Jänicke, 1998). Despite two decades of debate on sustainable development, we observe only very few examples of integrated 'ministries on sustainable development', with most countries maintaining the more traditional differentiation between economic or development ministries, and environmental ministries. It is not clear why administrative functional differentiation should differ at the international level.

Fourth, location matters. The integration of UNEP and UNDP would most likely imply the transferral at least of all senior UNEP staff to UNDP headquarters in New York, which is likely to be chosen as seat of an integrated organisation. This would result in the abolishment of the only major United Nations agency in the South. However, while the pros and cons of the Nairobi location have been under debate for long, it does seem neither politically nor practically feasible for the UN to withdraw from Nairobi or to move major entities to Nairobi, in particular if the latter would imply relocating offices that have enjoyed a long-standing connection with the United Nations' New York headquarters.

Not least, any reform proposal that envisages the dissolution of existing bureaucratic entities is certain to trigger significant political resistance. While this should not serve as an argument against reform *per se*, it appears worthwhile to note the precedent of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) when pondering about a merger of UNEP and UNDP. In the context of the Task Force on

Environment and Human Settlements, is has been proposed to integrate the small UNCHS into a strengthened UNEP. This proposal met, however, with stiff resistance from developing countries and UNCHS staff, and it was quickly dropped as a 'non-flyer' (Bauer, 2001). In the end, UNCHS was strengthened rather than dissolved. Following six years of de facto administration through UNEP, Secretary-General Annan eventually appointed Anna Tibaijuka of Tanzania as new Executive Director to UNCHS in 2000. In January 2002, the agency was upgraded to a United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT).

In sum, we believe that the balance of evidence advises against the merger of UNEP and UNDP into one integrated programme or organisation, at least not from the environmental perspective. A world organisation on sustainable development that would require the integration of UNDP and UNEP, would be likely to downgrade environmental concerns to the benefit of unfettered economic development. This also affects the interests of the very poor population segments in the South who live from the extraction of natural resources or in overly polluted areas.

#### A World Organisation on Sustainable Development based on UNEP?

If, on the other hand, a world organisation on sustainable development would imply merely the upgrading of UNEP to an international organisation with this name, while leaving other bodies-including UNDP or the World Bank-untouched, it is questionable what consequences the choice of the organisation's name-'sustainable development' instead of 'environment'-would entail. Opponents might rightfully complain that this would reduce the overarching concept of 'sustainable development' again to what many Southern experts believe it to be in the Northern understanding: a new attractive yet deluding label for environmental protection (e.g. Agarwal et al. 1999). To the extent that sustainable development is understood as established triad of socially, economically and ecologically sound development, one must object to a conceptualisation of a world organisation on sustainable development that encompasses predominantly traditional environmental functions.

In sum, a world organisation on sustainable development would be either ill-advised if it implies the integration of UNEP and UNDP, or a misuse of a key concept of North-South relations if it merely implies giving a new name to an essentially environmental organisation.

#### A World Environment Organisation in the Context of Sustainable Development?

Most proposals that call for an upgraded UNEP or alternatively a new world environment organisation, do not suggest an integration of UNDP or other non-environmental agencies. Of course, this would not automatically amount to solving the problem of unsatisfactory co-operation between the more environmentally inclined components of the United Nations and its development agencies. However, trespassing on the mandate of development agencies would be counter-productive,

and substantive improvements could be expected from forging from scratch institutional links between a new major environmental agency and the organisations affiliated to the United Nations Development Group.

The case for such a new world environment organisation has found increasing support in the literature as well as among decision-makers (see Bauer and Biermann, 2005). Notably, the most recent debate has helped to refine arguments to the extent that some middle ground between proponents and opponents of a new agency appears discernible. Some outspoken critics of a world environment organisation, such as Adil Najam, meanwhile support the upgrading of UNEP to a specialised UN agency (Najam, 2005). Any more far-reaching proposals, such as a merger of UNDP and UNEP, as well as a well-sounding but factually little supportive title such as a 'world organisation on sustainable development', would rather harm than help the current consensus-seeking debate. This holds in particular as the degree of scepticism amongst developing countries remains high, no matter what institutional design is being put on the table (see Gupta, 2005, in more detail).

On the other hand, a world environment organisation would also need to take development aspects into account.

First, it will be crucial to define within the mandate of a world environment organisation whether this will cover all environmental problems or just a sub-set, the so-called 'global environmental problems' (Biermann, 2002). Some writers, most explicitly Daniel C. Esty and Maria Ivanova (2001), have argued in favour of a 'Global Environmental Organisation' (GEO) that would exclusively deal with what they conceive of as 'global environmental problems'. They contend that local problems—such as local air pollution, soil degradation or water poisoning—must not be part of a GEO. This GEO concept is technically problematic, potentially unfair, and difficult to implement (see Biermann, 2002, in more detail). First, the terms 'global environmental problems' or 'global commons' are hard to define in a legal-political context. Forests, for example, have been mentioned as a global common owing to their environmental functions in the earth system, but most developing countries would object to notions of limited sovereignty in this field. Unsurprisingly, the adjective 'global' has not been used to denote an international agency, with the exception of the Global Environment Facility, which excludes local problems and has hence attracted criticism from developing countries.

An additional problem is that UNEP addresses all forms of environmental problems, from the local to the global levels. Either the creation of a GEO, based on UNEP, would thus entail the restriction of the universal mandate of a GEO-ex-UNEP, or it would require the establishment of some parallel international entity for local environmental issues. A number of successful local and regional UNEP programmes, such as the UNEP Regional Seas Programme, would entirely fall out of the purview of such a GEO. It seems not unlikely that this development would create a two-tier, if not 'two-class' international organisational structure: first, a strong 'Global Environment Organisation with world-wide reach, significant financial resources and the support of industrialised countries, which deals with issues of immediate concern

for the North, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity or ozone depletion; and second, a weak, if not non-existent, international mechanism for the local environmental problems of developing countries, ranging from water pollution to indoor air pollution (Biermann, 2002).

This seems hardly acceptable for developing countries, and it will in the end do little for the environment. The prevalent Southern distrust in this debate is mirrored in a UNEP report on 'convention clustering' which placed the conventions on climate and ozone depletion-presumably prime candidates for a 'global common issue'-not in a cluster of atmospheric issues (which is absent), but in a cluster of 'sustainable development conventions', indicating the special status which developing countries bestow on the socio-economic implications of the climate issue (UNEP, 2001a, para. 25). Thus, it remains essential to take into account the fundamentally different concepts that are implied by the distinction between the 'world environment' and the 'global commons'.

Second, reconciling environment and development within a world environment organisation would require addressing another concern of developing countries: that a new international agency could have a mandate to impose sanctions upon members, either directly or through linkages with the trade regime. Indeed, some commentators in the North support the idea of a world environment organisation explicitly with reference to the WTO experience, in particular to its non-compliance regime. World trade regulations allow WTO members to bring alleged infringements of multilateral trade agreements to a dispute settlement system, which builds on tribunals of government-appointed trade experts whose decisions are de facto binding. For a world environment organisation, however, such a procedure seems problematic. For one, there are technical difficulties: WTO members must be parties to all multilateral trade agreements, which may not be the case regarding the membership of a world environment organisation. Even though ratification of a list of multilateral environmental agreements could be made compulsory for new members of a world environment organisation, this would create obstacles for a nation to join the organisation, and might hinder institutional reform in the first place. In addition, trade policies and environmental policies differ when it comes to dispute settlement and non-compliance mechanisms, because unlike environmental problems, trade conflicts address concrete, transparent and universally measurable trade acts of governments that directly address specific relationships with other treaty parties, such as custom duties, import and export regulations or technical standards for domestic goods and production plants (Biermann, 2002, in more detail).

Third, reconciling environment and development concerns in a powerful world environment organisation will require that decision-making procedures do grant both North and South sufficient control over the outcome of negotiations and the organisation's future evolution. Thus, a strong organisation seems feasible only with a double-weighted majority system comparable to that of the Montreal Protocol as amended in 1990 (Biermann, 2000). Here, decisions require the assent of two thirds of members that must include the simple majority of both developing and

developed countries. This system of North-South parity in decision-making represents a 'third path' between the one-country, one-vote formula of the UN General Assembly, which grants developing countries an in-built majority, and the one-dollar, one-vote system of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which favours the interests of major industrialised countries. Decision-making procedures based on North-South parity-that is, veto rights for both South and North as a group-could ensure that the world environment organisation would not evolve into a mechanism to curtail the development prospects of Southern countries, for example by enforcing expensive Northern environmental standards upon poorer developing countries that have other priorities and more pressing needs given their scarce resources (Biermann, 2002).

Finally, a world environment organisation must not detract from the compromises reached at the 1992 Earth Summit. In particular, the constitutive treaty of a world environment organisation will have to encompass more than purely environmental rules but must address above all the development concerns of the South. Thus, principles such as the right to development, the sovereign right over natural resources within a country's jurisdiction, or the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities need to be integrated into the constitutive act of the organisation.

### **UNDP and a strengthened UNEP: Opportunities for Co-operation**

A world environment organisation should neither integrate UNDP nor be substituted in the form of a 'world organisation on sustainable development' as a merger of UNDP and UNEP. However, political efforts are needed to guarantee the coherence and co-operation between UNDP, on the one hand, and UNEP or a potential future world environment organisation on the other hand. The main problem lies in the lack of co-ordination of essentially environmental policy bureaucracies, including the plethora of environmental treaty secretariats. In addition, however, further co-operation and co-ordination between environmental and developmental entities of the overall United Nations bureaucracy is clearly needed.

Such co-operation could be improved, first, at the leadership level, including through the strengthening of the Environmental Management Group that has recently been set up to better co-ordinate the environment related activities of the United Nations implementing agencies and the policy objectives under the wider sustainable development agenda, but has so far amounted to little more than yet another talking shop.

Second, co-operation could be improved at the inter-administrative level, that is, between officers from environment and development agencies who would be enticed through management reforms within their agencies to better work together. For example, environmental programmes could be explicitly related to Poverty

Reduction Strategy Processes (as a kind of integrated 'development assessment') and findings from the already existing environmental assessments of development projects could be brought to bear more strictly. Moreover, improved inter-agency communication should at least help to avoid the fuelling of inevitable 'turf battles' between co-operating organisations, subsequently reducing their adverse impact on effective policy implementation.

A Memorandum of Understanding to address mutual benefits sought from improved inter-administrative co-ordination is being negotiated between UNEP and UNDP for some time now at senior management level. It is expected to raise the question of field offices, one of the key characteristics and assets of UNDP. The question that naturally arises is whether UNEP might benefit from closer institutional co-operation at the country level by utilising the world-wide infrastructure provided and maintained by UNDP. As of now, UNEP merely supports some regional offices that are not comparable to the extensive network of field offices of the development agencies. UNEP has formally no local mandate and has not been devised as an implementing agency with own operational programmes. The question hence is whether a strengthened UNEP or a world environment organisation should be given an operational mandate that could include a network of field offices, either independently or in liaison with the UNDP network.

This question needs to be assessed in light of criteria of both effectiveness and efficiency. Regarding effectiveness, it seems that major new and more extensive environmental programmes in the South would at some point require specialised expertise on the ground. Theoretically, this could be better housed in an agency that specialises in environmental protection, not economic development, which would advise to allow UNEP or a future world environment organisation to build up the capacity for operational activities.

This is not undisputed, however, especially not from the side of UNDP. Gustave Speth, for example, the former UNDP Administrator, while supporting the creation of a world environment organization, emphasised back in 1998 that this new organisation should by no means assume operational functions in the field, which should remain with the existing bodies, including UNDP. Some UNEP officers, on their part, are yet well prepared to also assume an operational mandate.

On the other hand, the creation of a new extensive network of specialised field offices of a 'world environment organisation' in developing countries does not seem to be the most efficient solution to approach this problem. Rather, UNEP (or a future world environment organisation) could be allowed to establish independent operational programmes (a route that UNEP in fact appears to be incrementally embarking on), for example on energy saving, the management of riverine systems or on the prevention of air pollution, yet with integrating these programmes, including their specialised mission officers, into the existing field office system of UNDP. In particular, this could be an option to give UNEP a stronger role with regard to on-the-ground implementation of projects arising out of its GEF portfolio. Activities under

this portfolio require close co-operation with UNDP and the World Bank anyway.

Last but not least, the question of co-ordination and co-operation between UNDP and UNEP raises the issue of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. The commission's record is quite disputed, and many actors in the North would advise abolishing it. This would not, however, seem to be warranted, and even less so after the Johannesburg Summit. Political science has shown that bodies that do not lead to enforceable decisions and legally binding agreements can be important arenas for the development of new ideas, the 'testing' of existing proposals, and the discursive preparation of a consensus that then leads to binding decisions in other arenas, such as diplomatic conferences that adopt new treaties. The relevance of the CSD lies especially in the border area between environmental protection and poverty reduction. Here, the CSD is the only body that continuously offers an arena in which diplomats and ministers can debate, together or in parallel with civil society representatives, the integration of economic development and environmental protection at the global level. The CSD might not be perfect, and the lack of attention on the side of financial and economic policy-makers is a major problem for those who want to make it more effective. Yet without the CSD, co-ordination and co-operation between the environmentalist and the development communities would be even less. Furthermore, major criticism regarding the relevance of CSD has been deluded by adjusting the mandate of the commission to monitor the implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals. To what extent this will make a difference remains to be seen. In order to enhance at least the 'discursive power' that is theoretically vested in the commission, the Commission's chairpersonship could be delegated to an authoritative eminent person that enjoys confidence and respect in the environmentalist and the development camp alike. The position could be modelled for example along the lines of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Ideally, it would, in addition to the original tasks of CSD, be positioned in a way that allows it to improve UN system-wide co-ordination and coherence by mediating at the senior management level conflicting interests between UNEP and UNDP as well as other agencies operating in the sustainable development arena. Such a proposal, while insufficient to cure the co-ordination dilemma at large, appears feasible regardless of more ambitious reform proposals and could plausibly be expected to make a contribution in guiding both governments and international agencies for the sake of a more coherent implementation of both Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

## **Conclusion**

Our qualitative empirical assessment of inter-agency co-operation between UNDP and UNEP indicates that policy integration for sustainable development between United Nations agencies is rather difficult. While the opposite may seem the case when screening the statements and publications of either organisation, the flaws



become apparent where it matters: on the ground implementation of policies and projects by the respective bureaucracies. Such administrative pathologies - to paraphrase a term coined by Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore (1999) - can be traced back to dysfunctional organisational structures in the overall UN system.

As it is, UNEP and UNDP do not operate at eye-level. While both programmes are *formally* equals within the United Nations organisational set-up, *politically* the bureaucratic power of UNDP outweighs that of UNEP by far. The Commission on Sustainable Development, originally conceived of to integrate developmental and environmental activities of the United Nations, failed to live up to its mandate. It did not rectify the structural imbalance between the United Nations' environment and development institutions. This, however, would be a crucial pre-condition if an actual policy integration of United Nations operations shall materialise on the ground.

We thus believe that effective policy integration in the pursuit of meaningful sustainable development, i.e. development activities that put environmental protection and economic growth on a par, requires a substantially strengthened United Nations Environment Programme. Only a UNEP that is politically and materially strengthened will be able to insist on and see through a reasonable 'greening' of the United Nations system. As of now, policy integration for sustainable development is left unsatisfactory.

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