

The study of International Environmental Organizations (IEOs): The case of UNEP and co-ordination of multilateral environmental agreements

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1. Introduction: How to study international environmental organizations (IEOs)

In this paper we will discuss the extent to which United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) has been successful in achieving one of its main functions, the co-ordination of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). This will be done in relation to the biodiversity cluster of MEAs. Before specifying further our approach and goals with the paper, first some general observations as to how the study of IEOs fits into the broader study of global environmental governance.

Over the last 10-15 years there has been a strong research focus on international environmental *regimes*. A large number of international research projects have worked on assessing and explaining their *effectiveness*.¹ More recently attention has also been geared towards the *interplay* between regimes and how this affects the overall working of the global environmental governance system.² Since the millennium there has also been an increased interest in the study of *organizations* in global environmental politics – the main focus of this paper.³

There have been important academic and policy discussions related to the role of international organizations in global environmental governance. One discussion has dealt with the value of establishing a Global Environmental Organization (GEO) in order to streamline and simplify the increasingly complex web of international environmental institutions. The model has been the World Trade Organization (WTO), *the* dominant international organization regulating international trade. This idea had some political momentum before the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, but the political ‘heavy-weights’ never caught on to the idea and at present it does not seem to be a politically feasible alternative. Still, the academic discussions have continued, with some strong supporters for the idea, while others have fiercely opposed it.⁴ In this paper we shall not discuss the pro’s and con’s of a WEO, a comprehensive overview of the various positions have been presented elsewhere.⁵

However, we find it worthwhile to dwell somewhat on an important underlying point in the discussion of a WHO in order to clarify our own views and positions on the role of international organizations in global environmental governance: *To what extent can*

¹ Some of the most important projects are: Victor et al, 1998, Young et al, 1999, Miles et al, 2002.

² The most comprehensive effort so far is probably Oberthur and Gehring (eds.), forthcoming 2006.

³ The most systematic effort here has been the Global Governance Project under the leadership of F Biermann.

⁴ Strong proponents include Biermann, 2002 etc as well as while strong objectors include Najam etc, Oberthur and Gehring. Etc..

⁵ See Mee, 2005 (forthcoming).

*environmental problems be reduced through design of the relevant organization at hand?*⁶ Within the realist school of thought, the answer is simply that design does not make much of a difference as regimes are no more than epi-phenomena, a mere reflection of the will of the most powerful members of the organization.⁷ They emphasize that it is the *political will* of the members of the organization that decides its effectiveness. However, few realists are preoccupied with ‘soft’ post modernist issues like the environment.⁸ It follows from their perception of the world system that they zoom in on what they think is more important – security and narrow national interest. Therefore, students preoccupied with international regimes and – organizations tend to belong either to the neo-institutionalist school of thought – or the even ‘softer’ approach, the social constructivist.⁹ The former is particularly preoccupied with the significance and role of institutions, while the latter is *also* preoccupied with the significance of norms, knowledge and learning. This leads to what seems to be a trivial – but we believe often neglected – observation: *Most – if not all – students of international environmental institutions (regimes and organizations) believe that they play a (significant) role in deciding the degree of effectiveness in dealing with the relevant problems.* In turn, this *may* imply a systematic overplay of their importance. That is, if your belief is that ‘organization matters’, you will tend to seek your belief confirmed, and not be as open towards other conclusions as maybe you should – according to text books in methodology. Therefore, ideally we would like that also realists had taken more of an interest in these ‘soft’ issue areas, in order to get more of a sharp discussion of the fruitfulness and variations of the different approaches.

This being said, there are still considerable variations between different scholars as to the significance they attribute to ‘*institutional design*’.¹⁰ Some analysts, not necessarily belonging to the realist school of thought, emphasize the significance of power - underlining the *limitations* of the institutions.¹¹ In a similar vein, some observers maintain that too much emphasis is vested into the question of (organizational) design – and too little emphasis is paid to the lacking will and ability of the major actors (Northern states as well as key economic players) to do something about the problems. The gist of the argument is that you cannot change the root causes of the problem by clever institutional design.¹² Others are more optimistic, they do not necessarily downplay the ‘political realities’, but they have a stronger

⁶ There have been long – and more or less fruitful – academic discussions on the relation between international institutions, - regimes and – organizations (refs). In this paper we deal primarily with the role played by international organizations, material entities, probably the most straightforward of the three concepts.

⁷ We are aware that this is a simplification, but the point here is to provide some broad benchmarks between the various approaches.

⁸ See Mitchell, xx and Andresen and Gulbrandsen, 2005 (ISA paper).

⁹ For an interesting discussion of the position of various schools of thought in relation to international organizations, see Bauer, 2005 (forthcoming).

¹⁰ We use ‘institutional design’ in relation to organizations and regimes as well, as this is a frequently used concept.

¹¹ See for instance Miles et al, 2002 – various approaches.

¹² For an interesting account of this perspective, see Najam, 2003.

belief that ‘good organization’ – for example a WEO – may make a positive difference in terms of effectiveness.¹³

As to our taking of this ongoing debate, we have some sympathy for both perspectives. On the one hand, we find it important to emphasize the significance of power and the dominant position of strong state actors for the effectiveness of global environmental governance. We believe that this by far has the most explanatory power in explaining success or failure of global environmental governance.¹⁴ To give a simple illustration, when the US does not want ‘to play ball’ in the climate regime, the chances of an effective international climate policy is strongly reduced.¹⁵ Correspondingly, when the US (as well as main parts of industry) stood forth as pushers and leaders in the making of the ozone regime, this no doubt explain a significant part of the high effectiveness of this regime.¹⁶ We believe this is important to keep in mind as a bench mark; *overall the design of international organizations cannot be expected to make much of a difference for the effectiveness of international environmental policies*. In fact, we will argue that less of a difference can be expected from design of international organizations as compared to the design of international regimes. The argument is simple. The regime is broader, composed of all the members of the regime while the relevant organization is typically a rather small Secretariat with bureaucrats working as the ‘servants’ of the relevant Conference of the Parties (COP). This is not to say that such organizations are without influence, not the least thorough the exercise of *authority* and as facilitator for the Parties to the relevant agreement.¹⁷

Arguably UNEP is something different from a MEA Secretariat, in a sense both something ‘more’, something ‘less’ and something ‘different’. It is certainly ‘more’ in the sense that it has a much broader and ambitious mandate as compared to the smaller and more issue specific Secretariats. It is also ‘more’ in the sense that it – so far - is larger than all MEA Secretariats in terms of manpower and economic resources. However, while some of the Secretariats are growing very fast, like the UNFCCC Secretariat in Bonn as well as the CBD Secretariat in Montreal, the economic situation of UNEP has been extremely strained for most of its existence – *considering its broad mandate*. If this is controlled for, it seems likely that some of the larger MEA Secretariats are better equipped to perform their *narrow* mandate that UNEP is to perform its *broad* mandate. UNEP is different from the MEAs Secretariats in the sense that UNEP has a Governing Council, deciding the broad frames of its work and mandate – and at the same time, one of its key functions is to serve as well as to coordinate a number of MEAs. Be this as it may, there is no doubt that organisational core of

¹³ Biermann and Bauer, xx

¹⁴ This observation is based not the least on the most comprehensive study of environmental regime effectiveness that we are aware of so far, Miles et al 2002.

¹⁵ Bang, Tjernshaugen and Andresen, 2005.

¹⁶ We are of course aware of the fact that other factors mattered as well, not the least the role of science, see for example, Parson, 2003.

¹⁷ For discussions on the role of Secretariats more generally as well their role in specific regimes, see Bauer, 2005 (forthcoming) and Andresen and Skjærseth, 1999.

UNEP is an IEO, and here we focus on the authority and ability of the *bureaucracy, or the staff of UNEP*, and study how they are able to fulfil their co-ordinating functions.

Although we want to downplay, or be ‘realistic’, in terms of what can be expected from institutional design of international environmental organizations, we find it somewhat defensive to disregard the opportunities offered by clever institutional design. As researchers we cannot - and should not – attempt to influence the world political system. As individuals we may regret the lacking environmental enthusiasm on part of many key actors, but it is the role of policy makers and civil society to exert pressure on these actors to do more. That is not our job as researchers and analysts. This is a different matter when it comes to institutional design. In dialogue with policy makers and practitioners we may suggest improvements that may make *some* positive difference for the problem solving ability of the relevant regime and organization in question. In short, we cannot do much but provide a skilful and sober analysis of the most important factors explaining effectiveness, but we may be more ‘activist’ players in terms of making suggestions in terms of institutional design, however modest their effect – it is more than nothing...

We have used the concept of *effectiveness* numerous times, but not yet defined it. Over the last decade or so, it has been commonplace to define effectiveness in relation to international *regimes* in terms of *output, outcome* and *impact*. Output refers to rules, programs and regulations emanating from the regime while outcome refers to behavioural change – in the ‘right’ direction – by key target group – as a result of the regime. Finally, impact refers to the environmental improvements in the relevant issue area following from the regime in question. In our opinion output does not really say anything about ‘real’ effectiveness, only about the *potential* for effectiveness. That is, the more ‘stringent’ and specific the rule, the higher the potential for effective policies, provided it is properly implemented by all parties. At the other end of the spectrum, all analysts agree that what we *really* want to know is the environmental impact of the regime, its *environmental effects* – as opposed to its *institutional effect*.¹⁸ However, due to the problems of causality and the high number of intervening variables and uncertainties and variations when it comes to the natural environment most analysts agree that for methodological reasons, this indicator is very difficult, if not impossible to apply. Therefore, most (political science) analysts end up with paying most attention to the outcome produced by the regime, also methodologically challenging, but doable.¹⁹

Can the indicators of effectiveness from regime analysis be transferred to the analysis of international organizations? It has been suggested that these three indicators can be used for the study of IEOs.²⁰ As a point of departure, this may be a sensible strategy. However, some modifications may be needed. First, the impact indicator is even more problematic to apply in the study of organizations than it is regarding regimes. It follows from the above

¹⁸ Kutting, 2000.

¹⁹ For comprehensive in depth studies along this dimension, see Skjærseth, 2000 and Rosendal, 2000.

²⁰ Birmann and xx However, they do not seem to mention that these indicators have been used a long time in regime analysis.

reasoning that less can be expected in terms of direct and tangible results following from an organization as compared to that of a regime. In a sense the organization is further removed from the problem at hand compared to the regime and the parties to the regime. Providing clever advice, facilitation, knowledge production as well as mediation may certainly be important, but the chain of event from the deeds and actions of the IEO to the actual problem at hand is incredibly long and complex – and therefore exceedingly difficult to measure. For example, UNEP may give (wise) advice and provide input on how to deal with ocean pollution, but to trace this advice to actual behavioural change on the ground is a tall order indeed! Therefore, outcome as an indicator of effectiveness is difficult to apply in terms of IEOs. Consequently, we believe that output, in reality *potential effectiveness* is the most relevant indicator in terms of evaluating IEOs. It has also been suggested that an even ‘softer’ indicator, *learning*, may be appropriate when it comes to these types of actors – considering their roles and mandate.²¹ In the earlier days of regime analysis, *goal achievement* was also used as a yard stick against which performance could be measured.²² This yardstick has later on been more or less discarded, not the least because goals are often so vague that they are exceedingly difficult to measure performance against. Consider for example the goal of the World Health Organization: “Health for all” – not very useful as a measuring rod. Another reason is that goals may be contradictory, for example the goal of the International Whaling Convention is both to conserve whales, as well as to consider the interests of the whaling industry.

Nevertheless, in this paper we have chosen to use goal achievement as a measuring rod in our evaluation of the performance of UNEP in terms of coordinating the biodiversity cluster. The reason is that the goal is quite specific and it is feasible to measure performance in relation to this goal. Translating this indicator to the indicators outlined above, as a point of departure, it comes closest to the output indicator, telling us something about UNEP’s ability improve the output and thereby enhance the *problem solving ability* of the regimes in this cluster. Thus, we take as point of departure that that ‘coordination is good’ – as this is one of the ‘raison d’aitre’ for UNEP. This does *not* necessarily mean that we think coordination is good or necessary, as this is a rather complex and controversial question that we will not go into here.²³ In stead we rely heavily on *interviews* to discover the *perceptions* of key actors; both within UNEP itself, in Nairobi as well as in Geneva, and also with the relevant MEAs Secretariats. Do these actors believe that UNEP has been successful in terms of coordination, if not what are the main bottle necks – or maybe the MEAs do not want coordination by UNEP?

This leads us to the final point under this section, how do we *explain* performance? Systematic and skilful analytical devices have been used in order to shed light on this

²¹ For an elaboration, see Andresen, 2002.

²² Wettestad and Andresen, 1991 and Skjærseth, 1992.

²³ Most analysts think that some co-ordination is good, others argue there is no need for co-ordination, and also that it would be exceedingly difficult, see Victor, 1999.

question both in relation to regimes as well as to IEOs.²⁴ In this paper we have been less ambitious, drawing upon a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. Inductively, we have relied on the many interviews conducted; what explanatory factors have they defined to explain the performance of UNEP along this dimension? Deductively, we have relied on some of the insight drawn from the research project *Environmental Regime Effectiveness*, more specifically the notion of *problem solving capacity*, one of independent variables explaining regime effectiveness.²⁵ Based on this we end up with two main explanatory variables, one deals with the *role and position of UNEP in the UN system*. That is, how ‘strong’ is UNEP compared to other relevant UN bodies. The simple assumption being, *the stronger UNEP is in this regard, the higher its potential to coordinate*. We also include financial resources and geographical location in this dimension. The more ‘centrally located’ and the stronger financially, the easier co-ordination will be. The second more internal dimension deals with *UNEP as organization*; organisational set-up and bureaucratic culture. Here we want to investigate whether UNEP along these rather lofty dimensions is well suited for co-ordination. That will also depend on the ‘cultural fit’ fit between UNEP and the relevant MEAs. With this caveat and with no further references to formal mandates in terms of UNEP co-ordination, let us turn to the evaluation.

2. Assessing the effectiveness of UNEP

2.1. Perceived need for co-ordination among the MEAs

The idea of identifying clusters within the larger issue areas is in itself problematic. This is no less true for the issues involving biodiversity. No matter which way the lines are drawn, it will inevitably involve fencing something in and something else out and the drawing of borders between regimes is inherently a political activity (Hansenclever et al. 1996).²⁶ This is also true for the identification of the *biodiversity conservation cluster*. However, there is general agreement that the main MEAs included are the CBD, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the World Heritage Convention (WHC), and the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and flora (CITES).²⁷

This section proceeds to discuss the relationship between UNEP and relevant MEA secretariats. Here, the aim is to examine the demand side as seen from the MEA secretariats’ point of view. First we address briefly the question of whether the MEAs perceive a need for co-ordination among themselves. This tells us something about their view on the need for co-ordination in general. Second, we look more specifically into what the MEAs expect from UNEP in this regard and how UNEP responds to this.

²⁴ See for example Miles et al, 2002 and Biermann and Bauer, 2005

²⁵ For an elaboration, see Miles et al. 2002.

²⁶ See e.g. Rosendal 2001a and b on different clusters involving the CBD.

²⁷ <http://www.biodiv.org/convention/partners-websites.asp>

Let us first take a quick look at the roles and positions of MEA in the biodiversity conservation cluster. The majority of these was established in the 1970s and is therefore now very much in the phase of implementation. Ramsar (of 1972) is dedicated to stopping the loss and deterioration of a particularly vulnerable type of habitat – wetlands. The WHC (1972) concerns both natural and cultural habitats; those deemed to be of particular significance to humanity. The CMS (1979) aims to conserve terrestrial, marine, and avian migratory species throughout their range.²⁸ The purpose of CITES (1973) is to ensure that listed species of wild fauna and flora do not become or remain subject to unsustainable exploitation because of international trade. Finally, the CBD (1992) is the youngest as well as the most encompassing convention and its mandate comprises all species and ecosystems worldwide. UNEP has formal responsibility for or affiliations with the CBD Secretariat, as well as CITES, the Regional Seas Conventions, and the CMS. In contrast, UNESCO administers the World Heritage Convention while Ramsar is fairly independent, with the IUCN providing its secretariat.

A number of formal co-ordination activities are taking place within the biodiversity conservation cluster. There is a Joint Web Site between CBD, CITES, CMS, WHC and Ramsar. Several MoUs have been developed between the CBD and the other conventions: For instance, Ramsar signed a Memorandum of Co-operation with the CBD in 1996 and they have since signed three Joint Work Plans together. There are also Memoranda of Understanding with the CMS (1997), with UNESCO's WHC (1999), and with UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MaB) Programme (2002). The CBD COPVII in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2004, established the Biodiversity Liaison Group, including the CBD, CITES, Ramsar, CMS and WHC – and excluding UNEP.

UNEP is also increasing the offers of co-ordination activities. In response to calls for co-ordination, UNEP established a Division for Environmental Conventions (DEC) in 1999. DEC co-ordinates the MEA, tracks inconsistencies in MEA COP decisions, and seeks to streamline national reporting on biodiversity-related MEAs. UNEP has been convening co-ordination meetings for MEA secretariats since 1994. Since 1998, it is the United Nations Office in Nairobi (UNON) that offers administrative services to the MEA secretariats, including personnel and accounting services.

On paper this of course looks fine, but MoUs and joint web sites do not say much about the extent to which there is *real* coordination. With its comprehensive framework, the CBD could be a natural focal point for the other institutions within the biodiversity conservation cluster. The CBD differs from most of the other institutions within the conservation cluster in its strong foci on sustainable use and equitable sharing. UNEP staff agree that it might have been more logical to see the other MEAs as protocols under this CBD umbrella – but they realise that will never happen.²⁹ On the same note, the CBD is itself clear about not aspiring to become an overall framework convention for the biodiversity

²⁸ We have not looked much at the roles of CMS and WHC.

²⁹ Interview with NN, UNEP Information Unit for Conventions (UNEP/IUC), Geneva, 25 September 2003.

conservation conventions.³⁰ In addition, the CBD faces opposition both from other Conventions and from key countries. Part of the blame for the distrust is put on the CBD Secretariat itself: CITES complains that they would like to see the CBD as a partner, but fails to achieve this due to arrogance on the part of the CBD Secretariat.³¹ Part of the distrust may also stem from CITES projects not getting into the GEF portfolio along with CBD projects.³²

Another important aspect that affects the scope for co-ordination is the relationship between the MEAs and their COPs. It must be noted that each MEA maintains its own jurisdiction, each of the COPs constitute the highest authority for the convention, and the decisions on joint efforts with other MEAs rest with the COPs (Carstensen 2004). “We are servants – not in the engine room.”³³ The statement has a wide application as MEA Secretariats regardless of cluster look to their respective COPs for guidance on what to do. The most important action goes on at the national level. But COP decisions tend to put the secretariats in crossfire with a *double bind* message emanating from the very same member states. On one side there are the specific demands of the member states for ever more detailed reports and on the other hand there is the pressure for more harmonisation of reporting systems.

Given the double bind message from the COPs and the interlinked diversity of tasks, the MEAs do recognise the need for co-ordination. But do the MEAs want UNEP to provide these services? Part of the answer is that the MEAs seem to look more towards their COPs for guidance, rather than to UNEP. A second rough conclusion is that to the extent that MEAs recognise a need for co-ordination, or any other kind of assistance, from UNEP, expectations as to what UNEP can deliver is not very high.

First, UNEP’s relation to the MEAs involves two main aspects; administration and substance. The administrative tasks are performed by UNON and this is where the heaviest criticism has occurred. The most annoying aspect of this culture is the red-tape in administrative functions, and respondents agree that a major problem rests with the UN Office in Nairobi (UNON). In effect, many would like the Divisions and the MEA themselves to take on more administrative tasks, rather than leaving it to UNON – and in the case of the CBD Secretariat this has been done. The substance has to do with UNEP co-ordinating the MEA Secretariats. Here we have seen that the scope for UNEP’s role is largely influenced by the respective COPs; the MEAs are in general not ready for interference by UNEP. Still, the picture is not all bleak; MEA secretariats do realise the benefits they achieve from, and their ties to, the UN system. There is added recognition stemming from the UN seal and some MEA staff sees themselves as UN international civil servants.³⁴

³⁰ Interview with NN, CBD Secretariat, Montreal, 16 March 2004.

³¹ Interview with NN2, CITES Secretariat, Geneva, 24 September 2003.

³² Interview with NN2, CITES Secretariat, Geneva, 24 September 2003.

³³ Interview with NN, Ramsar, 6 September 2004.

³⁴ Interview with NN2, CITES Secretariat, Geneva, 24 September 2003.

Secondly, to the extent that MEA recognise a real need for co-ordination from UNEP, at least some of them do not expect UNEP to be able to deliver. It is explained that UNEP organises workshops and meetings, but little substantial comes out of it. For instance, UNEP failed to consult CITES during the development of National Biodiversity Strategies. Echoing these views, the CBD would also like to see a more service-oriented UNEP.³⁵ On a similar note, Ramsar maintains that UNEP could ideally be very effective in co-ordinating activities on specific issue areas – but fails to play this role. However, the smaller secretariats, such as Ramsar, are in more need of various kinds of assistance from UNEP. Ramsar stresses the need for more streamlining and rationalisation, which will help the secretariats to be more outreaching and assisting to the Parties: “UNEP should and could play this role in information and early warning – but is not able to.”³⁶ This is partly due to lack of financial resources but may also result from insufficient technical expertise and excessive emphasis on administrative matters.³⁷

In summary, these are generally grave tidings for UNEP and the sentiments are not just blowing off steam. A major signal is the CBD COP meeting (2004) that established the Biodiversity Liaison Group between CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar and WHC – but without UNEP as a member (Decision VII/26). This is clearly a sore point with UNEP, which has acted as a founding father for most of these conventions.

How does this relate to our theoretical perspective; what is the ‘score’ – or the goal achievement - of UNEP in terms of coordination of the biodiversity cluster? Needless to say, this is not a comprehensive study. However, our data are quite more comprehensive than presented here and based on some facts and many perceptions, the conclusion is quite negative. If we construct a simple three-point scale, high, medium and low, although there are positive points, the degree of effectiveness is tentatively somewhere between low and medium. How do we account for this?

3. Explanation of performance

3.1. The role and position of UNEP in the biodiversity cluster

This section provides a comparative view of the relationship between UNEP and international organisations involved in the biodiversity conservation cluster, looking primarily into different roles and positions, but we deal also briefly with location and financial aspects. We do not conduct any systematic survey of all these bodies; only a few illustrative examples will be used.

‘Many shoppers in the same market’

³⁵ Interview with NN, CBD Secretariat, Montreal, 16 March 2004.

³⁶ Interview with NN, Ramsar, 6 September 2004.

³⁷ For example, CITES was able to bring about the improved management of shared sturgeon species which is something UNEP had tried to do for a number of years. Interview with NN2, CITES Secretariat, Geneva, 24 September 2003.

The biodiversity cluster emerged without a grand master plan – now there is pressure from donors to co-ordinate. Through General Council decision, UNEP has a mandate to contribute to this co-operation; but does the role and position of UNEP – compared to other agencies provide room for this?

UNEP activities in biodiversity conservation formally include co-ordination and assistance through MEA secretariats, project management in liaison with other organisation, and information work. As already pointed to, UNEP is centrally placed in the biodiversity conservation cluster.³⁸ While UNEP is certainly very active in the biodiversity cluster, so are other IEOs like the World Conservation Union, IUCN. Employing more than 1000 staff, with one hundred in their headquarters, the IUCN draws its members from states, state agencies, NGOs and personal membership. It has for several decades been heavily involved in the biodiversity conservation cluster. Both Ramsar and WHC have formal links to IUCN in their convention texts. Ramsar is co-located with IUCN IN Glad, Switzerland, and has only eight staff members. The IUCN supports collaborative actions between Ramsar and other global environmental conventions, especially CBD, UNFCCC (Climate change and wetlands), CITES, World Heritage Convention, and Biosphere Reserves (supporting the UNESCO MAB Programme). Moreover, the IUCN secretariat and the Ramsar Bureau collaborate on stakeholder involvement in dialogues on the conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of natural resources, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from this use, through organisation of sessions of the Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF).³⁹ In sum, the IUCN is playing a significant role in co-ordination of the biodiversity conservation cluster.

A probably even more important actor is UNDP (and the World Bank) through their collaboration with UNEP as implementing agencies, administering the GEF. The UNEP GEF Coordination Office assists 28 countries in preparing biodiversity action plans and national reports and in accessing the CBD clearing-house mechanism, and 118 countries in preparing national biosafety frameworks.⁴⁰ In comparison, UNDP GEF supports some 250 full-size projects and 30 medium-size projects on maintaining and sustainable use of biodiversity in 141 countries.⁴¹ To date, more than 3,000 biodiversity-related projects of local NGOs and community-based organisations in 73 countries have been funded through the UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme, totalling over \$58 million. UNDP lists biodiversity as one of the six focal points in their Energy and Environment Practice.⁴² In sum, through capacity development, knowledge management, policy advice and advocacy, UNDP GEF has directed

³⁸ For an overview of the various formal co-ordinating roles of UNEP in this cluster, see Rosendal and Andresen, 2003.

³⁹ Based on data from YBICED 2003.

⁴⁰ GEF has operational programmes in biodiversity (following the ecosystem approach in forest, mountain, arid, semi-arid and wetland ecosystems), climate change, international waters, persistent toxic substances and the ozone layer.

⁴¹ To learn more, visit www.undp.org/gef and www.undp.org/biodiversity

⁴² UNDP on biodiversity and development: “Poverty and biodiversity are intimately linked. The poor, especially in rural areas, depend on biodiversity for food, fuel, shelter, medicines and livelihoods. Biodiversity also provides the critical 'ecosystem services' on which development depends. Biodiversity loss exacerbates poverty, and likewise, poverty is a major threat to biodiversity.”

over \$1.9 billion through grants and cost-sharing arrangements to developing countries for biodiversity-related projects. This support also encompasses enabling activities to help countries respond to CBD obligations as well as funding for project preparation. It is the UNDP's Regional Bureaux and Country Offices that undertake biodiversity projects described above. UNDP has Country Offices in 166 countries in five global regions.

So, how is the relation between UNEP and these actors? IUCN also perform important co-ordination functions alongside UNEP in this cluster; hence, there is a potential for synergy as well as competition and turf battles. The IUCN has also entered into co-operation with UNEP on monitoring and assessment. The World Conservation Monitoring Centre was originally set up by IUCN and has later been placed under the auspices of UNEP. Neither the IUCN nor UNEP consider the relationship as competitive, however. According to the IUCN, the relationship is unproblematic because they have similar mandates but different strengths. The IUCN has flexibility and UNEP has the intergovernmental mandate.⁴³ This view is reiterated in UNEP, and it is also pointed out how the two are complementary in that they reach out to different clients and thus reach a wider group of people.⁴⁴

In sum, there is an interesting potential for synergetic co-operation between UNEP and IUCN as the environmental sustainability issue is increasingly competing with other issues – issues that 'belong' to other international bodies.⁴⁵ The link to development has lately introduced a strain in relationships to other relevant actors. That link became manifest in Rio (1992) and was further strengthened at the Johannesburg 2002 Summit.⁴⁶ One observer claims that UNEP was strongly opposed to this trend – and in effect that UNEP to an increasing extent has been side-tracked by other UN bodies in the period after Rio.⁴⁷ This has ensued in frequent rivalry between UNEP and more 'development-oriented actors like the GEF and the UNDP – as well as the CSD.⁴⁸ In effect, a key IUCN source maintains that UNDP is increasing their influence through the mixed environment and development agenda – at the cost of UNEP. More concretely, IUCN would have liked to see UNEP taking the lead in

⁴³ Interview with Martha Chouchena, Head of Policy, Biodiversity and International Agreements Unit, IUCN, 23 September 2003.

⁴⁴ Interview with NN, UNEP Information Unit for Conventions (UNEP/IUC), Geneva, 25 September 2003.

⁴⁵ Issues related to the biodiversity conservation cluster are becoming increasingly important to the work of IUCN, such as the IPR issues, development issues, climate change, and trade. On all of these issues, IUCN is co-operating with UNEP. Interview with Martha Chouchena, Head of Policy, Biodiversity and International Agreements Unit, IUCN, 23 September 2003.

⁴⁶ The traditional *preservation* ideology basically believes in protecting species and ecosystems from mankind by establishing nature reserves. The concept of conservation admits for the possibility that people may coexist with "nature" without detrimental effects. The concept has tended to become watered-down – in the sense that it can also be used with the old preservation ideas in mind. The introduction of the concept of *environmental sustainability* may be regarded as an effort to revive focus on the long term links between environment and development.

⁴⁷ Corroborated by interviews in the Climate Change Secretariat, 23 October 2003.

⁴⁸ The relationship between CSD and UNEP is important in *general* regarding co-ordination, but less so related to the bio-cluster. However, a few remarks on the CSD are warranted. As commonly known, the main function of CSD is to review the implementation of Agenda 21 and subsequent UN Conference commitments related to the integration of environment and development goals within the UN system. Compared to the CSD, UNEP is clearly a more operative body, as the CSD has only a small staff of its own and holds sessions annually only for some two weeks. For an analysis of the effectiveness of CSD, see Kaasa, 2005.

implementing the Millennium Development Goals and the Biodiversity 2010 target – but UNDP dominates this process.⁴⁹ According to sources in CITES, UNEP’s role has been weakened by the strategic and political decisions to establish the CSD and the GEF.⁵⁰ In contrast, key UNEP sources take a somewhat different but also realistic view of this situation, admitting that they have to compete with UNDP and the World Bank, especially in capacity building.⁵¹

However, there are also signs that UNEP is improving its grip on this situation. UNEP is increasing its share of GEF money, most particularly within the biodiversity issue area. UNEP’s GEF Division is also rising to the task – it has increased from 2 to 100 staff members over the last three years and is now ‘fighting’ UNDP/GEF over resources. Recently, UNEP and UNDP have concluded a MoU (which is outwardly highly praised and judged to be without teeth by internal experts). UNEP is also collaborating increasingly with UNDP through the regional and national offices. According to central actors, UNEP is gradually succeeding in utilising the UNDP structure through their own use of GEF funding to get footholds ‘on the ground’.⁵² While the World Bank has let go quite easily of their National Environmental Action Plans, leaving the floor to UNEP’s National Biodiversity Conservation Plans, the UNDP has, however, felt more pressured in this process.⁵³ The future test of how this tug-of-war turns out will depend very much on how UNEP is able to reorient its focus to the regional and national level. Backing up this tentative conclusion, UNEP is already more decentralised compared to most other relevant UN agencies in that some two-thirds of UNEP staff works at the regional level. UNEP’s capacity to perform operatively would hence not seem to be particularly low. In most of our interviews, UNEP staff underlined that regionalisation was indispensable to succeed in the implementation phase.

In sum, the relation with IUCN seems mainly synergetic – they compliment each other, and there is probably room for even more co-operation – not the least in meeting the emerging challenges from ‘development segment’. The relationship to UNDP is more mixed, and by no means all negative. However, UNDP is so much bigger, the sustainability approach it strengthening its position, and the fact that it is represented in virtually all the states of the world, implies that UNEP is far from *the one and only co-ordinator* in relation to the MEAs. In addition there are other actors – not he least the GEF, illustrating ‘the many shoppers in the market – out of which UNEP is only one – and its position is not strengthened by its geographic location and its financial status.

⁴⁹ Interview with Martha Chouchena, Head of Policy, Biodiversity and International Agreements Unit, IUCN, 23 September 2003.

⁵⁰ Interview with NN2, CITES Secretariat, Geneva, 24 September 2003.

⁵¹ The establishment of the GEF was more important, as it took away the role that was intended for UNEP. “UNEP got a smaller part of the bigger pie”. Interview with Michael Williams, UNEP Information Unit for Conventions (UNEP/IUC), Geneva, 25 September 2003.

⁵² Interviews with PJS (January 2005); David Duthie and Achmed Djoghlaif, UNEP, Nairobi, November 2004.

⁵³ Interview with David Duthie, UNEP, Nairobi, November 2004.

‘Geographical location and funding situation’

Overall, there is hardly any doubt that the geographical location of Nairobi has made it more difficult for UNEP to perform its co-ordination role more generally, as well as in relation to the biodiversity more specifically. Some of the problems caused by this are in terms of general efficiency as well as problems of recruiting and keeping experts. As the CSD and GEF are located in New York and Washington DC respectively, this has added to the weakening of UNEP vis-à-vis UNDP and the World Bank. Regarding UNEP in relation to the distribution of the relevant MEAs, the geographical distribution of biodiversity cluster headquarters is almost complete – but none of them are very close to Nairobi.⁵⁴ On a positive note, the Nairobi location provided for a very strong support for UNEP among developing, especially in the early period. In itself it was extremely important to make the G77 realise that environmental problems were also relevant for them.⁵⁵ That is, the location may contribute to lower effectiveness, but increase legitimacy for the large majority of states in the world – often a neglected point in effectiveness analyses.⁵⁶ UNEP may also compensate for lack of control and large geographical distances both through the regional offices and through appointing the central staff of the secretariats belonging to UNEP. With a view to the regional trend, the UNEP Division for Regional Conventions (DRC) is already the second largest within UNEP, next to DGEF, and it is important in enhancing MEA implementation. DRC notices a greater recognition of UNEP within the UNDP structure; in that the UNEP provides added value.⁵⁷ Appointment of central staff also provides potential control, but such means of control are not always welcome by the MEAs. Overall, however, there is no doubt that the location weakens the co-ordinating abilities of UNEP in a number of ways – although there are some positive as well as mitigating factors.

It is common knowledge that UNEP has a very weak and unstable financial basis, even according to UN standards. This is often a major point among many analysts when they explain the weak performance of UNEP, linked also to the discussion whether UNEP should be given status as a specialised agency. We shall not go into this big debate here, but a few words on economy is warranted. Laurence Mee gives a detailed account of the more recent financial situation of UNEP.⁵⁸ After a short-lived growth around Rio 1992, support was again reduced, while it has increased somewhat under the leadership of Topfer, but the overall economic picture is still rather bleak. There is also a growing trend among the donors to control more of the budget and UNEP to control less. The reason is obvious, they do not trust that UNEP administers ‘their’ money in an effective way.⁵⁹ Obviously, the GEF has

⁵⁴ For an overview, see Rosendal and Andresen, 2003.

⁵⁵ Najam, 2005 (forthcoming).

⁵⁶ Andrsen and Hey, 2005 (forthcoming).

⁵⁷ Interview with Zhijia Wang, Deputy Director, Division of Regional Co-operation & Monika Wehrle-MacDevette, DRC, Nairobi, Kenya 25 November 2004.

⁵⁸ Mee, 2005, forthcoming

⁵⁹ A very recent evaluation of UNEPs use of extensive Norwegian economic support was not flattering to the reputation of UNEP. Aftenposten, November 15, 2005.

increased the capacity of UNEP somewhat as it is one of the three implementing agencies, but compared to the two others, UNEP is a ‘the very little brother’ in comparison. This of course has bearing upon the fact the different role of UNEP compared to UNDP and the World Bank.⁶⁰ However, it is quite clear that the dominant actors for various reasons do *not* want to give UNEP a financially strong role.⁶¹

More recently the need for partnerships between business, green NGOs and public authorities has been underlined as a way to increase environmental funding. There are various opinions on the role of these new ventures (Najam 1999; Andonova and Levy 2003), but increased business involvement is one potential way to increase funding. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), a coalition of 170 international companies, is cooperating with IUCN on biodiversity:⁶² ‘Business and Biodiversity: A guide for the private sector’ (Report 1997). In interviews, representatives were frustrated with the UN bodies and preferred collaboration with NGOs; as NGOs provide accountability even better than governments. UNEP was regarded as close to invisible as well as irrelevant by the WBCSD.⁶³ This view to some extent is substantiated by ENGOs themselves. WWF agrees with the WBCSD that working with NGOs and business is much quicker than working through the UNEP⁶⁴

Thus, for various reasons the funding situation of UNEP is weak, primarily due to the lacking willingness of strong actors to change this situation. The weak financial basis hardly improves the co-ordinating capacity of UNEP. However, we think this aspect should not be exaggerated as it is hardly weak economy that is most important in explaining this. In contrast, we think the internal life and bureaucratic culture of UNEP is more important.

3.2. The organisation and bureaucratic culture of UNEP

We have seen that the scope for UNEP’s role to co-ordinate a large extent is influenced by the respective COPs. The MEAs are not very open for interference by UNEP as they regard their COPs as the legitimate source of policy advice. At the same time, UNEP Governing Council decides that UNEP shall co-ordinate the MEAs. As one of our interviewees in UNEP, interaction and synergies, put it (in rather an understatement); “This is not an easy process”.⁶⁵

A major difficulty seems to stem from the internal organisation of UNEP. Töpfer brought with him a reorganisation from issue specific to functional division of labour between the UNEP Divisions. This may have solved some problems, but according to our

⁶⁰ Werksmann, 2003, Heggelund, Andresen and Ying, 2005, forthcoming.

⁶¹ UNEP worked hard to gain control over the ozone fund, but it moved to Montreal – with no UNEP control whatsoever.

⁶² <http://www.wbcsd.org/templates/TemplateWBCSD1/layout.asp?type=p&MenuId=NjA&doOpen=1&ClickMenu=LeftMenu>

⁶³ Interview with James Griffiths, Director, Sustainable Forest Products Industry and Biodiversity, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Geneva, 26 September 2003.

⁶⁴ Interview with Aimee Gonzales, Senior Policy Advisor to WWF, Gland, 6 September 2004.

⁶⁵ Interview with NN, DEC Interlinkages and synergies, UNEP, November 2004.

respondents, new problems appeared, as responsibility for each issue became split between all Divisions. UNEP Divisions fight among themselves to get credit for projects; they all have separate budgets and hence they are unable to co-operate on projects.⁶⁶ In some instances, the divisions also hamper the optimal utilisation of technical expertise in an issue area, as staff has become spread out between them.

Second, the most widespread explanation we have found is that UNEP keeps failing to ask the right service oriented question of “What can we do for you?” Instead UNEP still keeps up the old top-down strategy of concocting plans for the MEA that they do not need and do not want. In other words, UNEP is stuck in the initiation phase as the founding father and has so far been unable to enter the implementation phase as the MEA has reached adulthood.⁶⁷

This perceived lack of service-orientation largely may stem from the bureaucratic culture in UNEP. As most of the MEAs have limited staff, UNEP can and does provide specialised support, such as media support, to the secretariats.⁶⁸ However, a lot of time goes to red-tape and detail questions. UNEP staff is very much ready to agree that the relationship between UNEP and MEA secretariats is often constrained by red-tape and that UNEP might benefit from reducing this type of activity.⁶⁹ We are not in a position to judge whether the level of bureaucracy on the part of UNEP is unavoidable – considering it is a small UN body located in a developing country. However, based on the interviews we have carried out, it seems the bureaucratic culture of UNEP is perceived by many as a feature that weakens its ability to co-ordinate the MEAs.

On a slightly different note, interviews with central actors indicate the significance ascribed to *differences* in bureaucratic culture between MEAs and UNEP. For example, CITES staff sees themselves as more technical while UNEP is more concerned with policy issues. At the same time, UNEP is responsible for appointing staff and leadership in CITES.⁷⁰ A common view among the staff is that leadership recruited externally may be problematic; it may be politically based rather than professionally based.

Our interviews in Nairobi indicate that UNEP staff is acutely aware of the need to turn from a top-down to a bottom-up approach. This view dominated horizontally and vertically; it was found in all the divisions and at most levels in the organisation. Many focused on the annoying aspect of the red-tape in administrative functions, which led to the conclusion that something should be done about UNON, but the general service on

⁶⁶ Interview with NN, Atmosphere and Desertification Convention Units, DEC, UNEP, Nairobi, Kenya 23 November, 2004.

⁶⁷ Interviews with NN, DEC, DECI, DGEF, Nairobi, Kenya 23 November, 2004.

⁶⁸ Interview with NN, UNEP Information Unit for Conventions (UNEP/IUC), Geneva, 25 September 2003.

⁶⁹ “They do have a point though – when any request for home leave needs to be approved in Nairobi, we do need to remove some of those irritants. We also need to recognise that UNEP’s strengths are not on general administration”. Interview with NN, UNEP Information Unit for Conventions (UNEP/IUC), Geneva, 25 September 2003.

⁷⁰ Interview with NN1, Chief of Unit, CITES Secretariat, and with Eugene Delapoint, formerly Secretary-General of CITES.

substantive issues was also greatly criticised. From some of our respondents (who incidentally preferred anonymity) we have chosen a few citations: “An impediment is the bureaucratic culture in UNEP, which dissuades creativity”. “We do not accomplish much. We must be more service oriented!”. “We have got the message: People are fed up with our turf wars”.⁷¹

In summary, major internal challenges for UNEP seem to be the fragmented responsibility across Divisions and the bureaucratic red tape. Based on our sources there is unanimity that both inside and outside UNEP that it must turn from a top down to a bottom up approach in order to become more service oriented. Such – seeming – consensus may pave the way for gradual changes in this direction, but considering the rather top-down and less than open culture in UNEP itself, this will probably take some time. UNEP has been very successful in terms of agenda setting and regime formation, but this has become less important over time. New challenges of the implementation phase call for a more regional and national approach, and key respondents are aware of this. Difficult priorities both internally and externally are needed if UNEP shall be able to redirect its roles and functions more in this direction.⁷²

4. Brief and tentative concluding points

UNEP is a small and very poor IEO in the very fringes of international relations that few outside the UN bureaucracy and the relevant research community have heard about. We know that large, visible and resourceful UN organisations have a hard time get their job done effectively.⁷³ Thus, expectations should be exceedingly modest as to what can be accomplished by UNEP. This trivial fact often seems to be forgotten both in the UN as well as within the research community. In this paper we have not made any attempt at a comprehensive analysis of UNEP. Rather, we have taken one specific part of the mandate of UNEP, co-ordination, and looked upon this in relation the biodiversity cluster. Effectiveness was conceived of in terms of goal achievement, and overall we concluded UNEP was a quite some way from achieving this goal. How do we explain his? First, although UNEP is *formally* the main co-ordinating actor, there are other relevant actors that have much more resources and in many ways very relevant competence. Also, its geographical position as well as its strained funds to some extent explains modest performance. Finally, internal organisation and bureaucratic culture were not always found conducive to enable UNEP to do its job properly. It should be noted, however, that this is the general picture, there are positive modifications and nuances. Most of these observations are based on extensive interviews in UNEP as well as with the relevant MEAs.

⁷¹ Interviews with NN, DEC, DECI, DGEF, Nairobi, Kenya 23 November, 2004.

⁷² Interviews with NN (DEC; Interlinkages and Synergies), Sekou Toure (Regional Office of Africa to UNEP), David Duthie and Achmed Djoghlaif (DGEF), Zhijia Wang and Monika Wehrle-MacDevette (DRC), Svein Tveitdal (DEC and DEPI), Marc Collins (DEC), and Kakahel (deputy director)

⁷³ WHO is a classical example during most of the 1990s, Andresen, 2002.

Do this rather bleak picture mean that UNEP does a poor job in this context? Not necessarily, considering some the ‘malign’ circumstances surrounding UNEP, and we have only dealt with some of them, UNEP has undoubtedly done some useful work on this account. To use the traditional counterfactual reasoning, we think most of these MEAs are better off along some dimensions due to the job done by UNEP. The real difficult – and more important, however, is whether UNEP could have done any better – given all these constraints. The easy way out of this question would have been to eliminate some of the present barriers, for example by institutional design. To move UNEP to Bonn or New York, apply purely merits system of recruitment and fire and hire like in Microsoft, and we are quite confident that results would improve – also within the present budget. The problem is that UNEP is part of ‘real world UN’ – and that is a different story. However, we do think there are potential for improvements even within these constraints. Some of them we have hinted at, like concentrating more resources in terms of bottom-up think tank assistance and scrap the old top down culture. Also, UNEP seems to be aware that it needs to be better equipped for the main challenge in global environmental governance today: implementation on the ground. We will certainly think of more that can be done and discuss its feasibility, but we end here – in the hope of getting some help with these difficult questions from this conference.

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