

## **The UN Reform, System-Wide Coherence and International Environmental Governance from a Developing Country Perspective**

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The reform of the UN system, system-wide coherence in the field of sustainable development and international environmental governance (IEG) should be discussed linking environmental and development issues. The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 was an important landmark for the relationship between these two clusters. However, the integration of environment in development policies on national and international levels has been facing several obstacles. Although many conventions have been signed by countries to stop environmental degradation, during the last decades we have been assisting to increasing loss of biodiversity, global warming, degradation of soils and water resources, and chemical pollution. Neoliberal market reforms and services liberalization processes pushed forward by the ongoing World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations have increased social inequity and the gap between rich and poor in many countries and between the North and the South. Unsustainable production and consumption patterns dominate in the developed countries and are being replicated more and more in the developing countries, responsible for the environmental and social crisis. In contradiction with assumed commitments by the OECD countries, financial aid for development assistance is still below 0.3% of Gross National Income (GNI). It is within this context that the ongoing discussions on strengthening the United Nation Environment Programme (UNEP), system-wide coherence and environmental governance on international level should be analyzed.

### The South has to get engaged with IEG discussions

First of all, the UN Reform and discussions on IEG have not been popular issues in Brazil and Latin America for NGOs and social movements up to now. This is mainly due to lack of structures and access to documents in English language, and to the difficulty of grassroots organizations to link daily life to the discussions within the UN system. UN resolutions are soft laws and therefore, people do not recognize that their life will improve as a consequence of the bureaucratic and for them poorly visible work done within the UN system.

Global civil society discussions on IEG have been started several years ago and the UNEP Global Civil Society Forum has been a privileged discussion space. The Forum is now organized every year preceding the UNEP Global Environment Minister Forum, and declarations on IEG have been issued signed by the organizations assisting the Forum. However, the Northern NGOs strongly dominate discussions on IEG thanks to better access to technical, human and financial resources. Brazilian and Latin American organizations do not have yet clear statements on UN reform issues, system-wide coherence and IEG.

### Reaffirm common but differentiated responsibilities

Civil society does agree that UNEP has to be strengthened. However, developing countries have specific needs: A stronger IEG means to respect the fundamental principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”. Developed countries should promote technology transfer, new

and additional financial resources, and capacity building for meaningful participation of developing countries in IEG. Strengthening of IEG should occur in the context of sustainable development and should involve civil society as important stakeholder and agent of transformation.

Developed countries, instead of fulfilling their commitments made under the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), have prioritized the agenda of the WTO that promotes a regime of rules that are counter-running the Rio spirit and principles. The unilateral rejection of MEAs, such as the Kyoto Protocol, by some countries is another fact that puts at risk the common and binding efforts needed to advance towards sustainable development. The developed countries' commitment to contribute with 0.7% of their GNI for Official Development Assistance (ODA) and to provide new and additional funds to implement MEAs has not become true and ODA has even decreased in some countries.

#### Strengthen UNEP and institutions dealing with sustainable development

UNEP is one of the components of the IEG structure. However, strengthening UNEP must occur while simultaneously enhancing the economic, social and development components in other UN institutions. The role of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), for instance, has to be improved so that it can better play its integrative function. An enhanced UNEP will make the environmental dimension of the CSD stronger. Other relevant organizations and agencies dealing with IEG have also to be strengthened, together with the institutions dealing with economic and social affairs, and the institutions working with the integration of environment and development.

#### MEA have to weigh upon the WTO agenda

MEAs are frequently undermined in favor of the WTO regime. The UN system is weak when it comes to guarantee the implementation of agreements compared to the powerful WTO with its enforcement mechanisms. One example of the existence of contradictions between WTO rules and sustainability is the TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement. The agreement has made it more difficult for the South to access pharmaceutical products and technology from the North. Biopiracy, the appropriation and patenting by biotechnological corporations of the North of biological resources and traditional knowledge originating in the South, has also increased during the last years, threatening national sovereignty over natural resources and traditional knowledge.

The Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements (FBOMS) recently organized the Global Civil Society Forum during the Third Meeting of the Parties (MOP-3) on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Eighth Conference of the Parties (COP-8) on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Curitiba/Brazil, which happened under the slogan "Welcome to the Real World". Besides being an important event of mobilization of civil society for issues related to the conservation of biodiversity, we tried to show the existing conflicts between the WTO and the CBD regimes, mainly in the field of biotechnologies, but also in general, since the WTO agreements weaken domestic policy sectors deregulating legal frameworks. Bilateral agreements sometimes prevail and undermine the MEAs. When dealing with reforming IEG, the MEA must be re-affirmed and their national implementation needs to be prioritized. The WTO should never be allowed to have the final say in matters relating to perceived conflicts between trade and the

environment and the agenda for the sustainable use of natural resources, the protection of traditional knowledge and the right of access to genetic resources must weigh upon neoliberal market reforms.

#### Financial institutions mechanisms should strengthen IEG

The UN system is also weak in ensuring implementation of its agreements when compared to the multilateral financial institution mechanisms. The Bretton Woods Institutions, especially the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, have destabilized economic structures in many developing countries. Conditionalities attached to credits and loans such as the adoption of macro-economic policies and structural adjustment programs have contributed to environmental degradation and social exclusion. When discussing IEG it is important to consider the reform of the international financial system and link it to the overall goals of sustainable development. The Global Environmental Facility as funding mechanism also requires review and should be strengthened.

#### Involve and empower grassroots movements

Non-governmental organizations and grassroots movements have to get involved in discussions on UN reform, system-wide coherence and IEG. The Global Civil Society Forum during MOP-3 and COP-8 on the CBD in Curitiba was an excellent opportunity to involve civil society organizations in the debates on the effectiveness of the MEAs. The parallel event was outstanding because NGOs, social movements and grassroots organizations, could be involved. The landless movements from Brazil and Via Campesina, the international movements, decided to actively participate in the civil society forum, which makes very clear that these movements already linked the agendas for land reform, agrarian development, struggle against genetically modified organisms, protection of traditional knowledge and conservation of the environment. Civil society assumed its responsibility as stakeholder in environmental governance and kept a continuous dialogue with the delegations negotiating the outcome documents in this UN conference and contributed in a decisive way to the clear labeling of genetically modified organisms in international trade.

#### Promote synergies among MEAs

Synergies among the UNFCCC, the CBD and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification have to be strengthened. Promoting the synergy among the several environmental conventions was also one of the objectives of the Global Civil Society Forum. Within the Brazilian NGO Network cross-cutting discussions are promoted, for instance between the thematic Working Group Forests, Climate Change, Energy and Water, to deal in an integrated way with their respective conventions. Forest group members recently participated recently together with the climate working group in the elaboration of a document for the protection of Tropical Forests which was submitted to the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and climate group members helped the energy group to finalize a document with guidelines for the National Energy Policy Framework.

Capacity-building has to be carried out in developing countries on the efforts necessary to be done within the UN to improve system-wide coherence. A better cooperation has to be put in

place not only among the MEAs but also among all programs and projects that deal with the environment, development and human rights, in order to maximize the available resources and minimizing administrative cost. A better cooperation between the UN and civil society organizations can help to make sustainable development programs and projects more effective.

### Recommendations:

**Make adequate financing available:** National implementation of MEA is weak in many cases because of highly inadequate financial resources. OECD countries should finally designate 0.7% of GNI for ODA. All developed countries and developing countries within the realm of their possibilities should increase financial contribution for environment and sustainable development programs.

**Discussion on a centralized umbrella structure for MEAs:** The same geographical location of program secretaries such as UNEP and UN-Habitat in Nairobi, Kenya, is an interesting option. The parallel organization of various Conferences of the Parties may save travel costs and promote synergy in discussions and decision-making. However, with more financial and human resources in the North, there is a risk that centralization will be dominated by the stronger Northern countries.

**Support cross-ministerial approaches:** Sustainable Development has to be the context within IEG is discussed and this should involve other sectorial ministers, other than environment ministers, so that the linkages between development and environment can be promoted.

**Promote increased regional cooperation:** South-south cooperation for IEG is crucial so as to share resources, exchange technologies and defend the specific needs and interests of developing countries, based on strong alliances experienced in other multilateral negotiations processes such as the WTO. The UN regional commissions have to be strengthened so as to support the discussions and organize regional preparation meetings, such as the Regional Implementation Meetings for CSD.

**More public participation:** As a central component of IEG the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration should be promoted and fully put in place at all levels in order to ensure public participation, access to information and to environmental justice. This has been repeatedly requested by the Global Civil Society Forum hosted by UNEP.

**Capacity building for civil society in the South:** With appropriate capacity building, strong alliances can be forged at the national, regional and international level to intensify knowledge, strengthen research and policy formulation to promote the perspectives and positions of the South.