

**Institutional Linkages among Multilateral Environmental Agreements:
An Organizational and Educational Development Perspective**

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"The most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will occur not because of technology but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human", *John Naisbitt, 1990.*

A. Introduction

This paper reviews and comments on some of the main efforts that have been undertaken in recent years to identify linkages and develop synergy among three multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). It then addresses some of the institutional aspects of synergy among these three MEAs and, in particular, explores the value of synergies and coordination related to organizational development, which, this paper argues, must be accompanied by broad educational development.

The paper concentrates on the purpose and significance of synergy in the new context of sustainable development as the natural outgrowth of environmental concerns over the last 30 years. Owing to my personal experience with them, I will focus on the relevance of synergy and coordination among the conventions which have sustainable development as an essential aim - the so-called Rio Conventions - namely, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (UNCCD)¹.

These conventions emerged from a common process, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or Rio Conference, held in 1992, and share a common set of principles and approaches. Despite these commonalities, however, these conventions have several differing institutional elements, a fact which has not facilitated the development of synergy and coordination among them. These different institutional elements include: administrative arrangements (the CBD is administered by UNEP while UNCCD and UNFCCC are institutionally linked to the UN Secretariat); arrangements for the financial mechanism (CBD and UNFCCC have the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as a common financial mechanism while UNCCD's Global Mechanism is administered by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)); inter-relationships with specialized agencies (UNCCD and UNFCCC, but not CBD, are strongly supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), while CBD and UNCCD, but not UNFCCC, are strongly supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)); and each has a separate scientific and technical subsidiary body. The national focal points for these conventions also frequently work separately. Lastly, the diverse geographical location of secretariats has also been cited as an obstacle to better coordination².

¹While the terms "linkages" and "synergy" have several meanings, this paper considers "linkages" to refer to basic

¹Apart from the fact that these are the first conventions to integrate the concept of sustainable development, the analysis focusses on only these three to allow a concentrated effort that is easier to manage and which can ultimately lead to the gradual integration of other relevant legal and policy instruments.

²The Report of the UN Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements (document A/53/463, 6 October 1998), mentions on page 16 - somewhat incorrectly in my view - the geographical dispersion of convention secretariats as the first of several factors contributing to the "loss of efficiency because of inability to take advantage of synergy among conventions and substantial costs through loss of economies of scale and fragmentation of administrative, conference and infrastructure services". Based on my involvement with the convention secretariats as well as on my personal and managerial experience, I am of the view that geographical location is a minor factor in the development of synergy. Although co-location can facilitate collaboration, it is by no means a key element for such an endeavor. Managers that wish to collaborate effectively will achieve such an objective regardless of their geographical location whereas those not willing to do so, will not achieve it whether or not they are co-located. Examples exist of locations that are the seat of numerous organizations but which do not always succeed in integrating the work of programmes located in those cities. Conversely, examples exist of programmes that work very closely with others located in different parts of the world.

connections that exist between ecosystems and human and social actions, including economic activities - connections which may be discoverable through research in the natural and social sciences. For the purposes of this paper, "synergy" is the process by which such linkages may be addressed in a systematic, profound and long-term oriented manner in order better to attain individual and common objectives, such as sustainable development.

B. Review of efforts at collaboration between Rio conventions

Improved coordination, development of synergies, harmonized approaches, and mutually supportive activities between the Rio conventions are themselves variously mandated in articles of these conventions and decisions of their Conference of Parties (COP), as well as by other competent bodies³. Not surprisingly, the topic has received considerable attention, and a number of efforts have been undertaken by various entities to address the linkages between conventions. This section reviews some of these efforts, although it is beyond the scope of the paper to provide a comprehensive account.

(a) Synergy on scientific and technical issues under the Rio conventions⁴

The organizational experience of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is an instance worthy of mention, as this Panel has been an excellent example of the advantages and effectiveness of operating by networking versus the operation of traditional hierarchical structures. While there may be certain limitations and also scope for improvement, the Panel's action has been far more effective with results obtained at a lower cost than other similar bodies, and the networking nature of its operation has clearly had much to do with it. When addressing the need for new bodies it is advisable to look at the organizational approaches used in institutions such as the IPCC.

Synergies on scientific and technical issues are also being addressed through the initial dialogue that has begun among convention secretariats to address the linkages between the subsidiary bodies of the conventions: the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (CBD/SBSTTA), the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice (UNFCCC/SBSTA) and the UNCCD Committee on Science and Technology (UNCCD/CST).

The milestone report "Protecting our Planet, Securing our Future, Linking Environmental Issues with Human Needs: Opportunities for Strategic Interventions" by UNEP, the World Bank and the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration explores in detail the scientific and policy synergy among the major global environmental conventions. The report was presented during the UNFCCC/COP 4 in Buenos Aires in November 1998.

Several other events have been organized to look at specific scientific and technical synergy, for example, a workshop convened by the UNFCCC/SBSTA in Rome (24-25 September 1998), and held back-to-back with a technical meeting of the IPCC, addressed the issue of land use, land-use change and forestry following a mandate by UNFCCC/COP 3 in Kyoto.

Furthermore, the World Resource Institute (WRI) in a joint effort with the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP is preparing a contribution to scientific inter-linkages, called the "Millennium Assessment" to be presented at the time of the World Resources Report of 2000. The efforts of the WRI as well as other similar think-tanks at the scientific or expert level, such as the Worldwatch Institute and many academic institutions, are extremely valuable but still far from sufficient to address the scientific capacity building requirements of developing countries. Closer partnerships with institutions in the South with a view to share and develop jointly research and expand networking could greatly

³ See for example, decision 13/COP.1 of the CCD/COP, decisions IV/2, IV/7 and IV/15 of the CBD/COP, as well as recommendations of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), at its sixth session, and the United Nations General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session, on "Programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21". Additional references can be found in document "Collaboration and synergy among Rio Conventions for the implementation of the UNCCD" (ICCD/COP(2)/7 of 17 November 1998, prepared for the CCD/COP 2 (Dakar, 30 Nov-11 Dec 1998).

⁴For a more detailed and comprehensive review, see the Report on International Scientific Advisory Processes on the Environment and Sustainable Development prepared by Jan-Stefan Fritz for the UN System-Wide Earthwatch Coordination of UNEP (UNEP/DEIA/TR.98-1, 1998). Another good article on this particular linkage is "Scientific Linkages and Complementarities between the Conventions on Climate Change, Biological Diversity, Desertification and the Forest Principles" by Alexander L. Alusa of UNEP which is available at website: <www.soc.titech.ac.jp/uem/trialogue>.

enhance their work.

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) through its series of Global Biodiversity Forums (GBF) (fourteen have been held up to now), has also contributed to explore the connections between the CBD and other convention subjects. The GBFs are most valuable occasions for exchange of information but could still be further improved to contribute to systematic capacity building efforts in developing countries (see footnote 7).

There exists, therefore, a large potential to undertake joint academic and policy efforts to strengthen scientific capacities in developing countries in support of their commitments under the Rio conventions. Parties to the conventions could consider developing common/joint teams among the three subsidiary bodies for treatment of issues of shared concern such as, for example, technology transfer and adaptation, resource degradation in coastal areas, and integrated climate impact assessment.

Special efforts would be required to integrate teams at national levels with the various scientific and academic groups working on these issues in order to increase their capacity to assist governments in policy formulation. Support from academic and expert institutions could provide useful in this regard.

(b) Education, training and awareness

A number of international programmes should be mentioned here. Firstly, the UNESCO Programme on Environment and Population Education for Development (EPD) is working with the CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD secretariats on the development of common approaches for synergy on education⁵.

Secondly, the three Rio convention secretariats have each developed capacity-building programmes in a selected number of countries with assistance from the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and UNDP utilizing the Train X methodology⁶.

Thirdly, the UNEP Information Unit on Conventions has been assisting the convention secretariats in their activities on public information and awareness. Many other organizations within and outside the United Nations system have developed valuable awareness materials. In this regard, it would be useful to develop a joint database of available awareness materials which should be disseminated systematically to national focal points of conventions. In the context of the follow up to the 1997 UNDP Synergy Workshop, joint work will also be undertaken to identify capacity building needs of national focal points, and to develop appropriate responses.

Several international, regional or sub-regional agencies are undertaking some educational activity in the field of synergy among the Rio conventions: UNEP, UNDP, WMO (for UNCCD and UNFCCC mainly), FAO (for CBD and UNCCD mainly), IFAD, World Bank, the regional economic commissions, regional development banks, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and others, sometimes in close collaboration with the CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC secretariats. The NGOs active in this area are too numerous to be cited. Nevertheless, there is a need for increased activity as well as for greater collaboration among agencies and organizations.

There is a growing consensus for special attention to be given to education and public awareness activities on the Rio convention subjects as a long-term oriented support of sustainable development. A joint synergy initiative to identify education and public awareness materials and expertise available around the world and to collaborate in their wide and massive dissemination is still very much needed. Such an effort could be spearheaded by, for example, a partnership between the United Nations University (UNU) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and expand gradually to include other relevant organizations, with the aim to provide integrated assistance to national focal points of the Rio conventions. This would assist in their efforts to educate and increase awareness on sustainable development issues and, in particular, to introduce biodiversity, climate change and desertification awareness in national policy-making processes. Likewise, this initiative could also help introduce such

⁵More detailed information can be obtained from the Environment and Population Education for Development Programme of UNESCO that serves as Task Manager for Chapter 36 of Agenda 21.

⁶For more details, check each of the conventions web sites which can be accessed through <www.biodiv.org/rioconv>, <www.unitar.org> and <www.undp.org/seed/trainx/train-x.html>.

themes in school curricula and in teacher training programmes. Additionally, it would help in addressing public awareness needs and keep the public and relevant organizations abreast of developments and of resources available at the international level.

(c) Information systems: exchange of information, networking, clearing-house mechanisms⁷

A most interesting synergy initiative in this area is that involving the biodiversity-related conventions secretariats and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) on harmonization of information management for biodiversity-related treaties which is presented in detail in another paper prepared for this Conference⁸. It is clearly an initiative to follow closely and to support as it could eventually expand to include other sustainable development processes such as the UNFCCC and the UNCCD, and to address other policy, technical and institutional functions.

Another excellent effort in the area of exchange of information and policy advice is that of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and, in particular, its Linkages multimedia resource which includes such services as the Earth Negotiation Bulletin, Linkages Journal and Sustainable Developments. These services contribute to a massive and relevant dissemination of information on most events in the various sustainable development subjects. A selective utilization of their materials could contribute further to capacity building and training of negotiators in developing countries.

The CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD secretariats have started a process to develop a joint programme to explore synergy in information management, including support to information management at the national level, a common Web page, development of common databases and synergies with other relevant processes in this area. This is a first step towards increasing and enhancing the exchange and sharing of information among the three secretariats and their national focal points. It could evolve to promote partnerships and greater efficiency and effectiveness in assisting governments and other relevant organizations in their implementation of the conventions' commitments.

In this regard, the UNCCD secretariat has already concluded a memorandum of collaboration with the CBD secretariat and with the Ramsar Convention secretariat. Discussions have also been initiated with the UNFCCC secretariat and a similar collaboration is expected to be developed in 1999. Furthermore, having the synergy in mind as a high priority, the UNCCD secretariat has responded favourably to requests for negotiation of memoranda of collaboration made by organizations also working on the subject, in particular, UNESCO, FAO, UNITAR and the GEF.

Other valuable efforts are the 'listerserv' services which disseminate information and connect relevant experts on specific subjects. Some are managed by the secretariats themselves, such as that of the Ramsar secretariat and the UNCCD's for the Latin American and Caribbean region, while others are administered by NGOs, such as the Biodiversity Action Network (BIONET).

Information is an area that covers several different services or functions, such as information exchange, media or public information⁹, information networking, information systems and databases, clearing-houses, etc. Each of these functions could be the object of a separate study and analysis which cannot be undertaken here, but which ought to be conducted at some point. The study should aim to identify the numerous existing capacities worldwide and assess their potential contribution to capacity building in the developing world, and to avoid the tendency towards duplication and scattered efforts that exists at present.

⁷Additional information can be found at the following websites: (a) the NGO Trialogue <www.soc.titech.ac.jp/uem/trialogue/frames.html>, (b) Synergies on Information Management among the Rio Convention Secretariats <www.biodiv.org/rioconv>, and (c) the Virtual Global Biodiversity Forum <real.geog.ucsb.edu:8080/webx?>. For another perspective, see article: "Reporting Requirements and Information Systems- Synergies Between the Conventions on Biological Diversity, Climate Change and Desertification and the Forest Principles" by Laurretta Burke, at website<www.soc.titech.ac.jp/uem/trialogue>.

⁸ "Harmonizing the information management infrastructure for biodiversity-related treaties" by Jerry Harrison and Mark Collins. The full feasibility study can be found in Web site: <www.wcmc.org.uk/convent/treaties.htm>.

⁹ Public information or public awareness can also be presented under the education and awareness section. For classification purposes, however, under information, a distinction could be made between the content or substantive component linked to education and the dissemination and networking processes.

(d) Financial mechanisms¹⁰

Although the GEF, administered by the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP, and the Global Mechanism (GM), administered by IFAD, have been designated to operate the mechanisms to provide financial resources to enable the implementation of the three Rio Conventions, there are a number of other financial institutions and mechanisms which are supporting the work required for sustainable development, both on a multilateral as well as on a bilateral basis.

Work is being done, in particular by the GEF, to address the linkages and possible synergy among the three conventions and other GEF subjects such as international waters and ozone protection¹¹. Other relevant multilateral and bilateral donor agencies, for example, the OECD and the 'Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial' (FFEM) and regional and subregional development banks are also interested in supporting similar efforts. It is expected that with the establishment of the UNCCD Global Mechanism, IFAD will also support such initiatives. More, however, remains to be done to facilitate the closer collaboration among all relevant multilateral and bilateral donor agencies in search of greater effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of their resources. In particular, efforts could be made to develop a strong partnership between the GEF and the GM to address the needs of the three conventions in the most integrated manner for the benefit of national level activities geared towards their effective implementation.

The OECD and its DAC Working Party on Development Cooperation and Environment undertook a study on global environmental conventions (mainly the CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC) to identify the unique requirements of each convention, synergies between them and corresponding priority areas of support as well as policy and operational implications notably in the area of donor coordination.

The UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA) is preparing for high-level consultation to be held before the end of 2001 on Financing for Development which is expected to cover most of these initiatives and make substantive recommendations in this area. Detailed information can be found at Web site <www.un.org/esa/analysis/ffd>.

New donors such as the Turner UN Foundation are also starting to make substantive contributions to projects for sustainable development through the UN Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP). Many other private foundations are also heavily involved in financing Rio Convention projects. The contribution of these resources towards long-term capacity building and their coherence with regard to the priorities set up at Rio and regularly updated by CSD and the conventions' COPs, still need to be assessed.

Although the number of private foundations around the world investing in sustainable development is constantly increasing, it does not seem to be at a pace rapid enough to compensate for the diminishing ODA transfer from the developed to the developing countries.

Some hold the view that the provision of financial assistance is secondary to improving access to markets in developed countries of developing country exports. These proponents affirm that trade regulations, subsidies and restrictions in the developed world do not allow products from developing countries to enter developed country markets, and consequently countries from the South should be referred to development restrained or contained¹² rather than "developing" or "underdeveloped". An expansion of the access to rich markets would, in my view, inevitably bring together a greater concern about environmental impact in these countries as has happened in the developed world during their expansion.

In general, one might assert that although substantive financial resources are being invested in sustainable development projects, it is difficult to assess the "sustainability" of their impact on capacity building in developing

¹⁰ Financial mechanisms refer here to a broader definition not restricted to the formally established mechanisms of the conventions such as the GEF and IFAD.

¹¹ See "A Framework of GEF Activities Concerning Land Degradation", GEF, Washington, 1996 and "Synthèse du séminaire de Ouagadougou (1-3 juillet 1997) sur le Fonds pour l'Environnement Mondial et la lutte contre la désertification", Secrétariat de l'Etat Français à la Coopération, SOLAGRAL, November 1997.

¹² The author of this expression is the Colombian writer Germán Arciniegas.

countries. It is hoped that the "Financing for Development" Conference of the UN can provide substantive guidance in this regard.

(e) National reporting and communication of information¹³

The UN/DESA, in response to United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) and Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) mandates, is also addressing the need to streamline national reporting for conventions, Agenda 21 and related processes¹⁴.

Initial contacts have been made among the CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD secretariats to develop a joint programme for assisting a selected number of Parties in the coordination at the national level of their reports/communications to the three conventions. Although there is a great deal of interest in the secretariats to implement it, other more urgent priorities have, however, prevented the initiative to advance faster.

The formulation of national reports under the three conventions requires considerable efforts from Parties. A mechanism by which such efforts could be coordinated, allowing for the best use of national capacities and ensuring long-term-oriented capacity building of focal points is most desirable. Additionally, it could greatly facilitate the most effective and efficient use of resources of the three secretariats in providing assistance to national focal points by exchanging and sharing knowledge, expertise and other resources as appropriate when responding to national demands. Each report could point out its relevance to the reports submitted in compliance with other conventions.

UNDP's Sustainable Energy and Environment Division (SEED) has been involved actively and provided leadership in this subject starting with the convening of an Expert Meeting on Synergies between the Conventions on Biological Diversity, Climate Change, Desertification and the Forest Principles in Sede Boqer, Israel, 17-20 March 1997. The meeting addressed, in particular, synergies in national implementation of the Rio agreements¹⁵.

The WCMC initiative on harmonizing information management mentioned above also includes a component for national reporting on biodiversity-related conventions.

Some limitations to synergies exist where reporting plays an important part in the assessment of implementation of commitments under a particular convention, as the reporting format and information required will be tailored to the information required to ascertain compliance with those specific commitments. Nevertheless, common data sets still exist that are required for reporting under the different conventions. Synergy and coordination at the national level will not only avoid duplication in data collection and processing, but, perhaps more importantly, will also guarantee consistency in that the same data will be used in different cases.

(f) Policy advice, principles, procedures and legal aspects¹⁶

On general policy guidance and recommendations, a principal effort to be noted is the Report of the Secretary-General: "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform", document A/51/950 of 14 July 1997 which contains a specific section addressing the needs of the environment, habitat and sustainable development in the United Nations (pages 56-59). Subsequent to the UN Reform Programme, a task force was established and its report delivered as the Report of the Secretary-General on Environment and Human Settlements (document A/53/463 of 6 October 1998), which has been already referred to in other parts of this paper.

¹³For another perspective, see article "A Comparison of the Three Rio Conventions and the Forest Principles for Potential Synergies: Food for Thought" by Ruth Greenspan Bell which can be found at website:<www.soc.titech.ac.jp/uem/trialogue>.

¹⁴The UN/DESA Web site contains a great deal of information on national experiences related to the implementation of the conventions as part of the national reporting on Agenda 21 <www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo>.

¹⁵The full text of the report on the UNDP Synergies Expert Meeting can be found at the Web site: Synergies on Information Management among the Rio Convention Secretariats <www.biodiv.org/rioconv>.

¹⁶For another perspective on these and other institutional aspects related to synergies, see article: "Coordinating Implementation of the Rio Agreements: Institutional Mechanisms and Processes" by Ruth Mackenzie. The article can be found at website:<www.soc.titech.ac.jp/uem/trialogue>.

General policy guidance had been provided earlier by the UN General Assembly XIXth Special Session of June 1997 and on a yearly basis by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, convened around the month of April every year. Subsidiary bodies such as the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development of the UN Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) contribute periodically to the exchange of information among UN agencies in their activities relevant to sustainable development.

The COP of each convention, the related subsidiary bodies, bureaux and secretariats also provide direct guidance on collaborative and synergy processes. Some have dealt with the subject with greater interest and detail, such as the CBD, while others such as the UNFCCC focus more on addressing specific linkages, e.g., Article 3.3 of the Kyoto Protocol and the related decision 9/CP.4 adopted at the fourth session of its COP, on land-use, land-use change and forestry. A broader mandate for the development of synergy between the UNFCCC and the other Rio conventions could be found in the objective of the UNFCCC contained in Article 2 which refers to a time-frame for stabilizing greenhouse gases that allows ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change¹⁷

In accordance with its mandate, UNEP has held regularly meetings on coordination of Convention secretariats. Some sessions have addressed the more immediate needs for coordination among the UNEP-administered conventions, while others have included items relating to non-UNEP conventions. As the effects of recent organizational changes are felt, the capacity of UNEP to lead such coordination is expected to be enhanced.

At regional level, intergovernmental organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization for African Unity (OAU), the UN regional economic commissions, regional development banks, and others, also contribute to provide guidance in this field. The same is true at the subregional level where organizations are increasingly becoming active in this field.

UNEP and IUCN's Environmental Law Centre (ELC) have undertaken initiatives on specific legal items. UNITAR together with the IUCN/ELC is also developing an international programme of training for the application of environmental law. These initiatives aim to develop gradually, with the assistance of relevant academic institutions, common principles, approaches and procedures for the consolidation of sustainable development practice, by continuous strengthening of the legislative base required for policy-making. A closer collaboration with clear modalities between the institutions mentioned above and the three secretariats could enhance the effects of these initiatives and help disseminate their early results.

A most valuable effort in this area is that of the Foundation of International Environmental Law Development (FIELD) in London. The Institute for International Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) near Vienna, the Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations (CASIN) in Geneva as well as the Institute for Advanced Studies of the UN University (UNU/IAS) and various academic centres around the world (Harvard Law School, MIT, Columbia University among others) have also made substantive contributions in the field of legal analysis and the potential for synergy.

Major research and policy efforts are still pending however, in the field of development of principles and values for sustainable development. An ethical framework is still to be developed which can be accepted by all countries and which could be integrated into all educational systems around the world thus motivating a truly global awareness and response to the challenges of sustainable development (see recommendation below).

(g) COPs and subsidiary bodies

At its nineteenth special session (23-27 June 1997), the United Nations General Assembly stressed the fact that "the convention secretariats should give consideration to improving the scheduling of meetings, to integrating national reporting requirements and to improving the balance between sessions of the conference of the parties and sessions of their subsidiary bodies...". This assessment was reiterated by the Secretary-General's Report on Environment and Human Settlements (A/53/463) and specific recommendations to this effect are provided in that report.

Given their institutional arrangements and administrative connection with the United Nations Secretariat as well as

¹⁷ "Report on the Inter-Linkages between the Kyoto Protocol and other Multilateral Regimes, A Project of the UNU", paper for this Conference, page 39.

their co-location in Bonn, the UNFCCC and UNCCD secretariats are in a position to plan together, share resources and join efforts when convening meetings in Bonn and other venues¹⁸. Through collaborative efforts, effectiveness of meetings could be increased and participation of Parties and observers facilitated in sessions of the COPs and subsidiary bodies by planning and convening meetings in a coordinated manner, including by holding back-to-back events whenever possible. Considerable financial resources could thereby be saved and put to support projects in the field where they are needed the most.

C. Organizational Development and Educational Development

(a) Rationale

Considerable analysis has already been conducted on the linkages between the Rio Conventions on legal and policy issues; the ecological, scientific (here referring to natural sciences) and technical linkages among these and other conventions, international instruments and processes have also been the subject of several studies and reports in recent years.

With regard to the Rio "sustainable development" conventions, the rationale to study synergy among them includes, *inter alia*, the following facts¹⁹:

- (i) They share a common sustainable development approach, they are part of a common process (UNCED) and have close linkages with a common global strategy, namely Agenda 21. The Rio conventions also share the same basic principles enshrined in the Rio Declaration; the conventions hence present a convergence of objectives for achieving sustainable development;
- (ii) The three subjects are intimately related on ecological, but also on socio-economic and institutional grounds; several of the policies and measures suggested for achieving the objective of one convention may also contribute to objectives of the others. On the other hand, neglecting synergies and pursuing the objectives of one convention without regard to the impact on other conventions may lead to counterproductive results²⁰;
- (iii) Often decision- and policy-makers in charge of implementation of the conventions belong to the same government ministry or government ministries dealing with closely related portfolios; a pragmatic synergy initiative highlighting intersections among convention objectives could improve dialogue and contribute to cost-effective and more efficient ways to achieve convention and sustainable development objectives at the national and local levels;
- (iv) Finally, the small size of these convention secretariats allow for flexibility, and these secretariats are therefore excellent candidates for new initiatives in partnerships between organizations, allowing for the rapid building of effective team efforts, into which other organizations could be integrated to construct a longer-term-oriented processes.

Based on my personal experience, I thought it might be useful to bring into perspective a new set of elements,

¹⁸ It is also evident, however, that co-location is not a pre-requisite for the development of synergy, as the biodiversity-related conventions which are scattered around the world have nonetheless developed close collaboration and partnerships.

¹⁹ This section draws upon the document "Collaboration and synergy among Rio Conventions for the implementation of the UNCCD" (ICCD/COP(2)/7 mentioned in footnote 3.

²⁰ For details on the interconnections among the three and other related subjects, an recent analysis is presented in "Protecting our Planet, Securing our Future", UNEP, US/NASA and the World Bank. Other useful documents include: "Collaboration and synergy among Rio Conventions for the implementation of the UNCCD" (ICCD/COP(2)/7), which provides additional explanations on the linkages of desertification with the other two convention subjects, and "Synergy in National Implementation of the Rio Agreements", UNDP, August 1998. Numerous documents have provided the technical and scientific explanations on the interconnectedness of environmental issues. This paper does not attempt to repeat or insist on these elements, but focusses instead on the institutional aspects of related synergies.

borrowed from the organizational sciences which have contributed to the development of organizational processes in general, and have been extensively utilized by private sector institutions in particular. These elements should be coupled with the development of educational processes, with a view to undertaking longer-term-oriented capacity building to ensure sustainability in society at large.

The need for increased coordination and synergy in the field of international cooperation has been recognized for some time. It is intimately related to other concepts such as the "holistic approach", "integrated rural development", "thinking globally and acting locally", and many more. All these concepts express the same need to address the linkages and interdependence between human and social behaviour and natural systems and to search for improved effectiveness and efficiency in programmes and organizations in order to ensure sustainable development.

Synergy and coordination are needed mainly because ecosystems are inter-related and because of the interconnections and interdependence of social life and natural systems. The shortcomings are greater on how to manage these inter-relationships rather than on knowing about them. People and organizations need to become more conscious of the ecological, social and economic interconnections and interdependence but above all, they need to act accordingly. Therefore, a greater emphasis is needed on people and organizational behaviour rather than on ecosystem behaviour which is already well documented and research on which is already well underway.

However, from a simple coordination or basic exchange of information to more substantive partnerships, the gamut or range of synergies is immense. The meaning that each person gives to words such as "coordination", "communication", "linkages", "synergy" or "partnership" is very different. One might argue however, that each term suggests a gradually more intensive involvement of partners or associates and that what matters is the manner and purpose with which they are carried out. There is clearly a different degree of involvement in a simple approach of "exchange of information" to the more in-depth relationship of a "partnership", the latter being essential to achieve synergy. The ambiguity is greater in other terms such as "coordination" or "communication", which can be understood as simple actions or more complex behaviour patterns.

On environmental management, and more so on sustainable development, the need for synergies has been reflected in all major international policy events, in Stockholm, the World Conservation Strategy, the Brundtland Report, the Rio process and, more recently, UNGASS XIX (New York, June 1997), and it continues to be identified as a major need in more recent reports, such as "Protecting Our Planet Securing Our Future" by UNEP, US/NASA and the World Bank, the UNDP's Human Development Report, UNEP's Task Force report and others.

The report "Protecting Our Planet Securing Our Future" by UNEP, US/NASA and the World Bank presents a great deal of information and recommendations to better understand natural synergies²¹ as well as the scientific and technical implications, including some of the social and economic impacts of environmental issues.

In order to be effective and responsive to sustainable development, coordination and synergy will, however, require greater understanding of organizational and educational elements. Above all, effective synergy is not possible without drawing also on principles in organizational development, such as a greater involvement in networking and encouragement and facilitation of the participation of relevant partners or stakeholders in policy and decision-making, and the replacement of existing structures with new team oriented arrangements which encourage staff creativity and participation in decision-making and enhance effectiveness²².

It is important to note that beyond the formal mandates, it is, of course, pure and simple common sense that justifies close collaboration and developing coordination and synergy to build partnerships among institutions working on

²¹ It is important to note that while natural interdependence has been acknowledged for a long time, ("Ecology is a word which basically describes the synergism in nature - everything is related to everything else", Stephen Covey, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", page 283), and that policies have also recognized the social and economic interdependence of various environmental issues (thus the environment impact assessment and similar policy instruments), there is still a major gap or shortcoming in recognizing the institutional and more importantly, the organizational inter-linkages (management, leadership, networking, partnerships, etc.) required to address effectively natural and social interdependencies.

²² "The flow of information is changing authoritarian forms of organization in the workplace. They are being replaced by flat or networked organizations where shared values are the key" (Francis Fukuyama, "The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the reconstitution of Social Order", Profile Books, 1999).

related subjects. Common sense, in this regard, however, requires drawing on the introduction of accepted principles and an organizational development approach.

On the one hand, it is recognized that measures to protect biological diversity also contribute to enhancing sink capacity relevant to mitigating climate change and to combatting desertification, while other linkages are also becoming better known. Scientific and policy analysis is underway to further our understanding of these issues. On the other hand, what remains widely unknown and underdeveloped are the ways that human and social values, principles, attitudes and behaviour impact on the ecosystem. By joining forces and building partnerships, organizations can address these issues and be far more effective and efficient than by working in isolation within their own structures and using only their own methods.

The shortcomings and weaknesses of organizational structures, which, in some cases, lead to misuse of resources and scattered efforts in the management of these subjects, still need to be further addressed. A potential exists to improve organizational elements, such as management, leadership and the building of additional partnerships, to secure the road to sustainable development.

The concern about improving coordination and developing synergy at the level of the organization has been evoked frequently in the public sector, but changes have not yet been fully implemented, in contrast to private organizations, where this has been one of the keys for its success. Yet the search for synergy, however, has been recognized as essential for the achievement of sustainable development.

Synergy - which goes beyond simple coordination - can only be built on partnerships which require careful planning and great dedication, as these cannot be implemented "by decree". As in all human and social relationships, in order to achieve synergy, people need, in a consistent manner, to meet periodically, exchange information regularly, share concerns, approaches and views, and build teams whose culture and sense of belonging is greater or at least equal to that of the individual organizations themselves.

Organizational change should be accompanied by efforts at the level of general education, aiming at transforming educational programmes to raise awareness about, and eliminate obstacles to, sustainable development. Not enough is being done, however, to change educational systems, both formal and non-formal, especially to develop widely the values, principles and attitudes that encourage sustainable behaviour and discourage those that lead to unsustainable behaviour²³.

As mentioned in the introduction, the paper only posits the value of these elements; much more time would be needed to address them in full. They remain therefore most relevant subjects for further organizational and educational research within the framework of international organizations and sustainable development.

(b) Processes leading to synergy

Synergy initiatives that take advantage of, and build upon, the existing links among the Rio conventions, especially at the national and local levels, and add value to their individual implementation processes, could also become instrumental in gradually developing partnerships, common approaches and greater collaboration among these and other international instruments dealing with subjects relevant to environment and sustainable development. Key issues related to such processes would include:

- (i) The process must be country-driven with the clear ultimate goal of assisting countries in their efforts to pursue sustainable development policies at the national level and to facilitate their effective participation and interaction in global efforts. Linkages in the implementation of conventions must be explored among relevant government agencies.
- (ii) The need to ensure appropriate coordination at the global level, of efforts and involvement of organizations within and outside the United Nations system, taking into account the issue management

²³ A leading negotiator in several of the Rio agreements, Ambassador Bo Kjellén of Sweden, expressed this in a very eloquent way by saying that "the climate change agenda must ultimately re-programme the genetic codes of our civilization". Although he said it in the context of the climate change negotiations, I believe that this assertion is applicable to sustainable development in general.

system introduced by the Secretary General in 1997 as part of the United Nations reform process²⁴.

(iii) The need to explore further the suggestion made by several consultations, such as the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN)²⁵ "that synergistic effects among Rio conventions could be maximized through the adoption of sub-regional and regional projects and programmes." The potential of regional and sub-regional efforts to address sustainable development issues is becoming increasingly recognized particularly to provide a bridge between national and international fora. If the appropriate organizational changes are not fully implemented, however, these efforts may lead to an additional layer of bureaucratic, ineffective and inefficient institutional obstacles.

D. Conclusions and recommendations

In the recent years, the organizational development literature²⁶ has overwhelmingly acknowledged that the sharing of power (including knowledge, resources and information) provides greater strength to leaders and managers, thereby generating greater interest and availability in others and thus contributing to enhancing their own power. Whenever an institution establishes partners and jointly raises its productively with them, its own prestige and capacity is enhanced. A good example was the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) during its first years when it implemented the catalytic role which was requested to exercise by its founders. For example, UNEP's Oceans and Coastal Areas Programme Activity Centre (OCA/PAC) for many years successfully carried out a catalytic role, motivating other organizations to undertake actions jointly in the various regional seas programmes around the world.

If the holistic approach, the catalytic role or the search for synergies is so widely recognized as important and clearly identified as a major need in policy-making, then why is it so difficult to implement in practice? I will try to explain and provide the reasons based on my own experience and reflections.

If we could summarize the main elements that play a key role in the development of synergies among international programmes, and the lack of which, at the same time, inhibit the achievement of such synergies, we could, among others, point at the following:

- (a) ***lack of an organizational development awareness in international organizations***. Weak leadership and management approaches lead to the inability to address longer-term objectives, to provide vision, administer resources or manage continuous evaluation of programmes. What is essential and obvious in private business is still often not considered in international public affairs where leaders do not always have the necessary management and leadership training. The development of skills for conflict-resolution or negotiation are also essential to achieving synergies as organizations sometimes have conflicting needs and objectives.
- (b) ***fragmented and specialized approach*** in dealing with issues that are inevitably interconnected and which therefore, require interconnected solutions. Furthermore, the inter-connectivity pertains not only to technical aspects, but also to social perceptions and political requirements of the issues. Multilateral and bilateral agencies consistently approve funds for projects and activities that are, to a large extent, not only short-term oriented, and further, are not required to coordinate their efforts with similar initiatives. Thus, they frequently fail to contribute to substantive or sustainable capacity building.
- (c) ***short-sighted political objectives*** of government agencies (recipient and donor alike) who expect results in the short-term because they need to show results by the end of the year or the term in office, leads to sub-optimal results. Equally, demands for quick results made by governing bodies do not allow managers sufficient time to work on developing synergies. Increased dialogue with delegates representing governments is thus required as well as with

²⁴ "Renewing the United Nations: A programme for reform" (A/51/950), 14 July 1997, page 80, paragraph 248.

²⁵ AMCEN Special Consultation on the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol and related multilateral environmental agreements, held in Nairobi, Kenya on 19-23 October 1998.

²⁶ There are many excellent texts to recommend in the field of organizational development. It would be impossible however, given the short-time available, to provide an exhaustive list in this regard. Two authors are nevertheless highly recommended as an introduction to the subject, namely Ronald A. Heifetz with "Leadership without easy answers", 1994 and Stephen Covey with "The Seven habits of highly effective people" and "Principle-centered leadership".

NGOs, on benefits of addressing long-term objectives and seeking synergies. Public participation would ensure acceptance and support to long-term plans and thus, facilitate government's acceptance. Policy dialogues and public debates, however, are rarely part of project or plan preparation. At the most, they are parallel or side events in the policy-making process, mostly tolerated for window-dressing purposes.

(d) the obstacles above spawn another negative consequence, which creates a vicious circle from which it is difficult to break free, namely, the **competition for international funds** (multilateral and bilateral) among international organizations. Owing to the limited resources available and the numerous organizations, there is increasing competition for the same resources available which is further aggravated by the fact that development assistance is shrinking in some donor countries²⁷.

(e) another element in the vicious circle, is competition at the international level often motivated by **competition at the national level** among ministries and government agencies serving as focal point to different international organizations and thereby duplicating requests for technical assistance and funds for projects with similar objectives but implemented by separate national and international agencies.

In order to address development in a sustainable manner, the above obstacles or shortcomings should be addressed urgently, by:

(a) **Improving organizational capabilities.** International organizations in particular need to be encouraged and supported by their governing bodies to allocate the required priority to improving organizational and management capabilities and to seek synergies with partner organizations, in order to re-shape the institutions required by sustainable development in the coming years.

(b) **Adopting a trial and error approach.** A process towards integration and search for synergies cannot be undertaken globally because it would require previous agreement on principles, criteria and procedures which would take too long to negotiate. Therefore, a better approach is to move forward on a trial-and-error basis, where short-term issues are worked out with a longer-term vision in mind, based on organizational change (improving management, decentralization, openness, partnerships, sharing resources and skills, etc). In this regard, some positive initiatives are already being developed, for example on international trade and the Rio conventions involving the WTO, UNEP, UNCTAD, NGOs, private business and governments. Many areas, however, remain largely unattended.

(c) **A national and local focus.** The servicing of national and local needs should be the main purpose or *raison d'être* of international organizations, including assistance in understanding and participating in global issues. Synergies at the international level need to be geared towards nurturing and supporting synergies at the national and local levels as well as the relations among themselves.

(d) The above actions can be undertaken with a short-term approach; others however, must be addressed immediately but with longer-term objectives, combining multiple and joint efforts by relevant partners at all levels: specifically, there is a great need to develop and disseminate widely **an ethical framework for sustainable development**. A great deal of effort is still needed to develop an ethical framework that can be widely accepted and integrated into educational systems that will ensure a solid base for addressing the challenges of sustainable development. Without a solid and well integrated set of principles, the best of actions will remain ineffective and wasted as an alternative set of values exists which undermines and impedes sustainable development.

The development of sustainable development ethics requires some research but above all it requires wide and in-depth discussion with all sectors of society, different cultures and a massive effort of integration into educational systems around the world. Some efforts have already been developed in this direction, but what remains to be done is the undertaking of a wider consultation to encompass all relevant sectors in society and countries around the world, followed by a wide and extensive dissemination to ensure integration into all educational systems around the world. It

²⁷ Funding from donor agencies often requests that projects seek "cost-effectiveness". However, cost-effectiveness is often linked with cutting or reducing expenses and not with increasing efficiency and effectiveness, at the cost of discarding appropriate management training or addressing long-term objectives. Funding criteria should look for improved organizational management, decentralization and systematic search of synergies.

is clearly a long-term enterprise but one that can not be postponed much longer. It can be achieved with a clear long-term strategy and it would provide a meaningful entry into the new millennium.

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