IPI ROUNDTABLE

"Strengthening International Environmental Governance: Exploring System-Wide Responses"

<u>**Meeting Summary**</u>

On Wednesday 14 December 2011, the International Peace Institute and the Nordic Council of Ministers of the Environment held a roundtable discussion to consider the topic of reform options for international environmental governance (IEG) in the context of the Belgrade Process, the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome and the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) summit. The main goals of the meeting were to:

- Using the Belgrade Process and Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome as a starting point, begin discussions on comprehensive and coherent options for IEG reform,
- Create a better understanding of the various considerations and needs involved in IEG reform,
- Create a picture of the current IEG and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) architecture to help find synergies between the various parts,
- Examine the links between policy and financing, and
- Promote strategic engagement at the regional and national level.

The group of representatives from UN Member States, the United Nations system and academia offered an invaluable combination of practical, political and theoretical expertise. The half-day event featured several informative presentations on the current challenges facing IEG and MEAs, which were followed by an insightful and lively discussion. In addition, practitioners gave a thorough summary of how IEG is being implemented in the field and how national level concerns should be taken into account during Rio+20 negotiations next year.

Three major threads emerged during the discussion. Conversation around **process** tended to focus an eye forward towards Rio+20 and how best to ensure progress next June, as well as what states and policy-makers should see as ideal in terms of an IEG architecture and how it relates to organizational management, both in terms of the normative and operationally. Participants also spent much time on the subject of **coherence**. This tended both towards coherence between different aspects of IEG and broader efforts by the international system and coherence between the global architecture and local and national implementation. Finally, participants discussed the pros and cons of **consolidation** of previous IEG outcomes, with particular attention paid towards finding synergies within MEA clusters.

<u>**Process**</u>

Beginning with the Belgrade Process in 2009 and continuing with the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome in 2010, the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental

Governance have provided valuable inputs to governments in their preparation for the Rio+20 conference. One of the responses identified in the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome is to develop system-wide strategies for the environment. This will ideally provide the ways and the means for the international system to bring about better environmental outcomes through collective action.

This conversation has continued through discussions of the "Friends of the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD)" meetings sponsored by the government of Kenya over the past year. Through these efforts, a few key issues are emerging. Issues of IEG will be integral for building a new international architecture for sustainable development. Whatever the outcome of negotiations, UNEP is an important part of the environmental architecture and should be strengthened, though what that means is up for debate. The aim of an IEG system should be to achieve an efficient, effective and coherent governance system that is able to effectively respond to member states' needs and is based on the three pillars of economic, environmental and social considerations.

The Rio+20 Conference presents an opportunity to move this debate forward. IEG-reform is a complex process with several important and interlinked dimensions. However, a consensus will provide guidance and support for a strong push for more coherent UN work on sustainable development. It can help the UN strengthen its work on sustainable development by bringing focus to sometimes disparate and competing strands of UN competencies. However, to take advantage of this opportunity, member states must work together to find a common vision. In the end a successful Rio can create the political will for a continued process beyond and can help the UN system achieve more than the sum of its parts.

Coherence

Meeting participants also highlighted the importance of bringing coherence to the UN's work on the environment and sustainable development, but also to the UN system's work overall. This coalesced into two general threads. First, the concept of delivering as one at the country level should be both the focus and the starting point of discussions. Second, strengthening the mechanisms for system-wide coherence should be utilized to support this aim.

In the words of a Minister of the Environment of an unnamed developing nation related by one speaker, "You are the UN. You are here to support my country." At the national and regional level, examples such as the UNDP/UNEP Poverty and Environment Initiative (PEI) and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) can offer a roadmap for mainstreaming the environment into UN work at the country level. Indeed, the PEI is a good instance of agency partnerships being able to leverage complementary core competencies. In both of these examples however, there the central tension between sustainable environmental management on the one hand and rapid poverty reduction on the other still remains.

One of the central challenges, aside from sheer capacity to manage all the balls in the air, will be to find the right mix of incentives for maximum national buy-in. To this end, the UN can simplify the tasks required by functioning as "broker" and offering support countries on investments, knowledge and operational activities. At regional level as well as at national the key is to design incentives that would encourage a closer UN system cooperation.

At the global level, the problem of overall systemic coherence remains. There are a multitude of cases of overlapping mandates and unclear division of labor within the UN system's work, particularly in the fields of environment and development. The IEG architecture needs to better equip the agencies that manage to process to meet needs as they arise. Additionally, any IEG reform needs to address the widespread turf battles, silos, and unsound competition for funding.

On the issue of funding, the linkages between finance and policy need to be stronger in order to fill the gap between policy making and implementation. Financing needs to be sufficient, predictable and coherent with the rest of the UN's funding strategies. This can help to increase transparency, enhance efficiency and improve coordination and management of financial flows. The discussion highlighted that current funding structures fulfill none of these requirements. However, key questions remain such as what *is* a sufficient funding level and how do we better assess the interplay of the various actors working on issues around the environment.

While it is tempting to approach environmental issues in a strictly programmatic way to ensure concrete outcomes, there is a risk of loosing the big picture. On the other hand, systemic approaches tend to be long term in nature and so, are very hard to reorient to quickly changing facts on the ground. Additionally, it is sometimes difficult to get national buy-in without the concrete outcomes offered by a programmatic approach. This tension between the systemic and programmatic will need to be addressed.

Finally, UNDP, UNEP and other international agencies need to elaborate a joint vision for sustainable development and the environment. This will help to clarify roles, responsibilities, tasks, and synergies, both among agencies and between national, regional, global levels. For system-wide coordination it is also important to examine and improve existing mechanisms such as the Environment Management Group (EMG), system wide frameworks like the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), and the role of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). While it is a relatively common view that UNEP should play a central role in this, there is not yet clarity as to what type of enhancements member states should propose. This belies vagueness about the reform implications for governance structures that allow member states to address shifting environmental and development challenges on the one hand and the managerial organizations and agencies that carry out those decisions and mandates on the other.

Consolidation

Lastly, the MEAs form the core of the environmental dimensions of IFSD. Currently, gaps in implementation exist and there is great potential for cooperation, which was an important topic of discussion. This dialogue focused mainly on the topic of global management and of country level compliance burdens. The MEAs are at the core of the environmental dimension of the IFSD. However, serious gaps exist in terms of implementation.

Most pressing is the fragmentation of MEAs across the international system. Over the past decades, there has been a proliferation of secretariat and agendas, as well as the associated meetings that constitute a drain on capacity for even the most resourceful countries. For developing countries, this

often presents a serious challenge to balance compliance with and implementation of MEAs with national development plans. At the very least, practices such as shared accounting and reporting can considerably lighten the burden and free up resources for more effective implementation at the country level.

Rio+20 has initiated a process that aims to further develop and broaden efforts to enhance synergies among related MEAs. To this end, the common registry or MEAs being compiled is a promising development. Likewise for the consolidation that has taken place on the chemical and waste convention cluster. This process has led to the administrative joining of three separate conventions: Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam. While these three conventions' secretariats were housed in the same building, they had independent decision making processes and administrative capacity. Over the course of three years, the conventions have managed to merge much of the administrative functions and have appointed an interim joint head. While program coordination and joint decision-making have not been instituted yet, the hope is that that will soon follow.

Hopefully, this example can be applied in part to the six biodiversity conventions; the Convention on Biodiversity, the Convention International Trade in Endangered Species, the Convention on Migratory Species, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the World Heritage Convention. These conventions are administered by three agencies with very different mandates (UNEP, UNESCO and FAO), have separate reporting requirements and need to be coordinated for efficient implementation.

As the chemical convention process has shown, the guiding principles for finding MEA synergies should be member driven with the autonomy of the convention being respected. Whatever synergies we can find will most likely come incrementally, as MEAs are slowly brought together. This consolidation will likely be easier in some areas than others; for example, in technical work as opposed to politically charged issues. Three major areas for synergies amongst MEAs are the interface between science and policy, the national level implementation of action plans, and national reporting. Regardless, during any process of consolidation, future MEAs must be taken into account to ensure that the problem of fragmentation does not worsen.

Rio+20 will provide member states with a political mandate to provide recommendations for promoting these synergies. For instance, one meeting participant suggested convening an "Intergovernmental Working Group on Synergies Between MEAs". Within clusters, we can choose the most workable or most important MEAs to synergize rather than needing to approach the entire cluster in one go. It is evident that seeing these conventions in context at the national level is necessary to ensure effective implementation.

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