UN80: Reform of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements

Around the Triple Planetary Crisis of Pollution, Biodiversity, and Climate Change

Edited by Felix Dodds and Chris Spence

Reflections by Liz Dowdeswell

A sdg 2030 Series Report by Stakeholder Forum

Stakeholder Forum
for a sustainable future

ABOUT STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future (SF) is a not-for-profit international organisation working to advance sustainable development at all levels. For more than 25 years, SF has been a bridge between stakeholders of all kinds and the international intergovernmental forums where sustainable development, and in particular the environment and issues related to its good governance, are debated, global goals are established, and strategies are mapped out. Our work aims to enhance open, accountable, and participatory decision-making and good governance for sustainable development through the continuous involvement and participation of stakeholders in these forums, and in the action that flows from their work.

To this end, we work with a diversity of stakeholders globally on international policy development and advocacy; stakeholder engagement and consultation; media and communications, and capacity building – all with the ultimate objective of promoting progressive outcomes on sustainable development through an open and participatory approach. In consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1996, SF also works with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) under an MOU to expand the engagement and participation of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders in the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) processes.

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INTRODUCTION

Felix Dodds and Chris Spence

"This is a good time to take a look at ourselves and see how fit for purpose we are in a set of circumstances which, let's be honest, are quite challenging for multilateralism and for the UN," Guy Ryder, Under-Secretary-General for Policy and chair of the UN80 Task Force.

There is no question that the world is in one of its most difficult periods and that multilateralism is under threat. These are not just the ones the UN refers to as the Triple Planetary Crisis – climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution –but also migration and displacement, conflict, and the emergence of many new technologies that will impact our societies in ways we can only imagine.

The UN80 Initiative was set up to rebuild multilateralism for this time and to ensure that the United Nations is fit for purpose.

This report focuses on the opportunity to finish the work of the former UNEP Executive Directors Klaus Toepfer and Achim Steiner on "clustering" the UN treaties on pollution (chemicals and waste), biodiversity, and climate change. It also examines how the relevant science bodies for these three clusters can cooperate more effectively and proposes that the Global Environment Ministers Forum be re-established to meet in the year the UN Environment Assembly does not convene.

The proposals are not new and have the benefit of proof of concept, as the pollution conventions of Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm have already been successfully clustered. We believe the best way to move forward now, and build on the success in clustering the pollution treaties, is first to bring the biodiversity conventions under UNEP into a cluster. After this, we propose bringing together the two "climate" conventions – the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer – under another organisational cluster.

With the proposal for the re-establishment of the Global Environment Ministers Forum, we again have proof of concept. There is no question that we need a place to address the interlinkages between the three issue clusters, and that this work should be informed by the scientific bodies.

What we are suggesting in this report addresses the three focus areas of UN80 reform, namely:

1. Improving internal efficiency and effectiveness, cutting red tape, and optimising the UN's global footprint by relocating some functions to lower-cost duty stations
2. A mandate implementation review (in a way to strengthen the environmental side of the multilateral environmental agreement)
3. Exploring whether structural changes and programme realignment are needed across the UN System

We hope that UNEA 7 might address the suggestions in this report by:

Requesting the UNEP Executive Director to produce a report for UNEA 8 on options for the clustering of the Biodiversity Conventions under UNEP and the clustering of the

two climate conventions of the UNFCCC and the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer

It also further requests the UNEP Executive Director to look at how the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and the recently-established Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution (ISP-CWP), and the Global Environmental Outlook reports can also better contribute to improving the UN system's ability to deliver transformative change.

The UN80 process offers a chance to build a stronger and more effective environmental pillar as we address the huge challenges in front of us.

As Guy Ryder stated recently, we need a "UN system which is able to deliver more effectively, to strengthen and consolidate trust in multilateral action … A system which can convey to public opinion and political decision-makers that this is an organization worth investing in [and] that this should be your preferred option when it comes to meeting the challenges of the future."

Felix Dodds is an adjunct professor at the University of North Carolina's Water Institute, a consultant advising stakeholders on United Nations engagement, and a Fellow at Stakeholder Forum. He has written or edited 26 books, including ***Heroes of Environmental Diplomacy*** (Routledge, 2022), ***Tomorrow's People and New Technologies*** (Routledge, 2021), and ***Negotiating the Sustainable Development Goals*** (Routledge, 2016). Felix was also a key contributor to the UN's sustainable development initiatives, including chairing the 2011 UN DPI NGO conference that proposed the first Sustainable Development Goals.

Chris Spence is an environmentalist, writer, and former leader of non-profits in New York, New Zealand, and California. He has consulted for the UN, IUCN, and IISD, working in over 40 countries. An award-winning writer, his books include ***Heroes of Environmental Diplomacy*** (Routledge, 2022) and ***Global Warming: Personal Solutions for a Healthy Planet*** (2005). Chris has also served as a journalist.

REFLECTIONS by Liz Dowdeswell

Unprecedented times. A period of great uncertainty. Fast-paced technological developments. Geopolitical distress and fragmentation. Deepening inequity and lack of empathy. A questioning of values and ethics. No safe space for respectful and civil conversations and building consensus. Does that describe the moment?

And yet the world community has a track record of success. Eighty years of multilateralism and collaboration. Progress in lifting people out of poverty. Reduction in morbidity and mortality. Increasing levels of literacy. Protection of endangered species and reversing environmental degradation. Identification of a global agenda. More to be done to be sure – much unfinished business.

Well-functioning organisations strive to be relevant, responsive, and resilient. And so it is that the world community is asking itself some serious questions. Does the United Nations remain fit for purpose? Does it demonstrate relevance and responsiveness to a changing and complex world of simultaneous polycrises? Does it have the tools and resources to be

resilient? Does this club of nations hold itself accountable for achieving real results? If not, what is the alternative?

For several decades now, the United Nations Environment Programme has been diligently assessing the state of the environment, bringing new science and knowledge to bear, responding to evolving concepts of sustainability, contributing collaboratively to the design and execution of a global plan – the Sustainable Development Goals. And always on the table is the dialogue about environmental governance and organisational architecture.

The authors of this publication have sensed this moment of necessity and opportunity. Building on past discussions, demonstrating proof of concept and competence, and harnessing the insights of a broad community, they enter into the conversation about UN reform. Their singular focus is on achieving scientific coherence, policy alignment and operational efficiencies through the clustering of major environmental agreements.

There are choices to be made. Will the vision be bold and ambitious, or will a more cautious and pragmatic incremental approach meet with consensus? Can hope be turned into tangible action, commitment into actual results? Is it really possible to think systemically, integrating the goals of economic prosperity, environmental stewardship, and social and cultural cohesion? Do we have the courage to deal with the inevitable trade-offs among competing objectives in the search for a common cause? Is there persuasive and persistent leadership that will build trust amongst all parties?

What we do know is that the world seems to have been turned upside down. These extraordinary times demand the very best of us, and we will be tested. Anxiously wringing our hands will not unleash the collective potential inspiration that we can bring. A process that considers diverse views, that seeks out multiple perspectives in genuine and transparent dialogue, is required to be considered trustworthy of protecting the public interest. It is a shared responsibility. Do not doubt that the accumulated insight, wisdom, and experience of UNEP matters.

The path to peace, prosperity, and protection of the planet will inevitably point to fundamental ethical issues of solidarity, respect, and rebalancing of power. Sustainability is a framework that recognises our interdependence and mutual vulnerability. If applied in a spirit of humility, optimism, and humanity, together we could save lives and livelihoods.

Liz Dowdeswell, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (1992-1998)

UN REFORM: IS IT TIME TO RENEW THE IDEA OF CLUSTERING THE MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS?

by Felix Dodds and Chris Spence

It was Winston Churchill who said, “Never let a good crisis go to waste.” He suggests that even in a crisis, which we surely are for multilateralism, we can find opportunities for positive change and progress.

We raised the issue of clustering environmental conventions in our recent article for IPS, “How Should the United Nations Respond to Its Funding Crisis?”

This article expands the idea of clustering the key environmental conventions to strengthen international environmental governance, and the United Nations Environment Programme, the body that is tasked with being:

“The leading global authority on the environment. It unites 193 Member States in an effort to find solutions to climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste, collectively known as the triple planetary crisis.” (UNEP, 2025)

We suggest strengthening UNEP in these three areas. To do so, we will need to delve a little deeper into the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating this approach into the UN reform process.

According to the World Trade Organisation, there are over 250 Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) in force (WTO, 2025). Although an older paper by UNEP put the figure closer to 500. This proposal does not attempt to address all of these.

Many of the environmental conventions were established through the relevant governing body of UNEP at the time. As they become ratified conventions, they have their own governing bodies, and the pertinent issues of climate, biodiversity, and chemicals, in the case of the triple planetary crisis, are no longer in the centre policy arena of UNEP.

Since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, there has been growing recognition that the proliferation of environmental challenges necessitates the formation of numerous global and regional conventions to address issues ranging from climate change to biodiversity loss and pollution control.

This has led to a fragmented set of environmental conventions with overlapping work, increased inefficiencies, and gaps while addressing interconnected similar concerns. It makes it more difficult to see the benefits that could occur from synergies and linkages between the various conventions. It reduces the ability of UNEP to be that global voice for the environment.

Klaus Toepfer, the UNEP Executive Director (1998-2006), initiated the conversation around the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), suggesting that to strengthen the environmental pillar, member states should consider clustering the key environmental conventions. This resulted in the UNEP Governing Council adopting a decision in February 2002 to support the programmatic clustering of related Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA), including the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions.

This decision followed the work of a UNEP Intergovernmental Group on International Environmental Governance. In November 2001, the secretariats of environmental conventions prepared an issues paper outlining the potential for closer cooperation in areas like capacity-building and information sharing. The 2002 Governing Council's decision specifically supported further consideration of clustering measures and the undertaking of pilot projects. This move aimed to facilitate an integrated life-cycle approach to managing substances covered by these conventions.

“(n) The clustering approach to multilateral environmental agreements holds some promise, and issues relating to the location of secretariats, meeting agendas, and also programmatic cooperation between such bodies and with UNEP should be addressed.” (UNEP, 2002)

It goes on to suggest that in science, which is a fundamental part of UNEP’s mandate, that:

“27. UNEP should continue, in close cooperation with the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements, to enhance such synergies and linkages including on issues related to scientific assessments on matters of common concern.” (UNEP, 2002)

There was also enhanced support for enhancing collaboration among multilateral environmental agreement secretariats in specific areas where common issues arise, such as current work among the chemicals and waste multilateral environmental agreement

secretariats and including the interim secretariats, as well as biological diversity-related conventions. Climate wasn't mentioned because it isn't a convention which UNEP has any administrative responsibility to it was set up by the UN General Assembly and not a process initiated by UNEP.

Final thoughts from Clustering environmental conventions—bringing related agreements under a cohesive framework—offers a pathway to achieving:

Enhanced Policy Coordination greater coherence, efficiency, and impactful outcomes.

Below, we explore the myriad benefits of this approach.

1. Enhanced Policy Coherence

One of the most significant advantages of clustering environmental conventions is the creation of a unified policy framework. Environmental issues such as deforestation, water pollution, and climate change are deeply interconnected, meaning that actions in one area often impact others. Clustering facilitates harmonised decision-making across conventions, reducing contradictions and ensuring that policies complement rather than undermine each other. For instance, coordinating climate action strategies with biodiversity protection can prevent unintended consequences, such as renewable energy installations that harm critical habitats.

2. Greater Resource Efficiency

Managing multiple standalone environmental conventions can strain financial and human resources. Clustering enables the pooling of resources, reducing redundancies in administrative functions such as reporting, monitoring, and capacity-building. A centralised secretariat or shared platforms can significantly lower operational costs while improving the delivery of technical and financial assistance to member states. This efficiency is particularly beneficial for developing countries with limited capacities to engage with numerous, separate agreements.

3. Streamlined Reporting and Compliance

Countries that are parties to multiple environmental conventions often face the burden of duplicative reporting requirements, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Clustering conventions allow for the standardisation of reporting formats and timelines, making it easier for parties to comply with obligations. Moreover, a unified compliance mechanism can provide a more comprehensive assessment of a country's environmental performance, fostering transparency and accountability.

4. Amplified Synergies Between Conventions

Environmental conventions often share similar objectives, such as the conservation of ecosystems or the mitigation of environmental degradation. By clustering, these agreements can leverage their shared goals to amplify their collective impact. For example, integrating the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) can create synergies that address multiple challenges simultaneously. Joint initiatives, such as ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation, benefit from the strengths of multiple frameworks working in concert.

5. Improved Stakeholder Engagement

Clustering conventions can make it easier for stakeholders—including governments, non-governmental organisations, businesses, and local communities—to engage with

international environmental governance. A streamlined system reduces complexity, fostering better understanding and participation. Stakeholders are more likely to contribute effectively when they can navigate a cohesive framework rather than a fragmented landscape of isolated agreements.

6. Stronger Focus on Cross-Cutting Issues

The clustering of conventions provides an opportunity to address cross-cutting issues that may be overlooked in isolated agreements. Topics such as sustainable development, gender equity, and indigenous rights are relevant across many environmental agreements but often lack a singular platform for discussion. Clustering creates the space for these critical issues to be integrated into the broader environmental agenda, ensuring that they receive the attention and action they deserve.

7. Enhanced Global Collaboration

Environmental challenges are inherently global in nature, requiring collective action and international cooperation. Clustering conventions fosters a sense of unity among parties, encouraging collaboration and information-sharing. This unified approach strengthens partnerships and builds trust among nations, which is essential for tackling transboundary and global ecological issues. Additionally, a clustered framework can promote the sharing of best practices and innovative solutions across conventions.

8. Strengthened Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective monitoring and evaluation are crucial for assessing the progress of environmental agreements. Clustering conventions allows for the development of integrated monitoring systems that provide a holistic view of environmental trends and outcomes. This comprehensive approach helps identify gaps, track progress, and inform evidence-based decision-making. For instance, a unified system could better assess the cumulative impacts of climate policies on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

9. Increased Political Momentum

A clustered approach to environmental conventions can generate greater political momentum by presenting a cohesive and compelling narrative about global ecological priorities. A unified framework simplifies communication and advocacy, making it easier to rally political support and mobilise public awareness. This momentum is critical for securing funding, driving ambitious targets, and maintaining long-term commitment to environmental objectives.

10. Addressing Emerging Challenges

The environmental landscape is constantly evolving, with new challenges such as plastic pollution, zoonotic diseases, and the impacts of artificial intelligence on ecosystems coming to the forefront. Clustering conventions allow for a more agile and adaptive governance system that can respond to emerging issues in a coordinated manner. By working together, conventions can identify gaps in existing frameworks and develop joint strategies to address novel threats.

Conclusion

The clustering of environmental conventions represents a pragmatic and forward-thinking approach to global environmental governance. By enhancing policy coherence, improving resource efficiency, and amplifying synergies, clustering can help address the complex and interconnected nature of today's ecological challenges. While the process of integration may require political will and institutional reforms, the long-term benefits far outweigh

the initial hurdles. In an era where environmental issues are becoming increasingly urgent, clustering conventions offers a pathway to a more efficient, effective, and inclusive global response. It is a call to action for nations and stakeholders to work together to safeguard the planet for future generations.

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THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BASEL, ROTTERDAM, AND STOCKHOLM CONVENTIONS SHOWS HOW CLUSTERING MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS BRINGS MULTIPLE BENEFITS TO THE ENVIRONMENT

By Michael Stanley-Jones

The UN80 Initiative, unveiled in March by Secretary-General António Guterres, is a system-wide effort to "reaffirm the UN's relevance for a rapidly changing world."[i]

The Initiative comes at a time of brutal budget cuts across the UN system.[ii] The United Nations High Commission for Refugees is cutting 3,500 jobs and making reductions in senior positions and offices to manage budget shortfalls. The World Health Organisation is expected to cut 20-25% of its global staff. Cuts at The World Food Programme range up to 30%.

And yet the needs served by the United Nations remain stark. The UN appealed for US$29 billion in funding for the Global Humanitarian Overview 2025 to assist nearly 180 million vulnerable people, including refugees, in December 2024. Near the midpoint of the year, just $5.6 billion - less than 13 per cent - had been received.

Facing this harsh fiscal environment, the Secretary-General established seven thematic clusters under the UN80 Initiative covering peace and security, humanitarian action, development (Secretariat and UN system), human rights, training and research, and specialised agencies to improve coordination, reduce fragmentation, and realign functions where needed.

The UN80 Task Force is scheduled to release its recommendations at the end of July.

In their timely opinion piece, "UN Reform: Is it Time to Renew the Idea of Clustering the Major Environmental Agreements?", Felix Dodds and Chris Spence advocate for "clustering

[i] United Nations (June 23, 2025). UN80 Initiative: What it is – and why it matters to the world | UN News.

[ii] United Nations (June 16, 2025). Brutal cuts mean brutal choices warns UN relief chief, launching 'survival appeal'. UN News.

key conventions and bringing scientific bodies to strengthen international environmental governance, while also offering potential cost savings."[iii]

"Currently, there are hundreds of different multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) in force, but perhaps only 20-30 core global MEAs with broad international participation," Dodds and Spence write.

Bringing the fragmented set of environmental conventions together in clusters to address the interconnected issues they address could strengthen their work, reduce inefficiencies, and fill significant gaps in how the UN approaches the triple plenary crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution.

There is one experience that suggests how such a clustering of MEA secretariats could be accomplished. In 2009, on an *ad interim* basis, the Joint Convention Services of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions was set up, preparatory to a decision by an extraordinary conferences of the parties of the three chemicals and wastes conventions to establish a joint Secretariat in February 2010.

I was hired as the first staff member assigned to serve the three conventions equally in December 2009, holding the position of Public Information Officer in the Rotterdam Convention Secretariat while acting on behalf of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions until August 2014. This gave me a ringside view of the process of "synergies" between the three clustered conventions.

My assignment covered media relations, public information and outreach, including helping manage the joint conventions' synergies website. The first lesson drawn from the experience of what we called "the synergies process" was that public information provided a fertile ground for joint activity between the three independent conventions.

A more important lesson concerns how the groundwork was successfully laid for the establishment of a joint 'BRS' Secretariat. The process needs to be owned and embraced by the Parties to the Conventions themselves. As legally independent entities, they must be the drivers of any envisioned reform.

A country-led working group was established with co-chairpersonship nominated by Parties from the North and South to steer the process. This ensured that the changes would have the political backing of the parties themselves.

A third lesson is that the leadership of the newly formed cluster of conventions' secretariat needed to be placed in one team. In practice, this meant consolidating the executives of the three conventions (on the UNEP side, as Rotterdam has a joint secretariat shared by UNEP and FAO). Having multiple executives retarded the synergies process. Reducing three executive posts down to one brought coherence as well as significant cost savings. The streamlining of secretariat staff further contributed to creating a more efficient, less costly secretariat.

Such administrative measures brought relatively these minor benefits when placed side-by-side with the larger structural reforms of the synergies process. Future conferences of the

[iii] Felix Dodds and Chris Spence (July 17, 2025). UN Reform: Is it Time to Renew the Idea of Clustering the Major Environmental Agreements? - Inter Press Service.

Parties (COPs) of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions are now held back-to-back on a biennial schedule.

For the more than 180 governments that attend the 'SuperCOPs', the efficiencies gained in time, travel and expense are obvious. The joint nature of the conferences also allows for a greater exchange of information and views between the parties to the conventions, helping close gaps in implementation and increasing understanding of how the actions of any one MEA impact the others.

Ultimately, this may be the highest benefit clustering of thematically-related instruments can bring to global environmental governance.

Michael Stanley-Jones is Environmental Policy and Governance Fellow at the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, Canada. He supports research that addresses the future of global environmental governance, with a focus on climate justice, rightsholders' participation in environmental decision-making, and sustainable development. He also contributes to fostering synergies between the Rio conventions (CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC) and discussions on the post-2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other UN processes.

He previously served as an Environmental Affairs Officer at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, within the Aarhus Convention Secretariat from 2004 to 2009. He joined the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as a Public Information Officer with the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions in 2009 and served as a Programme Management Officer in the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative / Action for Sustainable Development Goals from 2014 to 2022.

TOWARD ENHANCED SYNERGIES AMONG BIODIVERSITY-RELATED MEAS: ADDRESSING FRAGMENTATION WITH STRATEGIC COORDINATION

By Hugo-Maria Schally

Introduction

The governance of nature and biodiversity has evolved from early 20th-century treaties on hunting and migratory species to today's complex web of multilateral environmental agreements. Initial efforts, such as the 1902 Convention for the Protection of Birds useful to Agriculture, reflected utilitarian concerns, but by the 1970s, global awareness of extinction and habitat loss led to more systemic instruments, including the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971) and Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (1973). The 1992 Rio Earth Summit marked a turning point with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the first treaty to address biodiversity at genetic, species, and ecosystem levels, supported by the Global Environment Facility as a financial mechanism. Since then, biodiversity governance has expanded through additional conventions, protocols and scientific platforms such as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), but has also become increasingly fragmented.

Global biodiversity loss continues at alarming rates, despite this dense architecture of internationally agreed rules and institutions. Biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) span terrestrial, freshwater, and marine realms; regulate access to genetic resources and trade in species; set site-based protections; and address drivers of land degradation and desertification. Yet, implementation remains hampered by institutional fragmentation, duplicative reporting burdens, and misaligned financial flows.

Against this backdrop, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) provides a shared vision for 2030 and 2050. Converting that vision into action requires not merely more resources, but better coordination—within and across MEAs, and between MEAs and broader sustainable development processes.

This article (i) maps the mandates and legal obligations of the principal biodiversity-related MEAs, (ii) analyses governance fragmentation and financial constraints, (iii) explores political dynamics among key actors, and (iv) proposes realistic, equity-centred pathways for strategic coherence, with comparisons to the more integrated chemicals and waste cluster.

1. Mandates, Legal Functions, and Obligations of Key Biodiversity-Related MEAs

1.1 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Protocols

The CBD's tripartite objective—conservation, sustainable use, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources—is codified in Article 1. Parties are obligated to prepare and implement National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and to report at regular intervals. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety establishes precautionary and risk assessment procedures for the transboundary movement of Living Modified Organisms (LMOs), while the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilisation operationalises Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) by requiring national frameworks for access permits, benefit-sharing, and compliance measures. The KMGBF provides a global goal and target structure to guide CBD implementation.

1.2 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES regulates international trade through a system of appendices and permits, supported by compliance review and trade-related measures. Its focus is targeted—ensuring that trade does not threaten species' survival—complementing broader conservation duties under CBD. CITES' decisions and periodic reviews create quasi-regulatory effects at national borders, with enforcement typically delegated to customs and wildlife authorities.

1.3 Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

CMS requires range states to cooperate to conserve migratory species and their habitats, often via MoUs and specialised regional agreements. Its 'umbrella' function has catalysed multiple instruments and action plans across taxa and flyways.

1.4 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Ramsar obliges Parties to designate wetlands of international importance and to promote their 'wise use.' Its compliance approach is facilitative and cooperative—anchored in site listing, monitoring, and the Montreux Record—rather than punitive measures.

1.5 World Heritage Convention (WHC)

The WHC, administered by UNESCO, integrates natural and cultural heritage through site nomination, protection, and monitoring. While enforcement is largely reputational (e.g., inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger), the Convention has proven influential in safeguarding globally significant ecosystems and landscapes.

1.6 International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)

ITPGRFA establishes a Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-Sharing (MLS) for a defined list of crops and forages essential to food security. The proceeds from that system finances on-the-ground projects that sustain agrobiodiversity and farmer resilience. The Treaty complements CBD/Nagoya by providing sector-specific ABS tailored to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

1.7 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

UNCCD aims to combat desertification and mitigate drought effects through national action programmes and regional cooperation. Its land-use orientation connects directly to biodiversity and climate agendas, particularly on ecosystem restoration, drought resilience, and sustainable land management.

1.8 Agreement under UNCLOS on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)

The most recent addition to the MEA system for nature and biodiversity, the BBNJ Agreement, which has yet to enter into force, addresses conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction—roughly two-thirds of the ocean. Its four pillars encompass marine genetic resources (including benefit-sharing), area-based management tools (including marine protected areas), environmental impact assessments, and capacity building/technology transfer. It complements the CBD, whose scope is limited to areas under national jurisdiction. The Agreement foresees a COP, subsidiary scientific/technical bodies, a secretariat, and compliance arrangements; it also provides for benefit-sharing modalities and a voluntary trust fund to support participation and early implementation.

2. Governance Fragmentation and Institutional Complexity

Biodiversity governance is institutionally dispersed across UNEP (CBD, CITES, CMS), FAO (ITPGRFA), UNESCO (WHC), independent or IUCN-hosted secretariats (Ramsar), directly under UNGA (UNCCD) and the UNCLOS system (BBNJ). This dispersion yields divergent rules, reporting schedules, compliance approaches, and scientific interfaces. By contrast, the chemicals and waste cluster, where there is a uniform link to UNEP as a hosting institution, has progressively institutionalised synergies (shared services, coordinated COPs), producing clearer lines of authority and operational economies of scale.

2.1 UNEP and the Environment Management Group (EMG)

UNEP provides a convening platform and hosts several biodiversity secretariats; through the EMG it seeks to promote UN system-wide coherence. However, neither UNEP nor EMG

has binding authority over treaty bodies. Their effectiveness hinges on political buy-in, voluntary coordination, and financing. Past reviews have cautioned against proliferating stand-alone secretariats and have encouraged shared services and clustering where mandates allow.

2.2 Science-Policy Interfaces

IPBES has strengthened the knowledge base for biodiversity policy, but linkages to individual MEAs vary. Unlike the chemicals and waste cluster—which benefits from standing scientific committees (e.g., POPRC, CRC)—biodiversity MEAs rely on a patchwork of SBSTTAs, technical working groups, and ad hoc expert committees. A more connected science interface would support cross-MEA target setting, monitoring, and methodological alignment.

2.3 Legal and Operational Overlaps

Overlaps are evident in ABS (CBD/Nagoya, ITPGRFA, and BBNJ), site-based conservation (Ramsar, WHC, CBD), and species measures (CITES, CMS, CBD). Countries face capacity overload from multiple national focal points and asynchronous reporting cycles. Harmonised reporting and data platforms can reduce this burden; the CBD-led Data Reporting Tool for MEAs (DaRT) could be a promising step if broadly adopted.

3. Financial Mechanisms and Constraints

Finance is the critical enabler of synergy. CITES, RAMSAR and CMS lack a dedicated financial mechanism and rely on ad hoc external funding, including from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The GEF currently also serves as the financial mechanism for CBD and its Protocols, UNCCD, and is expected to support BBNJ-related actions as these kick in after its entry into force. Cumulatively, GEF has allocated over USD 22 billion in grants with substantial co-financing. Yet funding often flows through siloed windows aligned to individual MEAs, complicating multi-convention projects.

3.1 Beyond GEF: Complementary Funds

The ITPGRFA MLS provides resources to farmer-led conservation and breeding initiatives. Ramsar and WHC depend heavily on voluntary contributions and project finance, creating chronic underfunding for site management and monitoring. The BBNJ Agreement includes a voluntary trust fund to facilitate early implementation and participation by developing countries as well as a special trust fund to be alimented by proceeds from the use of genetic resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

3.2 Persistent Gaps and Fragmentation

Despite aggregate growth in biodiversity finance, Parties at CBD COP15 noted continuing gaps between ambition and available resources, alongside barriers to access and absorption. Integrated programming for cross-MEA outcomes remains limited. By comparison, the chemicals and waste cluster uses joint services and synchronised COPs to align budgeting cycles, capacity building, and technical assistance, creating a more coherent pipeline of support.

4. Political Dynamics and Major Actor Positions

Political economy shapes what institutional designs can achieve. Secretariats tend to protect their autonomy; governments weigh sovereignty, trade, and development priorities; and equity concerns remain salient. Contention around digital sequence information (DSI) and ABS illustrates divergent interests across MEAs.

4.1 Major Actors

- United States: outside CBD and Nagoya; engages actively in CITES and sectoral bodies; cautious on multilateral ABS.
- China: strong role in CBD/KMGBF; supportive of capacity building; cautious about far-reaching benefit-sharing modalities under BBNJ.
- India and Brazil: emphasise equity, technology transfer, and fair benefit-sharing; wary of burdens without commensurate support.
- European Union: generally cohesive advocate for biodiversity ambition and cross-MEA coordination, though internal sectoral trade-offs (e.g., agriculture) persist.
- African Group, strong on conservation and sustainable use, focused on the provision of additional financial resources and keen on the establishment of dedicated financial mechanisms.

4.2 Ocean Governance Politics

The BBNJ Agreement must navigate interactions with existing sectoral and regional bodies, notably RFMOs. Debates over institutional hierarchy, benefit-sharing of MGRs (including DSI), and standards for ABMTs/EIAs reflect broader geopolitics and North–South equity concerns.

5. Comparative Insights and Pathways Toward Strategic Coherence

5.1 Lessons from the Chemicals and Waste Cluster

The BRS Conventions operationalise synergies through: (i) joint services and administrative functions; (ii) back-to-back or joint COPs; (iii) harmonised technical assistance and capacity-building strategies; and (iv) standing scientific committees. While mandates remain distinct, institutionalised coordination has yielded efficiencies in budgeting, technical support, and compliance assistance. The Minamata Convention on Mercury, though separate, benefits from and contributes to shared technical platforms and capacity-building networks.

5.2 A Practical Synergy Agenda for Biodiversity MEAs

1) **Joint Work Plans under the KMGBF:** Develop time-bound, target-linked joint programs among CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar, WHC, UNCCD, ITPGRFA, and (as it matures) BBNJ. Prioritise cross-cutting areas such as ecosystem restoration, invasive species, wildlife trade, and genetic resources.
2) **Harmonised Reporting and Data Architecture:** Scale up the CBD DART platform across MEAs; align indicators, metadata standards, and submission cycles.
3) **Integrated Funding Windows:** Establish a GEF multi-MEA 'synergy window' either under the General Trust Fund or under the GBFF to finance projects that deliver jointly against KMGBF targets and related MEA obligations; incentivise national-level integrated programming and shared enabling activities.

4) **Coordinated Capacity Building:** Create a joint help-desk and roster of experts servicing multiple MEAs; bundle regional training; and promote South–South cooperation.
5) **Science Interface Linkages:** Mandate reciprocal participation of scientific bodies (e.g., SBSTTAs, CMS Scientific Council) and further formalise channels between IPBES and all biodiversity MEAs.
6) **UNEP/EMG and UNEA Leadership:** Utilise UNEA to adopt resolutions inviting MEAs and UN agencies to report on synergistic implementation and to pilot joint services.
7) **National-Level Integration:** Encourage 'Integrated Biodiversity Implementation Plans' that consolidate NBSAPs with Ramsar site strategies, WHC site management plans, CITES/CMS action plans, UNCCD NAPs, and—where relevant—BBNJ commitments. This reduces duplication and clarifies institutional responsibilities.

5.3 Guardrails for Equity and Effectiveness

Synergy must not translate into additional burdens on developing countries without resources. Equity guardrails can include: predictable finance; technology cooperation; fair access to genetic resources and DSI benefits; and attention to indigenous peoples' and local communities' rights. Political buy-in improves when integration demonstrably reduces workload (e.g., one integrated report instead of many) and mobilises additional finance.

6. Conclusion

Biodiversity MEAs collectively provide a comprehensive rulebook, but fragmentation blunts their impact. The KMGBF offers a unifying roadmap; the BBNJ Agreement extends governance to the global commons. By institutionalising joint work, harmonizing reporting and data, integrating finance, and strengthening science and coordination functions, the biodiversity regime can replicate the practical synergies achieved in the chemicals and waste cluster—while also emphasising equity and capacity. The alternative is continued inefficiency and missed outcomes during a critical decade for nature. Given the institutional complexities of the biodiversity-related MEAS, it might be advisable to establish a two-step process. Bringing the UNEP-hosted secretariats closer together and, based on possible results open a broader process to see how the other MEAs that are hosted by other institutions could be brought in.

Endnotes

[0] Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971), text and subsequent COP guidance on wise use and Montreux Record.

[1] Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 1 (Objectives).

[2] Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization; COP-MOP decisions NP-1/6 to NP-5/2 on implementation.

[3] FAO, International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), Benefit-Sharing Fund description (2018).

[4] Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), umbrella function and regional Agreements/MoUs across taxa.

[5] BBNJ Agreement scope: marine genetic resources (including benefit-sharing), area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments, and capacity building/technology transfer.

[6] Global Environment Facility (GEF) cumulative funding to the biodiversity and land degradation focal areas exceeding USD 22 billion in grants.

[7] BBNJ Agreement voluntary trust fund provisions to support participation and early implementation.

[8] UN Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) recommendations cautioning against the proliferation of MEA secretariats and encouraging clustering/shared services.

[9] CBD COP15 outcome documents noting persisting gaps in implementation finance and access/absorption challenges.

[10] CBD COP15 decisions referencing the Data Reporting Tool for MEAs (DaRT) to streamline reporting (e.g., CBD/COP/15/L.4, L.27).

[19] BBNJ benefit-sharing modalities and capacity-building provisions applicable to developing states.

[20] UNCLOS-based institutional arrangements for BBNJ, including COP, subsidiary bodies, and compliance mechanisms.

[21] Interactions with Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and implications for BBNJ implementation and institutional hierarchy.

Hugo-Maria Schally is the former Head of the Multilateral Environmental Cooperation Unit at the Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission. He was coordinating and developing the EC's work in collaboration with international environmental organisations and multilateral environmental agreements, and the links between trade and environment. He was also in charge of EU policies and legislation regarding global deforestation and forest degradation, international trade in wildlife and the access to and sharing of the benefits derived from the utilisation of genetic resources. He was engaged in the negotiation of multilateral environmental agreements and global conferences such as UNCED 1992, Rio+20, UNFCCC, UNCBD and the international Ozone Treaties, serving also as president of the Implementation Committee of the Montreal Protocol.

UN80 – CLUSTERING THE CLIMATE CONVENTIONS

By Stacey Azores

Introduction

The international governance of environmental challenges has progressively evolved over the past decades, transitioning from isolated treaties addressing specific issues to a complex web of multilateral agreements that aim to foster sustainable development and environmental integrity. Early efforts, such as the 1972 Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, laid foundational principles emphasising the importance of environmental protection within a broader development agenda (UN, 1972).

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit stands out as the most significant UN gathering dedicated to global environmental governance. This landmark meeting culminated in the adoption of several key agreements, including Agenda 21 — a comprehensive blueprint for sustainable development — along with the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Forest Principles, which established guiding principles for responsible forest management.

Crucially, the Summit also laid the groundwork for two major international treaties: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Additionally, the Summit initiated the negotiation process for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Collectively, these agreements and processes reflected a holistic approach to interconnected environmental challenges — biodiversity loss, climate change, and land degradation — aligning scientific insights with emerging political priorities.

These three conventions and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) have provided critical platforms for international cooperation. However, their sector-specific mandates have also resulted in fragmented governance.

This fragmentation, characterised by overlapping mandates, divergent institutional arrangements, and separate financial mechanisms, poses significant challenges to achieving holistic solutions to interconnected environmental crises. Meanwhile, scientific evidence increasingly underscores the complex interdependencies among MEAs.

The discussion of UN Reform around UN80 opens the opportunity for significant reform as outlined in Felix Dodds and Chris Spence (July 17, 2025). UN Reform: Is it Time to Renew the Idea of Clustering the Major Environmental Agreements? Inter Press Service.

How efficient is it to maintain separate related conventions as separate UN bodies?

UNEP has identified the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution (including chemicals and waste) as areas where we need to focus if we are to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development. This article explores the evolutionary progress of the UN Climate Convention and, in particular, the possibility of clustering the UNFCCC and the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the Montreal Protocol, and subsequent amendments.

Climate Change

The international community began to address serious concerns over climate change almost fifty years ago, beginning with the 1979 World Climate Conference organised by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was subsequently established in 1988 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) to assess scientific knowledge on climate change. Its creation aimed to provide policymakers with comprehensive, objective, and policy-relevant information on climate change impacts, adaptation, and mitigation, fostering international cooperation to address global warming.

This was followed by the 1990 Second World Climate Conference in Geneva, hosted jointly by UNEP and WMO, which emphasised the interconnectedness of environmental and climate issues. It reviewed the World Climate Programme (WCP), which had been established in 1979, and recommended the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS), both of which were agreed in 1992. This laid the groundwork for a global climate treaty and a robust climate observation network.

These conferences underscored the importance of a coordinated global response, leading to the decision that the negotiations for a comprehensive climate framework would be conducted through a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) decision, rather than under the auspices of UNEP alone, as was common with other environmental treaties like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

This resulted in the establishment of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, which has since evolved through successive negotiations. Five years later, the Kyoto Protocol (1997) set binding emission reduction targets for developed countries, while the Paris Agreement (2015) introduced a more inclusive approach based

on voluntary 'nationally determined contributions' (NDCs) involving all nations. The UNFCCC's governance includes the Conference of the Parties (COP), subsidiary bodies, and financial mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which supports climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. Over time, the focus has shifted increasingly toward climate resilience, adaptation, and addressing loss and damage, acknowledging the differing capacities and responsibilities of countries, especially following the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

The UN80 suggestion that the UNFCCC should be placed under UNEP's aegis as the *World's Environment Body* re-opens the possibility of creating a cluster of climate-related conventions with the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol, and subsequent amendments, which are already under the auspices of UNEP. Despite these differences, there are significant interconnections and synergies between climate change and ozone protection, especially given their common reliance on scientific assessments and policy frameworks.

Analogy of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions

The agreement by member states to create a cluster of chemicals and waste conventions was taken in 2009, and the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions had their first 'Super Cop' in 2013. This offers a proof of concept for clustering as explained in Michael Stanley Jones' article, How Clustering Multilateral Environmental Agreements Can Bring Multiple Benefits to the Environment, published by IPS on July 28th, 2025

UNEP has identified the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution (chemicals and waste) as a vision to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development. The next step would be to look at clustering the climate conventions, followed logically by the biodiversity conventions.

These conventions share a similarity in their supporting subsidiary bodies and increasing inclusivity for regional organisations and scientific panels, yet these are often limited to 'execution' mechanisms for formal coordination. This dispersion has resulted in operational inefficiencies, duplicative efforts, and missed opportunities over many years. Despite overarching concerns about planetary health, their implementation mechanisms have often created stumbling blocks when it comes to implementation actions.

In short, clustering offers the chance to facilitate greater integration among these interconnected challenges, leading to a more effective regime.

Overlapping Mandates

The mandates of the ozone and climate conventions significantly overlap in areas related to atmospheric composition, emissions, and the protection of the Earth's climate and ozone layer.

Both frameworks and their subsequent protocols, agreements, and amendments address issues stemming from human activities that release greenhouse gases and ozone-depleting substances into the atmosphere, which have direct implications for climate change and stratospheric ozone recovery. Scientific bodies such as the IPCC provide critical climate science, while the Scientific Assessment Panel of the Montreal Protocol supplies insights on ozone-depleting substances.

Despite this overlap, the conventions often operate in silos, with climate policies emphasising greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation, while ozone policies focus on phasing out ozone-depleting substances. This separation can lead to conflicting priorities or missed opportunities for co-benefits, thereby limiting the overall effectiveness of international efforts.

Currently, there are limited formal mechanisms for these bodies to exchange data and coordinate strategies, which hampers the development of integrated policies that address both climate change and ozone layer recovery. Efforts like the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, which targets ozone-depleting HFCs, which are also potent greenhouse gases, highlight the potential for greater synergy. However, institutional barriers and siloed approaches continue to restrict comprehensive action. Both conventions are now trying to address the issue of nitrogen pollution, a major environmental challenge.

Funding Fragmentation

Financial support is channelled through various mechanisms, including the Global Environment Facility and Green Climate Fund (GCF). While these mechanisms have increased overall funding levels, there remains significant fragmentation in financing multi-dimensional initiatives.

Despite increased commitments to mobilise financing for climate change and atmospheric protection, substantial funding gaps persist, particularly in developing countries where ozone depletion and climate vulnerabilities are most severe. For example, climate adaptation projects financed by the GCF may not fully incorporate ozone layer protection measures, limiting the potential for integrated benefits and comprehensive approaches.

The absence of coordinated funding streams complicates the implementation of integrated strategies, such as those that combine climate resilience with ozone layer recovery efforts, requiring investments across multiple sectors and conventions.

Policy Challenges

Addressing policy challenges within UNEP, particularly through the lens of the triple planetary boundaries — the climate change, biosphere integrity, and biogeochemical flows — requires a more integrated and holistic approach.

Currently, sectoral priorities often dominate negotiations, resulting in trade-offs that hinder sustainable development. Infrastructure projects aligned with climate policies can sometimes conflict with biodiversity conservation and resource usage boundaries, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive planning frameworks that account for these interconnected limits.

Could it be time to re-establish the Global Environment Management Forum (GEMF) as a dedicated mechanism within the United Nations Environment Assembly to address the triple planetary crisis?

Such a platform would facilitate dialogue among stakeholders, promote coordination of actions across sectors, and help build consensus on policies that respect planetary boundaries. This integrated mechanism has the potential to improve policy coherence, resolve conflicts, and ensure that climate, biodiversity, and pollution considerations are jointly addressed in global environmental governance. They should be informed by the

three science bodies, the IPCC, IPBAS and the newly established Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP)

Other Potential Integrations

Air pollution directly affects ecosystems, human health, and climate systems, so it would make sense to create formal institutional linkages aimed at addressing shared challenges. While it may seem far-fetched to propose that the UN restructures its bodies, the potential long-term benefits for implementation do warrant the effort.

Integrated policies could promote clean energy transitions that cut air pollution, lower greenhouse gases, and improve land health by reducing fossil fuel dependence. A multi-sectoral framework would enable joint action plans, data sharing, and financing—similar to the chemicals conventions—ensuring coordinated efforts for air quality, ecosystems, and climate resilience. This approach would strengthen sustainable development by recognising the interconnectedness of pollution control, biodiversity, climate mitigation, and land restoration (UNEP, 2020).

Beyond Clustering Ozone and the Climate Treaties

The first step in the approach to clustering is to shift the relevant treaties under the aegis of UNEP. This has been applied to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Minamata treaties on chemicals and waste. It should also apply to the biodiversity conventions under UNEP and, if the UNFCCC comes under UNEP, to the ozone and climate agreements.

Beyond those that are under UNEP, there are other conventions globally and regionally that are relevant to the triple planetary crisis. A second step in clustering for climate change would mean addressing the UN Convention on Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP), established under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). This convention represents a regional framework focused on addressing air pollution across European and Eurasian countries. If CLRTAP were to be integrated more closely with the UNFCCC, its role could become a vital part of a comprehensive, multi-layered environmental governance system that aligns air quality and climate efforts. Ultimately, all these agreements would benefit from being under a unified umbrella.

Conclusion

Addressing the interconnected nature of global environmental challenges requires a strategic shift towards greater institutional integration and coordination among existing treaties and frameworks.

Currently, key scientific assessment platforms such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and the proposed Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution (ISP-CWP) often operate in silos, limited by their distinct mandates and institutional frameworks. This fragmentation hampers the development of integrated scientific advice that could better inform policy and action across sectors.

Lessons learned from successful clustering of conventions, such as the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm agreements, demonstrate that formalised arrangements can enhance operational efficiencies, scientific coherence, and policy alignment.

To address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity and pollution – in addition to arguing here for clustering the climate conventions we have looked at the proof of concept with the BRS conventions and Hugo-Maria Schally in his recent article Toward Enhanced Synergies among Biodiversity-related MEAs: Addressing Fragmentation with Strategic Coordination also makes a strong and coherent argument for the clustering of the biodiversity conventions.

Integrating the scientific platforms under UNEP's umbrella would foster synergies between scientific assessments and policy implementation, and this could significantly enhance more efficient responses by helping to bridge existing gaps, reduce duplication of efforts, and maximise the impact of international environmental action on a global scale.

Proposals have emerged for the reinstatement of GMEF as a high-level mechanism designed to foster higher-level dialogue, streamline decision-making, and bridge sectoral divides for integrated approaches to environmental governance. Expanding platforms like the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF) or UNEA could serve as pivotal mechanisms to better coordinate efforts across these conventions.

Such a change may be hard. It may raise objections from those working under the current arrangements, who may feel uncomfortable with such a change. However, more integrated governance is essential to effectively tackling the triple planetary crisis.

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Stacey Azores participated in UN climate negotiations in various capacities, playing a crucial role in addressing one key adaptation issue. Her work included science, business, and government projects, academic programs, rural expeditions, and raising awareness of implementation and sustainability.

BETTER USE OF THE WORLD'S EXPERTISE IN NAVIGATING THE POLYCRISIS

By Peter Bridgewater and Rakhyun Kim

Other articles in this series on clustering conventions that are addressed by the Triple Environmental Crisis of pollution (Stanley-Jones), biodiversity (Schally), and climate change (Azores) have touched on the idea of clustering not only conventions but the science-policy bodies established separately to serve them. We address the question of the negative consequences of maintaining the *status quo* and identify how "consolidating knowledge" might make a difference.

Azores notes the progressive evolution of environmental challenges and their governance from the 1972 *Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment*, resulting in today's institutional landscape - a complex web of multilateral agreements aiming to foster sustainable development, living in separate spaces with inefficient coordination mechanisms.

From 1945 onwards establishment of the UN and its specialised agencies, including UNESCO and FAO, saw increased focus on the knowledge needed to address environmental issues. From its founding in 1974, UNEP also became increasingly active in this area.

UNESCO established a range of research agendas in biodiversity, earth sciences and water with a range of human-environment links, as did FAO for its areas of responsibility. This research pointed to the interconnected nature of global environmental challenges. The links between climate adaptation, mitigation and biodiversity were identified in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) "Nexus" assessment (IPBES 2024a).

Both Azores and Schally cite the successful clustering of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm agreements, demonstrating that formalised arrangements can enhance operational efficiencies, scientific coherence, and policy alignment. They also suggest similar clustering of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the IPBES, and the nascent Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution

(ISP-CWP) could similarly enhance better links between the knowledge-policy links in resolving the polycrisis of climate change, biodiversity and pollution. Yet the question remains, can such science-policy bodies be clustered easily, or is it preferable to seek ways to enable them to work more effectively?

The science-policy bodies.

Since its establishment in 1988, the IPCC has delivered six Assessment Reports at approximately seven-year intervals. Each of the reports is on climate change and approaches to mitigation and adaptation, yet with changing overall themes. An independent science-led exercise on status and trends in biodiversity and ecosystem services funded by UNEP with support from UNESCO, UNCCD, the Ramsar Convention and a wide range of scientific support was launched in 2000. This *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* was designed to help not only the CBD make more informed policy choices, but also influence all biodiversity-related Conventions, including UNCCD.

But while it was always to be a "one-off", the Millennium Assessment led to pressure for a "biodiversity counterpart to the IPCC", resulting in an intergovernmental meeting that established IPBES in 2012. Since its establishment, IPBES has developed in ways that are different from IPCC – producing a range of thematic, regional and global assessments on issues including pollination, land degradation, regional and a global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services status and trends, sustainable use of wildlife, invasive species, and the values of nature. Its most recent products are an assessment on how to achieve transformative change in managing the environment and an assessment of the nexus between climate change, biodiversity, human health, food and water. Crucially, it has embraced a range of knowledges beyond science.

The third Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel - on Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution (ISP-CWP) was officially established on June 20, 2025, by UNEA Resolution 5/8: The ISP-CWP Secretariat is hosted by UNEP, with its first Plenary Expected in 2026. After extensive negotiations, governments have agreed that its role is to provide policy-relevant scientific advice to support sound management of chemicals and waste in the environment and to prevent chemical pollution and protect human health and ecosystems.

So, there are now three science-policy platforms dealing with apparently very different issues. Yet, as the IPBES nexus report details, there are multiple synergies between the topics covered, and the role for the ISP-CWP alludes to including ecosystems in its work. The existence of a report from a workshop in 2021, sponsored by IPCC and IPBES, on biodiversity and climate suggested changes might be afoot, but thus far, each silo remains resolutely separate.

How do the Science-policy bodies work?

The IPCC uses a rigorous, consensus-driven process where assessment drafts undergo multiple rounds of expert and government review to ensure accuracy and neutrality. In a similar vein, IPBES has drafts that are subject to a range of external reviews, culminating in the government-member plenary carefully reviewing the *Summary for Policy Makers* draft before approving it. Both use a range of subsidiary bodies to manage technical and political issues. And both use scenarios and modelling in developing the assessments. IPBES has had more emphasis on bringing a range of knowledges to bear in its assessments, and there is some evidence IPCC is embarking on a similar pathway. It is not yet fully clear

how ISP-CWP will operate, but it seems more focus will be on horizon scanning and links with the corporate world.

All three have a range of constraints: weak funding structures; the need to build capacity in the global south; the elaborate and frustrating approval processes; ensuring material is "confidential' over the life of the assessment, which inhibits the flexibility needed in managing todays environmental pressures; managing data gaps; dealing with rapidly developing novel issues; balancing transparency while ensuring rigour; and avoiding capture by any particular sectoral voices.

Despite the activities of these global science-policy bodies, individual conventions have been producing "global outlooks". The UNCCD has its own science-policy interface, with an unfortunate result that its first Global Land "outlook" was released at the same time as the IPBES assessment on Land degradation and restoration, a considerable duplication of effort. The CBD has produced five *Global Biodiversity Outlooks* since 2001, the last in 2020. And the Ramsar Convention has produced two *Global Wetland Outlooks*, one in 2018 and the most recent in 2025. A *State of the World's Migratory Species* Assessment was published in February 2024 under the CMS.

While it could be argued that the more information available to inform policy development and implementation, the better, this is not an evident result. Rather, production of the outlooks resembles "zombie activity" - producing material for its own sake, without reference to the wider global situation.

Do we need three separate Science-policy Bodies?

It can be argued that we already know which policies need implementation, yet many nations still argue strongly for the need to inform policy development through the best available knowledge. IPCC reports inform UNFCCC & its COPs, IPBES assessments inform CBD, and other biodiversity-relevant conventions, while ISP-CWP aims to support the "chemicals conventions" cluster and guide global regulation of chemicals and waste.

A major player is UNEP-GEO (Global Environment Outlook), which has been in operation since 1995. It has become more all-embracing in recent years and strives also to be a science-policy interface. Inevitably, it covers some ground also covered by the IPCC, IPBES and the putative ISP-CWP. GEO operates a more flexible approach, offering continuing assessment processes with regular reporting to provide updates on the changing environmental situation, the effectiveness of policy actions, and the policy pathways that can ensure a more sustainable future, with increasing focus on using a full range of knowledges.

How can this be made more efficient and this effective?

Clustering of the chemicals conventions was achieved relatively easily, resulting in considerable savings on efforts. Schally has alluded to the desirability of clustering the " biodiversity regime" to replicate the practical synergies achieved in the chemicals and waste cluster - to avoid missed outcomes during a critical decade for nature. Should such clustering occur, there would be argument for greater synergy, if not fusion, between science-policy bodies.

Given the urgency of the polycrisis, time is of the essence; there are several possible ways co-operation between the bodies can be enhanced without full clustering. Such cooperation can lead to products that are policy-helpful, rather than simply policy-relevant, using, rejuvenating, and refining structures already agreed and in place, without damaging and time-consuming reorganisations. UNEP, through its GEO work and with guidance from the UNEA, is certainly well placed to foster and manage such cooperative arrangements.

- **Firstly**, given the strength of links between Climate change, biodiversity, food, water and human health demonstrated in the IPBES nexus report (ref), the biodiversity-related convention liaison group (BLG) should be strengthened by the addition of UNFCCC, UNCCD, FAO, WHO and UNESCO and meet regularly (at least 6 monthly) at the secretariat level.
- **Secondly**, Chairs of the Scientific Advisory Bodies of the biodiversity-related conventions (CSAB) originally met as a sub-group of the BLG. However, CSAB met only five times before disbanding due to a lack of resources, leaving coordination efforts solely to the secretariats. To ensure full coordination and buy-in from government, CSAB should be regenerated and expanded to include the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies of UNFCCC, UNCCD, and the of the bureaux of IPCC, IPBES, ISP-CWP and GEO, with this group chaired by the Deputy Executive Secretary of UNEP. This body should resolve overlaps and duplication and highlight crucial upcoming knowledge needs.
- **Thirdly**, continuous reporting should be adopted as the norm by all assessment bodies, with CSAB being the body that shapes the direction of assessments, with the concurrence of the plenaries of each organisation involved. GEO could supply horizon-scanning/Foresight to enable this work.
- **Fourthly**, the rationale for continued production of "outlooks" from conventions must be questioned, with efforts directed towards developing one key source of knowledge to assist policy development and implementation.

UN80 enables an opportunity to address how best science can support the Triple Environmental Crisis. Adopting these four strategies would decrease duplication, improve the quality and information in the assessment products, without upsetting the existing frameworks and systems that have been in place over a range of time periods. This would also allow fusion and regrouping at a pace and direction that plenary members are comfortable with, without losing momentum. It can also help the UN system deliver transformative change as outlined in the IPBES Transformative change report (IPBES 2024b), and in the context of UN80.

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UN80 - IS IT TIME FOR THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE GLOBAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM?

By Jan-Gustav Strandenaes

"We shall have to do more with less" was the summary message from a meeting in Oslo, Norway, this spring (2025), where the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Mr. Espen Barth Eide and Mr. Guy Ryder, Under-Secretary-General for Policy at the UN and Chair of UN80, both spoke about UN80 and the necessity to reform the UN[iv]. The UN80 initiative is, according to Antonio Guterres, SG of the UN, "a system-wide push to streamline operations, sharpen impact, and reaffirm the UN's relevance for a rapidly changing world".[v]

"We will come out of this process with a stronger, fit-for-purpose UN, ready for the challenges the future will undoubtedly bring us," Mr. Ryder has said.[vi] The precarious financial situation of the UN family has, however, led many to say that these nice words are euphemisms for a dramatic UN reform, fearing a necessary downscaling of many of its important activities.

This article builds on previous articles on clustering around the Triple Planetary Crisis of pollution (see How Clustering Multilateral Environmental Agreements Can Bring Multiple Benefits to the Environment by Michael Stanley Jones), climate change (see UN 80: Clustering the Climate Change Conventions by Stacey Azores), and biodiversity loss (see Towards Enhancing Synergies among Biodiversity-Related MEAs: Addressing Fragmentation with Strategic Coordination. Clustering biodiversity conventions by Hugo-Maria Schally) and most recently, the article on the possibility of clustering the three science bodies (see Better Use of the World's Expertise in Navigating the Polycrisis by Peter Bridgewater and Rakhyun Kim).

The UN 80 process enables us to look at some of the history of the UN Environment Programme and how to make it more "agile, integrated, and equipped to respond to today's complex global challenges."[vii] A historic lens is needed, and it would be wise to see if elements of this history can be resurrected and a debate around them can be reenergized to accomplish the goals of the present reform process.

[iv] From the author's own notes, he participated in this meeting
[v] From UN80 website: https://www.un.org/un80-initiative/en
[vi] Ibid
[vii] Ibid

The institutional constraints of UNEP

Where is UNEP in all this? UNEP is a Programme under the UN General Assembly, UNGA, one of the Charter Bodies. As such, any change in UNEP's structure and status has to be recognised by the UNGA. The UNGA has the power to directly affect UNEP's work, as well as the outcomes of the UN Environment Assembly, UNEA, even though UNEA is also a body with universal membership.

What was the Global Ministerial Environment Forum?

There are no positive and tangible results without continuity. Since its inception, UNEP has been run by the Governing Council (GC), which consisted of 54 member states elected for a three year period. The GC met in Nairobi every two years, effectively diminishing UNEP's role as a consistent guardian of environmental issues, at least at the political level.

As environmental problems increased over the years, there was an increasing need for more continuous political decision-making to meet and solve environmental issues, and the Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the GMEF, was established, among others, in order to answer to this challenge.

Conceived as a Special Session, the 6th since the founding of UNEP, the first GMEF took place in the city of Malmö in Sweden in the year 2000. It was hailed as a success for several reasons.[viii] One notable aspect was that 73 Ministers of Environment attended and engaged in various debates, including exerting political leadership. Even though 73 member states attended with their environment ministers – the highest ever at the time at an international conference – it is well to remember that the UN then consisted of 189 member states. A significant outcome document was the Malmoe Declaration, which outlines in no uncertain terms the environmental challenges, that UNEP was the preeminent global organisation on environmental issues and that there is an urgent need for UNEP and all stakeholders to engage and work to safeguard the environment[ix].

UNEP, with increasing knowledge in the environment, is still lacking in authority

Knowledge and understanding of environmental issues grow constantly and make clear to all its inherent complexity, resulting in new and sometimes divergent environmental themes demanding new political approaches.

On the verge of the 21st Century, and sensing new and dramatically different challenges, the then Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, outlined these challenges in his report to the UN GA in 2000, called "We the peoples: The role of the UN in the 21st Century." Here, he called for a Millennium Ecosystem Assessment to be delivered[x]. New environmental issues were identified, and the multitude of these issues was another reason for establishing the GMEF in 2000. There was a need to try to develop policy coherence.

The second GMEF was held in Cartagena, Colombia, in February 2002, and nearly 100 Ministers of Environment attended[xi]. Again, the presence of Ministers proved advantageous

[viii] https://enb.iisd.org/events/6th-special-session-unep-governing-council-and-3rd-global-ministerial-environment-forum-3
[ix] UN Digital Library: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/666264?ln=en
[x] https://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/About.html
[xi] https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/11331/K0260448_E_GcssVii-Proceedings.pdf. Note – in the report, the meeting is referred to as the 7th Special Session, which is formally correct, but it

to the deliberations and outcome results. This conference also became an important informal preparatory meeting for the upcoming World Summit for Sustainable Development, WSSD, to be held later that year in Johannesburg. The delegates at this GMEF emphasised the importance of this forum, and the proposal to organise a GMEF in odd years and not in Nairobi was tabled and agreed to. Annual high-level conferences on the environment were agreed as a necessity. Another interesting proposal tabled was that membership in the GMEF should be universal, an idea that took ten years to materialise. It was not until Rio+20 in 2012 that universal membership at a UN body dealing with environmental policies, the UNEA, was agreed to.

The 11th Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum was held in Nusa Dua, Indonesia, in 2010. A simultaneous extraordinary Conference of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, three Multilateral Environmental Agreements, was held back-to-back with the GC/GMEF.[xii] The conference had an overarching objective of enhancing cooperation and coordination and improving synergies in multilateral environmental agreements. As one report states, the meeting broke new ground and set an example of resource-saving coherence among MEAs and perhaps even within the UN system.[xiii]

Without a seemingly proper analysis of the benefit of annual meetings, the GC/GMEF processes were discontinued with the adoption of the UN Environment Assembly, the UNEA, which held its first session in 2014, and the process was back to high level environment meetings every second year. As the UNEAs were to be held every other year, this decision actually lost the continuity which had been established with the GC/GMEF process. With the increasing environmental challenges, not the least their complexity, maybe the time has now come to reinstitute annual UN environmental conferences and use the model which was established by the GC/GMEF process – every other year in Nairobi, and the intermittent year in a capital of a member state.

Strengthening UNEP and UNEA by re-establishing the GMEF.

If we re-establish the GMEF and combine it with the UNEAs, we would accomplish a continuity of high-level political and policy-oriented meetings for the environment. The UNEA would, if this were to take place, continue as it is presently organised, but the GMEF would be different. Two UN entities would play centre-stage: The MEAs and the Science-Policy Interfaces

UNEP has been designated by the governing bodies of eight MEAs, to provide secretariat functions to those conventions. This host relationship established with UNEP means that UNEP is providing administrative and financial support for each secretariat to carry out its responsibilities.[xiv]

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was the second Global Ministerial Environment Forum, GMEF after the first GMEF in Malmoe, Sweden in 2000

[xii] https://enb.iisd.org/unepgc/unepss11/

[xiii] https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n10/426/14/pdf/n1042614.pdf#page=33

[xiv] https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment/why-does-un-environment-matter/secretariats-and-conventions

UNEP has, for a long time, been at the forefront of scientific research on environmental issues. Three Science Policy systems have been established and receive support from UNEP.[xv]

The oldest is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, established in 1988. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the IPBES, is less well-known to the outer world compared to IPCC. It began functioning in 2014 with a secretariat based in Bonn.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution, ISP-CWP, is a new, independent intergovernmental body established to strengthen the global science-policy interface. It began its official existence in June this year (2025).

What could the agenda for the Forum be? It would have to complement and support the upcoming UN Environment Assembly. There would also be other overarching thematic priorities – the Triple Planetary Crises, the current Medium-Term Strategy and the Programme of Work.

The GMEF could be a place where the three established clusters of MEAs, focusing on pollution (chemicals and waste), biodiversity, and climate change, could meet to address synergies, gaps, and potential areas for collaboration. The MEAs could identify relevant work of a common nature that exists between the conventions and explore interlinkages between them. All this could be informed by the first day of a GMEF when the three science bodies could have identified and presented crucial environmental issues to be solved.

As the meeting would take place midway between the HLPF, the outcome report could also deal with the environmental elements of the SDGs to be dealt with by the next HLPF.

This proposed agenda involves clustering around themes of the Triple Planetary Crisis of pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change, ideas, and implementation across science and environmental governance to influence political priorities.

As the GMEF would begin with presentations by the three science bodies outlining urgent issues relating to the Triple Planetary Crises[xvi], their presentations could inform the discussions throughout the week, but also support any member state in their negotiations at the GMEF, as all stakeholders would discuss common problems. The focus of a systemic nature could be on the inherent inefficiencies in the use of financial resources, the MEAs could look at inconsistencies in the international legal systems, they all could discuss functional inefficiencies, but most importantly, identify their failures to address interlinkages.

When “forced by a common agenda”, they would all have to focus their priorities on the same themes and thus cluster their input.

An example of an area addressed by the three clusters together could be that of nitrogen, currently under discussion, which exemplifies a cross-cutting theme that could challenge all the UN units mentioned here to explore their approach to addressing it. And if all are assembled in a five-day conference, that could quite possibly happen.

[xv] https://www.unep.org/topics/environmental-law-and-governance/environmental-policy/science-policy-interface
[xvi] https://www.unep.org/resources/global-foresight-report

Could such a meeting be financed? The old GMEF was partly financed by the hosting city and country. These cities gave generous grants to the conference, knowing full well that they would earn tenfold in return as a consequence of participation from 193 member states delegations coming to their city.

The best outcome for UNEP in UN80

UNEP and UNEA lack proper funding, but perhaps its biggest weakness, which hampers its many efforts to be the preeminent global environment organisation, is UNEP's lack of authority and political status. This is perhaps the major reason that hampers its efforts to improve its own system.

Substantial improvements in its internal institutional system will always be difficult as long as UNEP is merely a programme under the General Assembly. The GA's own rules of procedure, its standing in the UN system, and its geographical placement in New York, make it the key organisational body of the UN, which, by its own position in the UN hierarchy, also makes it a rigid organisation. Whereas UNEP hosts delegations from ministries of the environment, the UNGA delegations are from ministries of foreign affairs.

These ministries address environmental problems in different ways. Whereas foreign offices are among the most important government entities in a country and have, by and large, a generalist understanding and competence on environmental issues, environmental ministries have environmental expertise but are weak in terms of political clout. During the last two decades, environment ministries have also suffered a serious reduction of political influence in several countries, and a few have even been closed down[xvii].

UN80 can start the process of finishing the work of Klaus Toepfer and Achim Steiner, two former Executive Directors at UNEP, on clustering the biodiversity conventions, and if UNFCCC comes under UNEP, it will provide an opportunity for a cluster on climate change. The creation of a more coordinated and effective science platform will help member states to have the right information and address the environmental issues they raise in a coordinated way.

By focusing on conventions under UNEP management, we gain a more coherent approach, albeit one that does not cover all relevant conventions, but one that will have a greater impact on addressing the Triple Planetary Crisis of pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change. The proof of concept for the chemicals and waste cluster successfully carried out at the 11th GMEF in 2010 should show us the way.

The re-establishment of the Global Environmental Ministers Forum enables member states at a high level to address the interlinkages, gaps and work programmes of the three established clusters. Wouldn't it be great to have this ready for 2030, when we will address the future approach to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development? A stronger UNEP has been the vision for many people for a long time. UN80 enables the chance to make that a reality.

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[xvii] https://www.euronews.com/2022/10/18/devastating-consequences-as-new-swedish-government-scraps-environment-ministry

For decades, Jan-Gustav has delivered projects for the United Nations Environment Programme on stakeholder engagement issues and had assignments for UNDESA, one of which had him coordinating civil society input for the entire Rio+20 process, the open working group for the Sustainable Development Goals, and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Financing the Triple Planetary Crisis of Chemicals and Waste, Biodiversity and Climate Change

By Craig Boljkovac, Hugo-Maria Schally, Stacy Azores, Felix Dodds, Chris Spence and Idil Boran

The opinions set forth below are the authors' own.

Introduction

The UN's reform effort, UN80, offers the opportunity to improve and strengthen the UN's environment pillar in the areas of climate change, biodiversity, and chemicals and waste. In our recent report, ***UN80: Reform of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements***, we assessed opportunities for reform, including clustering various treaties and strengthening the role of the UN Environment Programme.

However, we recognise that successful reform is only achievable if we address issues of financing. This report, which is a companion to the earlier one, considers how finance mechanisms can support key treaties and conventions, and in particular, the multilateral funding mechanisms available to them for implementing their goals and objectives.

A) Financing the Global MEAs on Chemicals and Waste

Craig Boljkovac

The main global chemicals and waste conventions and agreements include (in order of entry into force, with the date noted), the Montreal Protocol (of the Vienna Convention) (1989); the Basel Convention (1992); the Rotterdam Convention (2004); the Stockholm Convention (2004); the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM, 2006) and its successor, the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC, 2023); the Minamata Convention (2017); the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) (established in 2025); and the ongoing (but currently stalled) negotiations for a global plastics convention.

Overall, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is the principal multilateral funding mechanism for chemicals and waste multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and frameworks, with both formal status for some MEAs and no formal status for other conventions or agreements. There is also an array of other multilateral mechanisms (including a general mechanism and several agreement-specific multilateral funds) and many bilateral funding sources, including from governments and some limited non-governmental sources (as explained below).

Overall, several studies estimate that only a small percentage of the funds needed for full implementation of the chemicals and waste MEAs are being provided by current sources. For example, for what is considered to be the best-funded agreement of this type, the

Stockholm Convention, as of COP-12 in May 2025[xviii] the GEF had provided US$1.47 billion in total POPs funding since the adoption of the Convention in 2001, against an estimated total funding needs by developing and CEIT[xix] Parties of some US$4.9 billion for full implementation for only the period 2022-26 (some 24% of the total needed)[xx]. Since this Convention is considered the best-funded[xxi] Given that, among all global chemicals and waste MEAs, the funding gap for other MEAs is likely larger, if not significantly larger, than this.

1. Core Architecture: Global Funds and Mechanisms

The **Global Environment Facility (GEF) plays a central and cross-cutting role** in financing the global chemicals and waste agenda, functioning in different capacities across the relevant agreements. It serves as the formal financial mechanism of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and as the interim financial mechanism of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, while also indirectly providing some implementation support to the Basel and Rotterdam Conventions. Beyond these legally binding agreements, the GEF finances activities under the Montreal Protocol for countries with economies in transition, and it has been a major supporter of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and its successor, the Global Framework on Chemicals. The GEF is also expected to play a supportive role in the work of the newly established Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution, helping to strengthen scientific and institutional capacities.

The Special Programme and the time-limited former Quick Start Programme (QSP), managed by UNEP, are relatively minor (especially compared to GEF) resources for the chemicals and waste MEAs. The Special Programme provides support to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to enhance their sustainable institutional capacity to develop, adopt, monitor and enforce policy, legislation and regulation for effective frameworks for the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention, SAICM and the Global Framework on Chemicals. The QSP disbursed some US$47.6 million to end-2017[xxii]. The Special Programme has successfully processed seven rounds of applications since its inception in 2015. Across seven funding cycles, some 83 projects in 70 countries have been approved for a total of US $36.8 million[xxiii].

The Specific International Programme (SIP) under the Minamata Convention provides dedicated, targeted support to help developing countries and countries with economies in transition strengthen institutional capacity and fulfil their implementation obligations. It complements the GEF by funding projects focused on governance, legislation, monitoring, enforcement, and other enabling conditions essential for effective mercury control. Since the establishment of its Trust Fund in 2018, SIP has funded 24 projects (in 22 developing

[xviii] Global Environment Facility / Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions. Sixth Review of the Financial Mechanism of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. Information document UNEP/POPS/COP.12/INF/36. Geneva: Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention, 2025.
[xix] Countries with Economies in Transition
[xx] UNEP/POPS/COP.10/INF/33 (2021). *Assessment of funding needs for implementation of the Stockholm Convention, 2022-2026.*
[xxi] The Montreal Protocol, however, has by far the best record in mobilising private co-finance (see below), and has been cited by Kofi Annan (among others), as "Perhaps the single most successful international agreement to date…".
[xxii] Secretariat of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, *Update on the Quick Start Programme and its Trust Fund (to December 2017)*, document SAICM/ICCM.5/11, Geneva, 2018.
[xxiii] United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Special Programme to Support Institutional Strengthening for the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention, and SAICM: Overview of Rounds 1-7*, Nairobi: UNEP Secretariat, 2024.

country/CEIT Parties). The total contribution (funding envelope) for these projects is approximately US $7,780,000[xxiv].

The Global Framework for Chemicals (GFC) Fund is a dedicated financing mechanism established to support implementation of the new Global Framework on Chemicals by strengthening national institutions, accelerating the sound management of chemicals and waste, and enabling safer, more sustainable production and use. It aims to mobilise both public and private resources, complementing existing mechanisms like the GEF while filling gaps for activities not covered under legally binding agreements. It is, in some ways, a successor or complement to the Quick Start Programme under SAICM. While no figures are currently publicly available regarding disbursements to date, the Fund is currently accepting proposals for a second round of projects, which can range in size from US $250,000 to $800,000 per project (the deadline for applications is mid-December 2025). In addition, the International Council of Chemical Associations has indicated it contributed some 1.5million euros to the fund as of August 2025[xxv].

2. Finance Across Global Chemicals and Waste MEAs

Convention/Agreement	Finance Source/Mechanism	Scale/Scope and Notes
Montreal Protocol (Vienna Convention)	MP Multilateral Fund GEF (for countries in economic transition)	MF supports developing countries GEF supports countries in economic transition not otherwise eligible for MF assistance.
Basel Convention	Special Programme; GEF (indirectly), GFC Fund	Has also received support on plastics-related waste projects in light of the 2019 amendments to Annexes concerning plastic wastes.
Rotterdam Convention	Special Programme, GEF (indirectly), GFC Fund	Also receives support from Regional Centres (for the Basel and Stockholm Conventions) and bilateral support.
Stockholm Convention	GEF (principal entity on an interim basis[xxvi]); Special Programme	Also receives bilateral support for plastics-related projects where POPs are component ingredients.
SAICM/GFC	Quick Start Programme, GFC Fund	A multistakeholder/multi-sectoral partnership is unique in this cluster. The QSP was time-limited.
Minamata Convention	GEF, Special International Programme (SIP)	GEF is the formal financial mechanism, complemented by the SIP and bilateral funding.

[xxiv] Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, Report on the Specific International Programme to support Capacity-building and Technical Assistance (SIP), UNEP/MC/COP.5/11, Geneva, 3 November 2023.
[xxv] International Council of Chemical Associations, "Chemical Industry Boosts Funding to €1.5 M for Global Chemicals Management," Brussels, 6 August 2025, available at: https://icca-chem.org/news/global-chemicals-management-icca-funding-1-5-million/ And: United Nations Environment Programme, "Overview of the Global Framework on Chemicals Fund," 29 September 2025, available at: https://www.unep.org/global-framework-chemicals/gfc-fund/overview-global-framework-chemicals-fund
[xxvi] "The mechanism may also include other entities providing multilateral, regional and bilateral financial and technical assistance." (Article 13, Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants).

Plastics	Under negotiation, but both GEF and a stand-alone multilateral fund are under discussion, as well as a possibly hybrid mechanism. Alternatively, GEF might be asked to operate on an interim basis until a stand-alone mechanism is fully formed.	The GEF has publicly stated it stands ready to support implementation of the treaty, having invested roughly US$1 billion in plastic pollution solutions to date.

3. Broader Landscape: Finance Beyond Multilateral Funds for Chemicals and Waste MEAs

a) Bilateral Funds (including EU/EC, FFEM)

Bilateral funding remains a significant but highly variable source of support for the global chemicals and wastes MEAs, complementing the GEF and other multilateral mechanisms. Major contributors—including the European Union/European Commission, Germany, Japan, the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Norway and, increasingly, China—provide finance through technical-assistance programmes, targeted POPs and mercury projects, capacity-building, and enforcement initiatives. France's FFEM also plays a notable role, particularly in francophone Africa. While these bilateral flows collectively amount to several hundred million dollars per GEF replenishment cycle, they remain fragmented, are often tied to specific national priorities, and generally fall well short of the multibillion-dollar needs identified in formal assessments under the Stockholm, Minamata and Basel Conventions. Bilateral donors also provide the bulk of financial contributions to the multilateral funds previously cited.

b) Support from Regional Development Banks

Regional development banks and the World Bank increasingly support chemicals- and wastes-related objectives, though usually as co-benefits within broader infrastructure, energy, or environmental programmes, rather than as stand-alone Stockholm, Basel, or Minamata Convention projects. The World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), African Development Bank (AfDB), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB, the newer China-led bank) have all financed grid-modernisation, industrial-energy efficiency, and hazardous-waste management projects that incorporate POPs or mercury management components. For example, several World Bank and ADB energy-sector loans in Asia and Eastern Europe have included the identification, replacement, and environmentally sound disposal of PCB-containing transformers, aligning directly with Stockholm Convention obligations. Similar integration occurs in waste-management investments such as municipal solid-waste reforms that reduce open burning of waste (an Article 5 requirement under Stockholm on unintentional POPs), or industrial-pollution control projects that help countries comply with Basel transboundary-movement and waste-management rules, or Minamata-aligned mercury-phaseout and ASGM formalisation programmes. Although these banks do not operate as formal MEA financial mechanisms, their large-scale lending can deliver substantial chemicals- and wastes-related benefits when MEA objectives are explicitly mainstreamed into infrastructure and development planning.

c) Private Sector Support

For the chemicals and wastes MEAs, most finance is still public, but there are several notable public-private and purely private streams that complement the GEF and other public mechanisms. The GEF has experimented with public–private partnerships through its

former Earth Fund/PPP window and now via blended-finance and non-grant instruments in GEF-7/8, which explicitly aim to mobilise private investment and co-financing for chemicals and waste projects such as PCB disposal systems and other hazardous-waste interventions. Under SAICM, the Quick Start Programme combined a multilateral trust fund with substantial non-trust-fund contributions from companies and industry groups (e.g., BASF, ICCA, Dow), NGOs and UN agencies, valued at over US$76 million in cash and in-kind, alongside roughly US$37 million in the trust fund itself, making it one of the clearest PPP-style arrangements in this area. Its successor, the Global Framework on Chemicals Fund, is explicitly designed to draw resources from governments, the private sector (including finance), foundations and other stakeholders, and requires at least 25% co-financing from applicants, including private companies. For the Montreal Protocol, while the Multilateral Fund is funded by states, project evaluations show that private firms regularly invest their own capital to cover industrial conversion costs not paid by the Fund—Brazil's CFC/HCFC phase-out, where companies supplemented about US$92 million in grants, is a frequently cited example—so private co-finance is significant even if it does not flow directly into MEA trust funds. Overall, private and PPP finance for chemicals and wastes MEAs exists and is growing, but remains modest and project-based, however, compared with the core public funding streams.

4. Systemic Challenges and Emerging Trends

a) Overall Funding Gap and Tightening of Resource Availability: As noted in the Introduction, with the example of a funding shortfall for Stockholm Convention commitments and GEF funding, resources that have been made available for the full implementation of the global chemicals and waste MEAs fall far short at present. Given the current geopolitical landscape, funding from key past contributors such as the US and EU/EC will likely be further restricted in future. Barring the development of new and innovative approaches or the strengthening of contributions from private sources, this will likely result in the gap becoming wider over the coming years.

b) Need for Further Simplification of Funding Availability (without Compromising Accountability): Many recipient countries continue to lack the capacity to easily and effectively meet donor requirements (including, but not limited to, GEF) in order to access needed resources. Further capacity building in this area is needed. Also, further engagement is needed with innovative entities such as Regional Centres (technically limited to the Basel and Stockholm Conventions, although many, if not most, assist in their regions for the other chemicals and waste MEAs). Such Regional Centres are often "closer to the ground" to their client countries and can provide assistance on a more cost-effective basis than traditional implementing agencies (such as UN organisations). The GFC funding mechanism, for example, has recently recognised the unique contribution the Regional Centres can make.

c*) Need for Mechanisms to Increase Their Effectiveness Through Further Examination of Project Delivery and Country Eligibility:* GEF and other multilateral (and bilateral) donors can continuously improve the effectiveness of projects through regular examination of results and means for delivery of projects. While such efforts have clearly taken place over time, further efforts at incorporating clearly defined and formally structured mechanisms for improvement based on lessons learned would benefit recipient countries.

One of the most important systematic challenges is the misalignment of the GEF and the MEAs. The GEF consists of decision-making members who are not Parties to some of the MEAs. Therefore, in effect, non-Parties decide which implementation activities might be funded and which Convention Parties are allocated scarce resources. In addition, GEF

participants rarely have chemicals and waste-related expertise, and the chemicals and waste MEA participants are rarely experts at finance issues. This leads to misaligned expectations concerning what the GEF will and will not fund.

In addition, the GEF, for apparent geopolitical reasons, has, for at least the past 10-15 years, declined to take any action to fund proposals from a wide variety of countries that are Parties in good standing to one or more chemicals and waste MEAs for which the GEF provides financial support.[xxvii] To date, this issue has not been resolved.

d) Clear Overall Weakness of Private Sector Engagement: This cluster appears to be among the weakest (despite some modest successes to date under SAICM and GEF, as noted above) at mobilising significant private sector funding. Chemicals and wastes are highly profitable businesses worldwide ("The global chemical industry [alone] was estimated at US$5 trillion in 2017, and its size is projected to double by 2030.[xxviii]"). In principle, applying the polluter pays approach, industry should also cover the costs. Thus, the overwhelming proportion of public funding in this cluster is, in effect, a massive industry subsidy.

Recent interest and engagement of the private sector during the ongoing negotiations for a global plastics treaty will hopefully spread into the realm of the other chemicals and waste MEAs. Further, dedicated efforts in this area need to be made. As these MEAs are paving the way forward in terms of developing/future trends in the area of chemicals and wastes globally, developing countries should also further develop policies to ensure that the private sector pays a greater share of the costs.

e) The overall system for the provision of support with public funds needs to be formally re-examined: At present, countries such as Greece or Croatia (for example) provide support for far wealthier countries such as Saudi Arabia and other highly developed petrostates, and other countries at a similar (high) level of development, such as Singapore and China. A formal re-examination of the donor country system should be considered, perhaps within the framework of the UN80 process.

B) The Financial Landscape Around Biodiversity-Related MEAs

Hugo-Maria Schally

1. Core Architecture: Global Funds and Mechanisms

Global Environment Facility (GEF) & GBF Fund (GBFF)

The **GEF** remains the principal financial mechanism for the CBD and other MEAs. Under **GEF-8 (2022–26)**, the Biodiversity Focal Area allocation totals **US$1.92 billion**, with more than **US$5.2 billion** in cumulative biodiversity investments leveraged by co-finance. The **GBF Fund (GBFF)**—established under Decision 15/7 and launched in 2023—has become operational, serving as a cornerstone for the **2025–2030 Resource Mobilisation Strategy**. In 2024, CBD COP16 decisions emphasised simplified access, multi-country programming, and coherence with national biodiversity finance plans.

[xxvii] For example, please see: IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB). "Summary of the 2021 Meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions," 26–30 July 2021, Vol. 30 No. 78.
Available at: https://enb.iisd.org/chemicals/2021COPs/summary

[xxviii] Alpízar, F., Backhaus, T., Decker, N., Eilks, I., Escobar-Pemberthy, N., Fantke, P., Geiser, K., Ivanova, M., Jolliet, O., Kim, H-S., Khisa, K., et al. (2019). UN Environment Global Chemicals Outlook II – From Legacies to Innovative Solutions: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations Environment Programme. ISBN: 978-92-807-3745-5.

CBD Resource Mobilisation Post-COP16

At COP16, Parties adopted the revised **Resource Mobilisation Strategy (2025–2030)**, committing to mobilise finance from *all sources*—public, private, domestic, and international—and to establish a unified reporting framework. The decision also requested a review of the GEF's performance and explored the creation of a **dedicated biodiversity financing instrument** under CBD authority. Preparations for **COP17 (Yerevan, Armenia 2026)** focus on scaling national biodiversity finance plans, strengthening private-sector engagement, and harmonising reporting systems with GBF Targets 19 and 20.

UNCCD and New Restoration Finance

At the 2024 Riyadh Initiative, the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia pledged US$2 billion** toward global anti-desertification and land-restoration efforts, including a **Desertification Fund** and a **Global Water Organisation**. This unprecedented commitment—complementing GEF's Land Degradation Focal Area—aligns with GBF Targets 2 and 10 and signals a growing convergence of land, climate, and biodiversity finance.

Emerging Mechanism under the BBNJ Agreement (2023)

The **Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)** adds a marine dimension to the biodiversity finance landscape. Its **Article 52 Special Fund**, financed through assessed and voluntary contributions, supports developing States, SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs with simplified access and readiness mechanisms. This approach mirrors the equity and accessibility principles seen in the GBFF and UNCCD mechanisms.

2. Finance Across Key Biodiversity MEAs

Convention	Finance Source / Mechanism	Scale & Notes
CBD & Protocols	GEF, GBFF, bilateral & multilateral aid	Core mechanism for GBF implementation; central to 2025–2030 RM Strategy
CITES	CITES Trust Fund + GEF co-finance	Species-trade management via national GEF pipelines
Ramsar	Core + voluntary contributions	Limited core funding; relies on domestic and project aid
World Heritage (Natural)	WH Fund + external partners	Small-scale grants, supported by philanthropy and project finance
CMS	Assessed + voluntary + project-based	Dependent on MoUs and bilateral aid
ITPGRFA	Benefit-sharing Fund	US$26 million invested in 81 projects across 67 countries
UNCCD	GEF LD Focal Area + KSA Desertification Fund	Expanding restoration finance, strong synergy with GBF Targets 2 & 10

Convention	Finance Source / Mechanism	Scale & Notes
BBNJ (under development)	Article 52 Special Fund	New global mechanism for high-seas conservation

3. Broader Landscape: Finance Beyond MEA Budgets

Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Shifting Donor Priorities

Global biodiversity finance is increasingly constrained by the downturn in ODA and shifting priorities among major donors. Analyses of OECD and EU budgets for 2024–2025 show that donor countries—including the **United States, Germany, France, and Sweden**—have reallocated funding toward security, industrial resilience, and migration management, leading to reduced environmental and development allocations. The **U.S. retrenchment** from global development finance, including lower contributions to the GEF and reduced USAID environmental programs, compounds these pressures: U.S. leadership traditionally underpinned donor coordination and co-financing leverage. Its partial withdrawal diminishes predictability in multilateral fund replenishments and weakens appetite for innovative instruments such as debt-for-nature swaps and biodiversity credits.

The **EU's mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2021–2027)** also revealed re-prioritisation away from external green finance, while rising defence and industrial spending crowd out climate and biodiversity budgets. Inflationary pressures and domestic fiscal consolidation further limit contributions to multilateral mechanisms such as the GEF, GBFF, and GCF. These trends constrain access for developing countries, reduce concessional flows, and increase reliance on blended and private finance.

Private and Blended Finance

In response, Parties are seeking to mobilise private capital and blended instruments. COP16 called for regulatory and fiscal frameworks to attract biodiversity-positive investment, including impact disclosure requirements and risk-sharing mechanisms. However, private finance alone cannot compensate for declining public aid, particularly in low-income countries with limited market depth.

Philanthropy and Sovereign Instruments

Philanthropic funds, sovereign green bonds, and debt-for-nature swaps are filling part of the gap. Yet these remain fragmented and volatile. Sustained impact depends on aligning such instruments with national biodiversity finance plans and predictable public co-funding.

4. Systemic Challenges and Emerging Trends

- **Access and Absorption Barriers:** Despite new facilities, complex eligibility and reporting procedures continue to delay disbursements. COP16 reaffirmed the need for simplified access.
- **Shrinking Fiscal Space and Donor Retrenchment:** The combination of U.S. and European budget cuts threatens the stability of multilateral funding, creating uncertainty for biodiversity implementation.
- **Fragmentation and Coordination Gaps:** MEAs still operate with asynchronous cycles and overlapping mandates.

- **Emerging Donor Roles:** New actors, including Saudi Arabia, China, and the United Arab Emirates, are increasingly active, signalling a partial rebalancing of global environmental finance.
- **Private Finance Scaling:** Post-COP16 discussions highlight the need to scale biodiversity markets (credits, restoration bonds) under GBF Target 19.2, but progress depends on sustained public anchor finance.

C) Financial Architecture Supporting UNFCCC Implementation

Stacy Azores

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has established a layered financing architecture to support mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. The first multilateral instrument was the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)**, which was designated as an operating entity of the Convention's financial mechanism. Additional funding processes were thereafter developed through adaptation/mitigation negotiations, as follows:

Year	New Fund Introduced	Purpose within UNFCCC
1991	Global Environment Facility (GEF)	A broad climate-finance conduit also supports biodiversity and ozone protection
2001	Adaptation Fund (AF)	Finance for concrete adaptation projects under the Kyoto Protocol
2005	Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF)	Targeted support for the most vulnerable, least-developed parties
2005	Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)	Complementary financing for mitigation & adaptation in developing countries
2010	Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Separate the multilateral fund & primary operating entity of UNFCCC
2022	Loss and Damage Fund (officially "Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage", FRLD)	Dedicated financing to address economic and non-economic loss and damage suffered by vulnerable developing countries due to climate-induced extreme events and slow-onset impacts

Application of Financial Streams

Fund (Operating Entity)	Core Mandate (UNFCCC Context)	Typical Projects & Sectors	***Notable Gaps / Coordination Issues***
Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Main operating entity of the UNFCCC financial mechanism; equal focus on mitigation & adaptation	Large-scale renewable energy, resilient infrastructure, and climate-smart agriculture	Often omits explicit ozone-layer safeguards; overlaps with other funds can cause duplication
Global Environment Facility (GEF)	Entrusted with the Convention's financial mechanism, supports climate, biodiversity, ozone, and other environmental goals	Integrated projects linking climate mitigation with ecosystem restoration; pilot ozone-friendly technologies	Fragmented project design may separate climate and ozone components, reducing synergy
Adaptation Fund (AF)	Finances concrete adaptation actions under the Kyoto Protocol	Community-level flood defences, drought-resilience programmes	Limited scope for mitigation or ozone-related measures
Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF)	Targets the most vulnerable, least-developed Parties	Capacity building, early warning systems, and basic renewable installations	Small grant sizes can restrict the inclusion of multi-objective (climate + ozone)

Fund (Operating Entity)	Core Mandate (UNFCCC Context)	Typical Projects & Sectors	***Notable Gaps / Coordination Issues***
			components
Loss and Damage Fund (FRLD)	Assist developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in responding to economic and non-economic loss and damage, including extreme weather events and slow-onset phenomena	Post-disaster reconstruction, livelihood restoration, insurance-type pay-outs, ecosystem-based compensation mechanisms	Coordination with GCF, GEF, and adaptation funds is evolving; clarity on eligibility criteria and scaling of pay-outs remains a challenge

Funding Inadequacies and Threats

Finance under the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, and Paris Agreement has been the subject of ongoing concern and criticism, with developing countries and many other stakeholders noting the massive gap between existing financial support and what is needed to address climate change at the scale needed. Estimates vary, but some suggest US$2.4 trillion annually to support developing countries in meeting their goals. This is far more than what is currently provided across the public and private sectors.

At the same time, needs are not being met, and the appetite of governments of high-income countries to support even existing funds is arguably waning. The US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is emblematic of this shift, although even among many other governments in the Global North, there have been signs of a cooling as priorities shift to security concerns and other areas.

Meeting future needs will require more private sector engagement, community-level solutions, and innovative financial tools. Strengthening the synergy between the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility, the Adaptation Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund, and the newly created Loss and Damage Fund will be essential to avoid duplication, ensure complementary coverage (including ozone layer considerations), and ultimately bridge the trillion-dollar financing gap.

Please note that the loss and damage fund was formally created through decisions 2/CP.27 and 2/CMA.4 at COP27 and operationalised at COP28; so it is now an operating entity of the UNFCCC financial mechanism, with a Board of 26 members constituted in 2023. It was introduced as a dedicated stream for irreversible climate-induced harms, thus acknowledging that loss and damage must be financed separately from mitigation and adaptation.

Next Steps

Despite widespread concerns, multilateral funding for the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity, and chemicals and waste has not declined. In fact, reports show a record $137 billion in climate financing from Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) in 2024, which was a 10% increase from the previous year.

That said, it is very unclear what the impacts will be of the US government's closure of USAID and of projected funding reductions from France, Germany, and the United Kingdom in Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2025.

Other countries, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland, have also announced cuts or plans to reduce their aid budgets.

One bright spot is that the Green Climate Fund has established a Private Sector Facility (PSF), a dedicated division designed to fund and mobilise private-sector actors. It hopes to secure funding from institutional investors, project sponsors, and financial institutions.

The US$1.3 trillion Baku to Belem roadmap developed by the COP 29 and COP 30 presidencies may need to broaden its beneficiaries to include biodiversity, chemicals, and waste, if successful.

This overview of the funding helps to understand what funding mechanisms are available in each of the three clusters, highlighting gaps and overlaps for improving alignment

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SUMMARY OF THE WORKSHOP

UN80 – Clustering the Environmental Conventions around the Triple Planetary Crisis of Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Chemicals and Waste, edited by Felix Dodds

Hosted by the Government of Croatia

Organized by

Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development, in cooperation with the International Science Council

Introduction

The United Nations has been called many things in its time. A champion of human rights. The world's peacekeeper and provider of disaster relief. A leader in climate change, sustainable development, poverty reduction, and disease prevention. The world's single most important organisation. Today, it faces some of its greatest challenges—a polarised and fractured world, regional conflicts, and myriad environmental challenges—all at a time when funding is being cut, and its legitimacy is being challenged.

The reform discussion under UN80 of the UN presents an opportunity in the environmental realm to review and strengthen the multilateral landscape.

Since July 2025, several articles have appeared on the Inter Press Service examining ways to strengthen the environmental pillar through "clustering" of various treaties and activities.

These suggestions were compiled in a report circulated to the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives and the UNEA Bureau meeting on September 29th and 30th, 2025, enabling them to consider the ideas as they prepare for UNEA 7 in December 2025.

It has also been circulated to member states in New York prior to this workshop, which was held on October 8th. **The full report is available here**.

Theme
The theme of the report and the workshop was UN80 and the clustering of environmental conventions to address the *triple planetary crisis* — climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution (chemicals and waste).

The workshop took place on October 8th, 2025.

Organisers and Hosts
- Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development, in cooperation with the *International Science Council*.
- Hosted by the *Croatian Mission*, a core member of the Friends of Governance.

Workshop Session 1 Summary

Opening Remarks

I**rena Zubcevic**, representative of the government of Croatia, opened with welcoming remarks.

She emphasised that the *UN80 initiative* is a timely opportunity to strengthen the **environmental dimension of the UN** by addressing fragmentation among multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), such as the:
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other biodiversity conventions administered by UNEP; and
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Vienna Ozone Convention.

She highlighted that **clustering MEAs**—grouping them by themes like biodiversity, climate, and pollution—could:
- increase coherence and efficiency;
- reduce duplication and bureaucracy;
- enhance shared governance, scientific collaboration, and harmonised reporting; and
- streamline funding and improve implementation.

A proposal to revive the **Global Ministerial Environment Forum** underlines the push for political accountability and institutional reform, and building interlinkages based on scientific advice.

Keynote: Liz Dowdeswell: former UNEP Executive Director
Dowdeswell reflected on the **broader global context**:
- The world faces *unprecedented uncertainty, inequities, and fragmentation*, but also has *decades of multilateral success*.
- The UN must prove itself *fit for purpose*, *responsive*, and *accountable*.
- Environmental governance reform should be guided by **scientific coherence, policy alignment, and operational efficiency**.

- There is a need to respond to crucial questions about leadership, trade-offs, and showing the courage to act systemically.
- She concluded by emphasising **solidarity, respect, ethical leadership**, and **sustainability as an interdependent global framework**.

Remarks by Felix Dodds: Secretary to the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development:

- Peace and stability are fundamental to delivering environmental progress.
- Periods of useful reform can often be secured during crises (e.g., before Rio+20, after the financial crisis).
- The current challenges can be used to **build a foundation for future advances** in environmental governance.
- Six discussion papers from experts were compiled into a *Stakeholder Forum report*[xxix] to inform future UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) discussions.

Presentation by Chris Spence: former Deputy Director, *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*:

- Reaffirmed that MEAs are *more necessary than ever* but face *declining trust and funding*.
- Advocated "making lemonade from lemons" by revisiting **clustering MEAs** to create efficiencies and renewed impact.
- The idea of revisiting the idea of clustering MEAs led to a series of six *papers* exploring practical aspects of clustering—covering climate, biodiversity, chemicals, science bodies and the re-establishment of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum as a body to address the interlinkages of the clusters.
- Called for focusing any clustering on improving *implementation, impact* and *collaborative reform*.

Conclusion

- UNEP's history shows resilience in advancing environmental agreements even in difficult times (e.g., mercury).
- The session closed with a call to ensure that reform efforts lead to **real, on-the-ground impact** and more effective MEA implementation.

Session 2 Summary

Proof of Concept: the clustering of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions: How this was done, and lessons learnt

Moderator: **Sophie Rigg** (UNDRR, Climate Action Network UK)

Presenter:

- **Michael Stanley-Jones** – UN University Institute for Water, Environment and Health

[xxix] SDG 2030 Series Report No. 5 is UN80: Reform of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements – Around the Triple Planetary Crisis of Pollution, Biodiversity, and Climate Change, Edited by Felix Dodds and Chris Spence, with Reflections by Liz Dowdeswell

Respondents

- **Dr. Mohamed Khashashneh:** former Secretary General, Jordan Ministry of Environment
- **Craig Boljkovac**: Senior Advisor, Regional Centre for the Basel and Stockholm Conventions

The discussion focused on the successes, challenges, and future lessons from integrating three major environmental conventions on chemicals and waste.

Key Presentation: Michael Stanley-Jones

- Recounted the **"synergies process"** that merged the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions (BRS).
- The 2010 **"Super COPs"** (joint conferences of the parties) in Bali marked the start of this integration.
- **Benefits of clustering:**
  - Streamlined governance and reduced administrative burdens.
  - Enhanced information flow and cooperation between treaty bodies.
  - Improved efficiency for member states attending joint meetings.
- **Lessons learned:**
  - Success depended on **member state leadership**, not only UN bodies' support.
  - A **single executive secretary** improved coherence.
  - The most important gains were *substantive*, not administrative — improved collaboration for the environmentally sound management of hazardous substances.

Respondent 1: Dr. Mohamed Khashashneh

Spoke from a **national implementation perspective** (Jordan).

- **National-level impacts:**
  - Stronger inter-ministerial coordination and stakeholder engagement.
  - Better policy coherence across government, private sector, and academia.
- **Regional impacts:**
  - Strengthened cooperation among countries through **regional centres**, e.g., Cairo's Basel Centre now serving all three chemical and waste conventions (BSR).
  - Stressed the need for **continued funding** to maintain regional centre effectiveness to enable better national implementation.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Replicate the BRS synergy model for **biodiversity, climate change, and ozone conventions**.
  - Secure **sustained international financial support** for national and regional implementation.

Respondent 2: Craig Boljkovac

- Provided a **critical view** of the process:
  - Acknowledged efficiency gains but noted that the process was initially **driven by cost-cutting**.
  - Argued that benefits for developing countries are **still a work in progress**.

- Highlighted disparities between **well-resourced** and **under-resourced regional centres**, urging capacity-building and financial reinforcement.
- Warned against **fragmentation** in new treaty processes (e.g., plastics, mercury) and the loss of institutional coherence in Geneva's chemicals cluster if the mercury and future plastics conventions are not added to the cluster.
- Emphasised the ongoing need for **better coordination** among global MEAs.

Discussion

- **Future clustering opportunities:** biodiversity and climate-related conventions.
- **Positive features to replicate:**
  - Unified executive leadership.
  - Joint communications and shared scientific review processes.
- **Challenges to avoid:**
  - Lack of coordination, unstable funding, and exclusion of developing country perspectives.
- **Funding mechanisms:**
  - Stockholm Convention's use of the **GEF** as a financial mechanism benefited all three conventions.
  - Suggested similar shared funding for future clusters.

Extended Discussion: Plastics Treaty and UN Reform

- Panellists debated the **ongoing plastics treaty negotiations**, describing them as "blocked" due to political and industry pressures.
- Some called for **stronger leadership** or even exploring **alternative negotiation tracks outside the UN system** if it becomes impossible to secure a strong outcome (an example of an outside approach would be the Ottawa Landmine Treaty model).
- Others stressed the need to reassert **environmental ministries' leadership** in these negotiations.

Final Reflections

- The BRS "proof of concept" shows that **clustering MEAs** can increase efficiency and coherence when **member states drive the process** and **funding and leadership are aligned**.
- Future MEA clusters should integrate **joint communication, science, and financial mechanisms**, while maintaining strong **national and regional implementation support**.

Session 3 Summary

Toward Enhanced Synergies among Biodiversity-Related MEAs: Addressing Fragmentation with Strategic Coordination

Moderator: Ambassador Diamane Diomi, Deputy Permanent Representative of Senegal

Presenter:

- **Hugo Maria Schally**, Former Head of the Multilateral Environment Cooperation Unit, European Commission

Respondents:

- **Ines Verleye** – Senior Biodiversity Advisor, Belgium
- **Clarisse Kehler Siebert** – Co-chair, CBD Bern Process; Senior Swedish Negotiator

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Key Presentation: Hugo-Maria Schally

Discussed **enhancing synergies among biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)** to address **fragmentation in global biodiversity governance**.

- **Problem:** Although numerous MEAs exist (CBD, CITES, Nagoya Protocol, etc.), biodiversity continues to decline due to **overlapping mandates, fragmented reporting, inefficient coordination, and lack of coordinated implementation**.
- **Proposed Solutions:**
    - Develop **joint work plans** across MEAs under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).
    - **Harmonise reporting systems** (e.g., through the CBD-DART platform).
    - Establish a **multi-MEA funding window** under GEF or GBFF for integrated projects.
    - Coordinate **capacity-building efforts** and strengthen **science-policy interfaces** (e.g., IPBES links).
    - Promote **integrated national biodiversity implementation plans (NB-SUBs)**.
    - Emphasise **predictable financing**, **benefit-sharing mechanisms**, and **indigenous peoples' rights**.
    - Encourage **political will** to simplify actions and reporting across MEAs.

Respondent 1: Ines Verleye

- Supported the idea of **joint efforts on cross-cutting issues**, especially at the **national level**.
- Emphasised that **synergies should not be pursued as an end in themselves** but to improve biodiversity outcomes.
- Warned against **past repetition of lengthy and expensive intergovernmental processes that only seem to aim at strengthening UNEP at the expense of the MEAs**.
- Noted that many **coordination mechanisms already exist** (e.g., Biodiversity Liaison Group, Joint Liaison Group, collaborative partnerships).
- Advocated for **building on existing tools and processes** rather than creating new structures.
- Stressed that **national implementation** remains key to successful MEA cooperation.

Respondent 2: Clarisse Kehler Siebert

- Highlighted the **"Bern Process"**, which fosters cooperation among biodiversity MEAs to implement the GBF.
- Shared insights from **Bern III (2024)**, emphasising practical collaboration and creation of a **"community of synergy champions."**
- Suggested practical steps:
    - Use existing mechanisms and strengthen inter-MEA scientific dialogue.
    - Harmonise terms, data, and reporting practices.

- Make better use of major meetings to coordinate efforts.
- Be innovative and start implementing cooperation **immediately**.

Closing Remarks

- Mr. Schally agreed with most points but underlined two key issues:
  - The **distinct "cultures" of MEAs and COPs** often hinder collaboration.
  - The **financial constraints** of the UN system require **more efficient structures**, potentially merging some secretariats to save costs. And amplify implementation.
- The session highlights its **value in advancing integrated biodiversity governance**.

Session 4 Summary

UN 80 – Clustering the Climate Conventions

Moderator: Meryem Hamdouni, Counsellor and Coordinator of Sustainable Development section at the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of. Morocco to the United Nations

Presenter: Stacey Azores participated in UN climate negotiations in various capacities, playing a crucial role in addressing one key adaptation issue.

Respondents

- **Yvo De Boer**, former Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC (2006-2010)
- **Malini Mehra**, Chief Executive of GLOBE International, the environmental legislators' organisation

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Context and Objectives

Session 4 explored the **clustering of the climate conventions** within the framework of the **UN80 reform initiative**, which proposes restructuring UN environmental governance — including the potential placement of the **UNFCCC under UNEP**. The discussion focused on whether such clustering could enhance coherence, efficiency, and implementation of climate-related goals while avoiding duplication and fragmentation across conventions.

Key Presentation – Stacey Azores

Stacey Azores provided an overview of the evolution of climate governance and analysed the **prospects and challenges of clustering the UNFCCC with other environmental conventions**, such as:

- The **Vienna Convention** and **Montreal Protocol** (ozone protection)
- Other related treaties on air pollution and environmental protection.

Main Arguments and Findings

1. **Historical Evolution**
    - Environmental governance began with the **1972 Stockholm Declaration**, followed by the **1992 Rio Earth Summit**, which created the three "Rio Conventions" — the UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD.
    - These conventions, while holistic in origin, evolved into **sector-specific silos**.
2. **Fragmentation Challenges**
    - Separate mandates, institutions, and finance streams lead to duplicated work and missed synergies.
    - Examples include:
        - Conflicting outcomes between climate infrastructure and biodiversity goals.
        - Fragmented funding via the **GEF** and **Green Climate Fund**.
3. **Lessons from Chemicals/Waste Conventions**
    - The **BRS Conventions (Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm)** serve as a **successful model of clustering**, demonstrating improved coordination, joint scientific panels, and policy coherence.
4. **Benefits of Clustering**
    - Potential **60–85% overlap** between ozone and climate conventions.
    - Could yield:
        - Unified scientific advice (IPCC + Montreal Protocol Scientific Assessment Panel).
        - Streamlined data sharing and financing.
        - Integrated approaches to air pollution, greenhouse gases, and land health.
5. **Proposed Path Forward**
    - Move relevant treaties under UNEP.
    - Integrate air pollution and climate frameworks (e.g., UNFCCC with the Convention on Transboundary Air Pollution).
    - Establish a **single umbrella mechanism** to coordinate climate, biodiversity, and pollution governance.
    - Revitalise the **Global Ministerial Environmental Forum** for strategic oversight.

Respondent 1 – Yvo de Boer

Key Points:

- Drew on his experience leading the UNFCCC during the Copenhagen Conference (2009).
- Warned of **institutional resistance and competition for funding** within the UN system.
- Stressed that **structural reforms must follow strategy** — clustering should emerge from a **coherent strategic vision** rather than institutional reshuffling.
- Advocated for:
    - **Cross-UN and Bretton Woods coherence** (UN + World Bank).
    - Strategic coordination around **mitigation, adaptation, and finance**.
- Cautioned that past "Delivering as One" efforts failed due to political and financial self-interest across UN entities.

Respondent 2 – Malini Mehra

Key Points:

- Offered a **parliamentary and policy practitioner's perspective**.
- Acknowledged the academic soundness of Stacey's analysis but emphasised the **political realities and institutional rivalries** that hinder reform.
- Highlighted the UN's **financial and legitimacy crises**, noting risks of "reform by default" if inefficiencies persist.
- Observed **growing alignment** among the Rio Conventions (climate, biodiversity, desertification), particularly since the **Paris Agreement**, with increasing joint participation and shared scientific input.
- Stressed the need for:
  - **Pragmatic governance reforms** at national and regional levels.
  - Policy coherence across ministries and parliaments.
  - Stronger **domestic institutional demand** for international reform.
- Cited examples such as Japan's collaboration with France linking **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)** and **climate agendas**, though noting limited public or policy integration.

Closing Reflections

- Emphasised that **political will and inclusivity** (scientists, academia, private sector) are essential for clustering success.
- Noted that the debate revealed both **the promise of efficiency gains** and the **challenges of reconciling different institutional cultures and mandates**.
- Thanked the **Government of Croatia** and **Felix** for organising, and looked forward to continued dialogue on UN environmental governance reform.

Closing Remarks

- **Clustering** offers potential for **greater efficiency, coherence, and integrated action** on climate and environmental governance, though this was challenged by several interventions.
- However, **institutional inertia, funding rivalries, and political fragmentation** remain serious barriers.
- **Strategic alignment**—not structural merger alone—should drive any reform.
- The conversation reflected a **maturing global discussion** on how to make the UN system "fit for purpose" in addressing the **triple planetary crisis**: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Session 5 Summary

Re-establishing the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF)

Moderator: Daniel Magraw, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

Presenter:

- **Jan-Gustav Strandenaes**, Stakeholder Forum Senior Adviser on Governance

Respondent

- **Mark Halle,** co-founder of Better Nature, former Executive Director of IISD

Key Points

Jan-Gustav Strandenaes

- Reflected on his long history with UNEP and environmental governance since the 1972 Stockholm Conference.
- Proposed re-establishing the **Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF)** as a venue for high-level, continuous policy dialogue on global environmental issues.
- Argued that GMEF could fill current gaps in environmental governance by:
    - Providing continuity and political visibility for the environment.
    - Enabling dialogue between ministers, scientists, and MEA (Multilateral Environmental Agreement) clusters.
    - Integrating science-policy interfaces on climate, biodiversity, and chemicals.
    - Serving as a bridge between the **UN Environment Assembly (UNEA)** and the **High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)** on Sustainable Development.
- Emphasised the importance of addressing the **triple planetary crisis** (climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution) and strengthening UNEP's role under the UN General Assembly.

Respondent 1: Mark Halle:

Acknowledged Strandenaes' optimism but expressed **scepticism** about the feasibility of reinstating the GMEF.

- Raised concerns about:
    - The current **weak multilateral environment**, lack of political appetite for new institutions, and "institutional fatigue."
    - Limited **political power of environment ministers**, as core environmental problems stem from economic and fiscal policies beyond their control.
    - The limited effectiveness of large international meetings in delivering real change.
- Suggested that progress will likely come from **coalitions and networks**—involving Stakeholders, including civil society, business, and finance—rather than traditional intergovernmental mechanisms.

Discussion and Closing

- Daniel Magraw highlighted UNEP's tangible successes, such as the global phase-out of leaded gasoline, as evidence of its ongoing relevance.
- Questions explored whether the GMEF could address environmental issues beyond the triple planetary crisis and how environment ministers can still shape normative frameworks and networks.
- Strandenaes clarified that science-driven discussions within the GMEF could broaden its thematic reach, amplify coordination and implementation of MEAs.
- Halle reaffirmed that environmental progress increasingly depends on creative, cross-sectoral coalitions rather than formal UN processes.

Final Reflections:
Session 5 explored the **potential revival of the GMEF** as a platform to strengthen global environmental governance. While Jan-Gustav argued it could reinvigorate high-level engagement and coordination, Mark cautioned that political and financial realities make such a revival difficult, emphasising the need for innovative, multi-actor collaboration beyond traditional UN forums.

Session 6 Summary

Clustering the Science bodies: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution (ISP-CWP)

Moderator: Andrea Mocano, Deputy Permanent Representative, Mission of Romania to the UN
Presenter:

- **Professor Peter Bridgewater** (Special Advisor, International Science Council; former Secretary General, Ramsar Convention)

Respondent:

- **Professor Idil Boran:** Synergies of Planetary Health Research Initiative, York University

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Key Presentation Points – Professor Peter Bridgewater
The session focused on improving coordination and coherence among international environmental science-policy bodies—specifically the IPCC (climate), IPBES (biodiversity), and the forthcoming panel on chemicals and waste. Discussions centred on whether these entities should be *clustered*, *cooperate more closely*, or risk creating further *confusion*.

1. **Historical Context & Current Challenges**
    - Since the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, multiple environmental conventions and science bodies have emerged, but they often operate in silos with overlapping mandates.
    - The 2024 IPBES *Nexus Assessment* demonstrated strong interlinkages among climate, biodiversity, food, water, and health—yet translation of this science into policy remains weak.
2. **Duplication & Complexity**
    - Multiple conventions produce similar reports (e.g., IPBES and UNCCD both on land degradation), often using the same scientists, leading to inefficiency and confusion.
    - There is a proliferation of outlooks (e.g., biodiversity, wetlands, migratory species) that overlap rather than integrate knowledge.
3. **Integrating Diverse Knowledge Systems**
    - Environmental governance must include not only "Western science" but also indigenous and local knowledge systems.
    - IPBES has made progress on this front, while IPCC is beginning to catch up.

4. **Recommendations for Reform**
    - **(1)** Strengthen the Biodiversity Liaison Group to include UNFCCC, UNCCD, FAO, WHO, and UNESCO, and ensure regular meetings.
    - **(2)** Re-establish and expand the network of chairs from subsidiary science bodies across conventions to promote exchange.
    - **(3)** Adopt **continuous reporting** (like UNEP's GEO model) instead of multi-year cycles to ensure timely, adaptive assessments.
    - **(4)** Rationalise outlook reports and focus on a unified, cooperative knowledge system rather than separate, redundant outputs.

    Overall message: Cooperation, not clustering, will deliver coherence and effectiveness.

Response – Professor Idil Boran

Professor Boran emphasised that clustering should be *smart* and *substantive*, not merely structural. Her **four priorities** were:

1. **Inclusivity of Knowledge** – Incorporate geophysical, social, and indigenous knowledge systems across all science-policy bodies.
2. **Multi-Level Guidance** – Extend impact beyond intergovernmental processes to include local and non-state actors.
3. **Alignment with Finance** – Science-policy platforms should help align financial mechanisms to support environmental coherence.
4. **Sustained Collaboration** – Institutionalise cooperation among science bodies (e.g., regular IPCC–IPBES joint work) rather than one-off meetings.

Discussion

The session underscored the urgency of moving from fragmented, duplicative environmental science systems toward **coherent, continuous, and inclusive cooperation** across global science-policy platforms—integrating diverse knowledges and aligning closely with finance and governance mechanisms.

- Moderator Andrea Mocano highlighted the need for **coherence and reduction of duplication** from a UN reform perspective, stressing that the public expects unified communication from "the UN," not fragmented entities.
- In closing, Bridgewater noted that science-policy interfaces must be empowered by **political authority** and **flexibility**, echoing the superiority of continuous assessment models (like UNEP GEO) for real-time policy relevance.

Summary of Session 7

The Way Forward

Session 7 marked the concluding part of the workshop, focusing on reflections, forward-looking strategies, and the integration of science and coherence into UN environmental governance reform—especially in the context of the upcoming **UN80** process and **UNEA-7**.

Opening Remarks by Felix Dodds

The moderator began by expressing appreciation to all moderators, presenters, and respondents for their rich contributions throughout the sessions. Although discussion time was limited, participants agreed that the dialogue should continue beyond the webinar series, potentially influencing outcomes related to UN80 and broader UN reform. The importance of sustained engagement on environmental governance—independent of specific events—was underscored.

Reflection 1 - Ayaka Suzuki: Head, UN80 Secretariat/Director of Strategic Planning, Executive Office of the Secretary-General

Ms. Suzuki commended the workshop's depth and constructive spirit, noting its alignment with **UN80's goals of renewing the UN with purpose and coherence**. She emphasised:

- The UN's ongoing effort to move from fragmentation to clarity across its complex institutional architecture.
- Reference to the **"Shifting Paradigms" report (Workstream 3)**, which outlines a blueprint for structural reform aimed at simplification and realignment to better serve people and the planet.
- **Paragraph 47** of the report, which identifies dispersed environmental responsibilities across UN entities, commits to a **thorough assessment** of current arrangements and makes proposals on possible structural changes or program realignments on environmental issues.
- Recognition that reforms need not rely solely on mergers but could include **mechanisms like periodic coordination meetings**.
- A call for **collective input** and proposals from participants to inform UN80's assessment process.

She also highlighted the **importance of strengthening science-policy interfaces**, referencing her role managing the UN Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board, and noted the **creation of the UN scientific panel on AI** adopted by the General Assembly in August. Suzuki concluded by framing this moment as an opportunity to **"make coherence a habit"** and ensure that the UN system becomes more **science-driven and coordinated**.

Reflections 2 - Morgan Seag: Senior Representative to the UN System for the International Science Council

Dr. Seag expressed appreciation to the organisers and government partners, emphasising the ISC's commitment to supporting **evidence-informed governance and sustainable development**. Key points included:

- The ISC's role as a **global convenor of scientific expertise**, representing over 250 science organisations worldwide.
- Advocacy for **integrative, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches** to environmental challenges.
- Stressing that science contributes to **knowledge generation, synthesis, and brokerage**, connecting diverse governance actors.

- The necessity of **breaking silos** in global environmental governance by embedding **science-policy coherence** across MEAs (Multilateral Environmental Agreements).
- ISC's readiness to support reform processes with scientific advice—both on **substantive environmental issues** and on **systemic coherence improvements** within the multilateral system.

Reflection 3 - Louis Meuleman: Chair of the Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future and the European Environment Agency

Speaking from a managerial and governance perspective, Meuleman shared insights from his work advising UNEP on **policy coherence for environmental governance**, linked to **SDG 17.14 (policy coherence for sustainable development)**:

- UNEP's development of a **composite indicator with eight sub-indicators** on policy coherence, with contributions from OECD and others.
- His findings suggest that **policy coherence does not always need institutional reform but can also be achieved through bottom-up, multi-level coordination approaches**. This is important because structural reforms are politically sensitive due to the **decentralised nature of MEA secretariats**.
- Suggested that **"clustering" MEAs** could enhance coherence, but expected that such efforts would face negotiation challenges and resistance.
- Proposed that **"virtual" or informal clustering**—through coordinated or networked approaches—may serve as pragmatic intermediate steps.

Closing Reflections by Felix Dodds

- Affirmed that the session's proposals were **constructive contributions**, ultimately dependent on **member state direction**.
- Emphasised **coordination rather than rigid clustering** as a feasible pathway toward coherence.
- Suggested that **UNEP's voluntary fund** could be reoriented toward promoting **inter-agency cooperation** (e.g., with UNESCO, FAO).
- Called for the **Chief Executive Board** to ensure cross-agency collaboration, as done before the SDG negotiations.
- Expressed gratitude to the host and moderators of today, all participants, **the Government of Croatia (host)** and **the Governments of Senegal, Romania, and Morocco**.
- Encouraged participants to ensure that these discussions fed into **UNEA-7** and advance the environmental reform agenda under **UN80**.

Key Themes and Takeaways

- **UN Reform Momentum:** UN80 is a pivotal opportunity to enhance coherence, integration, and clarity across the UN environmental system.
- **MEA clustering and coordination:** Proof of concept of clustering the BRS chemical and waste conventions opens the possibility among the conventions administered by

UNEP for biodiversity, and the possibility of UNFCCC becoming a UNEP convention opens the possibility of clustering UNFCCC and the Ozone convention

- **Science-Policy Interface:** Strengthening evidence-based governance and integrating science into decision-making are central reform priorities.
- **Policy Coherence:** Practical pathways for achieving coherence—bottom-up coordination, informal clustering, and cross-agency collaboration—were emphasised over structural mergers.
- **Collaborative Governance:** Broad encouragement for collective input, interdisciplinary cooperation, and pragmatic reform that transcends institutional silos.
- **Future Outlook:** The conversation is ongoing, with expectations that insights from this workshop will inform both **UNEA-7 deliberations** and **UN80 reform processes.**

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