

**A Series of Governance Papers by Stakeholder Forum,
Focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Triple
Planetary Crisis**

**Paper 8: Lessons Learned from the BRS Conventions Synergies Process,
Which Could be Applied to the UNEP-Administered and Extended to
Selected Other Biodiversity Conventions**

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This was first published in March 2026.

The opinions set forth below are the author's own.

Introduction

The UN80 process is a major United Nations reform effort launched in 2025 to modernise the organisation for its 80th anniversary, focusing on making it more efficient, agile, and effective by streamlining structures, reducing bureaucracy, and better aligning programs with current global challenges like climate change, conflict, and technological shifts. UN80 has three key workstreams with Member States making final decisions on proposals. The three workstreams are:

1. Improving Internal Efficiency: Identifying immediate cost-reduction and process streamlining in the Secretariat.
2. Mandate Implementation Review: Analysing the effectiveness and implementation of mandates given by Member States.
3. Structural Changes & Programmatic Realignment: Considering deeper changes to the UN's structure and program focus.

This paper addresses all three and builds on the work initiated by former UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer on clustering Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). This work was continued by his successor Achim Steiner as member states engaged in a process for the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, culminating in a joint set of recommendations/decisions that effectively realised “synergies”.

How was it done?

The decision to pursue closer institutional integration among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions emerged over time between 2002 and 2010, against a backdrop of wider UN concerns regarding fragmentation in international environmental governance and, at least in part, related financial implications.

UNEP Governing Council [decision SS.VII/1](#) (February 2002) explicitly encouraged (while taking into account the fact that each Convention is governed by its own Conference of the Parties, not by UNEP) enhanced collaboration among multilateral environmental agreement

secretariats where substantive overlap existed, notably in the chemicals and wastes cluster.

These concerns were initially operationalized in 2005, when the Conferences of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention ([decision SC-1/18](#), May 2005) and the Rotterdam Convention ([decision RC-2/6](#), September 2005), alongside the Basel Convention Open-ended Working Group ([OEWG-IV/10](#), June 2005), formally agreed to explore options for increased cooperation, including shared administrative arrangements and common management structures.

At this stage, the emphasis remained exploratory and analytical, with Parties requesting studies on potential efficiency gains while underscoring the continued legal autonomy of each convention.

A decisive shift from exploration to structured institutional reform occurred between 2006 and 2007, when all three conventions adopted convergent mandates to establish a joint inter-convention process.

In May 2006, the Stockholm Convention COP-2 adopted [decision SC-2/15](#), calling for enhanced cooperation and proposing the creation of an Ad Hoc Joint Working Group to develop concrete recommendations on administrative and programmatic coordination.

This mandate was subsequently endorsed by the Rotterdam Convention COP-3 through [decision RC-3/8](#) (October 2006) and by the Basel Convention COP-8 through [decision VIII/8](#) (November 2006).

The Ad Hoc Joint Working Group, composed of fifteen representatives from each convention and meeting three times between 2007 and 2008, was explicitly tasked with identifying areas for synergy—including joint services, coordinated meetings, and shared managerial functions—while preserving treaty-specific mandates and decision-making authority. Its work marked the first formal, Party-driven effort to translate political intent into institutional design.

The recommendations of the Ad Hoc Joint Working Group were formally endorsed in 2008 and 2009 through substantively identical “synergies decisions” adopted by the Basel Convention COP-9 ([decision IX/10](#), June 2008), the Rotterdam Convention COP-4 ([decision RC-4/11](#), October 2008), and the Stockholm Convention COP-4 ([decision SC-4/34](#), May 2009).

These decisions authorised interim joint services and explicitly requested UNEP and FAO to prepare for simultaneous extraordinary meetings of the three COPs.

The process culminated in February 2010 at the simultaneous extraordinary COPs (informally known as the “Super COP”) held in Bali, Indonesia, where Parties adopted omnibus decisions ([BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), [SC.Ex-1/1](#)) establishing a joint head of the Basel, Stockholm and UNEP-administered components of the Rotterdam Convention Secretariats, on a voluntary and reviewable basis.

Throughout this period, donor countries—most notably [Switzerland](#), as host country to the Basel and Stockholm Convention Secretariats and shared host (with Italy) of the Rotterdam Convention Secretariat, and a consistent advocate of institutional efficiency—played a critical enabling role by providing voluntary financing for studies, extraordinary meetings and interim arrangements.

This staged, decision-by-decision approach ultimately allowed Parties to approve the integration of the secretariats incrementally, balancing managerial reform with political oversight and respect for the conventions’ legal independence (Basel Convention COP-9 [decision IX/10](#) (2008); Rotterdam Convention COP-4 [decision RC-4/11](#) (2008); Stockholm Convention COP-4 [decision SC-4/34](#) (2009)).

Following the adoption of the omnibus decisions, the synergies process entered a distinctly operational phase, shifting from conceptual alignment to concrete institutional restructuring ([BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), [SC.Ex-1/1](#) (2010)).

The Bali decisions did not immediately “merge” the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention secretariats into one entity with three separate legally autonomous identities; rather, they authorised a functional integration model built around shared management and services, explicitly subject to review and cost-neutrality ([BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), [SC.Ex-1/1](#) (2010)).

Central to this arrangement was the establishment of a joint head function for the Basel Convention Secretariat, the Stockholm Convention Secretariat, and the UNEP-administered components of the Rotterdam Convention Secretariat, initially for a two-year period and financed through voluntary contributions. This joint head was mandated to ensure coherence across the three secretariats while respecting their legal autonomy and distinct Conference of the Parties mandates, and to prepare proposals for a more integrated organisational structure for consideration by the ordinary COPs ([BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), [SC.Ex-1/1](#) (2010); [BC-10/29](#); [RC-5/12](#); [SC-5/27](#) (2011)).

In parallel, the Bali decisions authorised the gradual consolidation of administrative and support services within Geneva, where all three secretariats were co-located ([BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), [SC.Ex-1/1](#) (2010)).

On an interim basis, joint services were established in key cross-cutting areas, including legal affairs, information technology, information and public awareness, financial and administrative support, and resource mobilisation ([BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), [SC.Ex-1/1](#) (2010); [BC-10/29](#); [RC-5/12](#); [SC-5/27](#) (2011)).

These services were designed to replace parallel, convention-specific units, thereby reducing duplication and enabling economies of scale. Importantly, the decisions specified that savings generated through these efficiencies should be redirected toward implementation support for Parties, particularly in developing countries ([BC-10/29](#); [RC-5/12](#); [SC-5/27](#) (2011)).

Staffing changes were implemented largely through the reconfiguration and sharing of existing posts rather than large-scale staff reductions, with detailed staffing tables

annexed to Secretariat notes and reviewed by Parties ([BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), [SC.Ex-1/1](#) (2010); [BC-10/29](#); [RC-5/12](#); [SC-5/27](#) (2011)).

The emphasis on cost-neutral reorganisation, including gains in efficiency and effectiveness (see below), repeatedly reaffirmed by the COPs, was a critical political condition for sustaining consensus among Parties wary of institutional expansion ([BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), [SC.Ex-1/1](#) (2010); [BC-10/29](#); [RC-5/12](#); [SC-5/27](#) (2011)).

Governance innovations accompanied these structural changes, most visibly through the institutionalisation of coordinated and joint meetings of the Conferences of the Parties (Basel Convention COP-10; Rotterdam Convention COP-5; Stockholm Convention COP-5 (2011)).

Beginning in 2011 and culminating in 2013, the COPs of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions were increasingly scheduled back-to-back or fully jointly, sharing opening and closing plenaries, joint high-level segments, and common agenda items on budget, administration, and cross-cutting policy issues ([BC-10/29](#); [RC-5/12](#); [SC-5/27](#) (2011)). This also resulted in significant cost savings for member states.

While formal decision-making remained convention-specific—each COP adopting its own legally distinct decisions—joint sessions allowed Parties to negotiate identical or closely aligned texts on synergies, budgets, and shared services ([BC-10/29](#); [RC-5/12](#); [SC-5/27](#) (2011)).

By 2013, following the mandated review of the synergies arrangements, Parties endorsed the continuation of the integrated secretariat structure, effectively consolidating the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm secretariats into what became known in practice as the “BRS Secretariat,” albeit without altering the underlying legal independence of the three conventions (Basel Convention COP-11; Rotterdam Convention COP-6; Stockholm Convention COP-6 (2013)).

This procedural architecture significantly reduced the transaction costs of participation, particularly for small delegations, and reinforced political coherence across the chemicals and waste cluster.

Taken together, the post-2010 implementation phase demonstrates that the BRS synergies process was neither a sudden institutional merger nor a purely administrative reform.

Rather, it constituted a carefully sequenced, Party-driven experiment in functional integration, characterised by interim arrangements, formal review points, and sustained donor support (UNEP Governing Council [decision SS.VII/1](#) (2002); [BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), [SC.Ex-1/1](#) (2010)).

The resulting governance model—joint management, shared services, and coordinated COPs within a framework of legal autonomy—has since been widely referenced in discussions on clustering and coherence across multilateral environmental agreements, including in debates on future institutional arrangements for emerging regimes such as plastics and chemicals beyond 2020.

How has it worked out? (Conclusions)

Benefits from the BRS conventions' synergies process can be divided into two distinct parts:

1. Organisational benefits within the secretariats

From an institutional perspective, the most evident benefit of the synergies process has been the reduction of administrative fragmentation without formal loss of legal autonomy. Prior to 2010, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention secretariats operated with parallel managerial, legal, financial, information technology, and outreach functions, despite being co-located and serving largely overlapping constituencies.

The synergies decisions authorised the replacement of this parallelism with shared legal, IT, information management, financial, and administrative support, as well as resource mobilisation, while retaining convention-specific policy units and reporting lines.

This produced economies of scale and pooling of expertise (resulting in strengthened expertise and more opportunities for experts to stimulate one another by sharing ideas), reduced duplication, and simplified internal workflows, particularly for cross-cutting issues such as budget preparation, staffing, documentation, and conference servicing. The sum of 1+1+1 is certainly greater than 3.

A second organisational benefit lies in managerial coherence and strategic alignment. The joint head function created after the 2010 Bali decisions and implemented in 2011, provided a single point of executive oversight across the three secretariats, enabling coordinated planning, synchronised budget cycles, and harmonised work programmes. Having one joint head instead of three separate Executive Secretaries also resulted in significant cost savings for member statesⁱ.

Importantly, this coherence was achieved through a functional rather than juridical integration model, preserving Party control and legal separation while allowing management decisions to be taken with a system-wide perspective. The repeated insistence on cost-neutrality and review mechanisms also strengthened political confidence among Parties, making institutional reform acceptable in an otherwise mandate-sensitive environment.

Finally, the synergies process enhanced institutional resilience and predictability. By pooling administrative capacity (where, as above, the sum is certainly greater than all the parts) and stabilising staffing through shared posts rather than ad hoc arrangements, the secretariats became less vulnerable to short-term funding volatility in any single convention. This, in turn, allowed greater continuity in servicing COPs, subsidiary bodies, and intersessional processes, particularly during periods of fiscal constraint.

2. Benefits for national and regional delivery of support to Parties

At the national and regional levels, the principal benefit discernible from the synergies process is the reduction of transaction costs for Parties, especially those with limited

ⁱ This approach, which was tested on an interim basis before the secretariats were merged in 2012, proved to be unwieldy but was implemented successfully under one executive head.

administrative capacity. Coordinated COP scheduling, joint agendas, and harmonised documentation reduced the need for delegations to prepare for and attend multiple, substantively similar meetings. This was particularly significant for small delegations and developing countries, which previously faced disproportionate burdens in engaging across three separate but related treaty processes.

A second benefit concerns the coherence and accessibility of technical assistance and capacity-building. The synergies decisions explicitly promoted the coordinated use of regional centres and encouraged joint planning and implementation of technical assistance activities. As a result, Parties increasingly encountered the chemicals and wastes cluster as a more integrated policy space, rather than as three siloed conventions. This facilitated more coherent national implementation strategies, particularly in areas such as chemical lifecycle management, illegal traffic, reporting, and institutional coordination among national focal points.

Also related to the second, country-level benefits were that, in the early stages of the Basel-Rotterdam-Stockholm synergies initiative, UNITAR (with funding from the Government of Switzerland), as well as the secretariats of all three conventions (and, later, the combined BRS Secretariat) played a supporting role focused on capacity-building at the national and regional levels, particularly in helping governments operationalize the concept of coordinated chemicals and waste management. UNITAR supported pilot activities, training workshops, and guidance to strengthen inter-ministerial coordination, align national focal points, and integrate obligations under the three conventions into more coherent national frameworks. This work complemented the intergovernmental synergies process by translating emerging global institutional reforms into practical, country-level implementation approaches, especially in developing and transition economies.

In addition, the growing reliance on and importance of Regional Centres for both the Basel and Stockholm Conventions - there are some 23 such centres globallyⁱⁱ, almost exclusively located in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, has resulted in the generation of practical efficiencies in the delivery of technical assistance. Training, technology transfer and capacity-building activities implemented through these centres are often less costly and more responsive to regional needs than centrally delivered programmes (such as those delivered by UN organisations), reflecting their proximity to national institutions and expertise. At the same time, the centres have facilitated genuine South-South cooperation, thereby operationalising an important principle underpinning the Conventions and reinforcing the shift toward regionally anchored implementation models. Most, if not all, of the centres deliver not only for the Basel and Stockholm Conventions, but for the Rotterdam Convention and beyond, including most, if not all, of the international chemicals and waste agreements portfolio.

Third, the establishment of joint resource mobilisation and programmatic planning functions improved alignment between donor support and national needs. By reducing competitive or duplicative voluntary funding requests and promoting coordinated donor

ⁱⁱ 14 are Basel Convention Regional Centres (BCRCs) and 17 are Stockholm Convention Regional Centres (SCRCs). Eight of the centres serve both conventions.

engagement, the synergies framework helped channel financial and technical resources more strategically. Although the volume of funding was not necessarily increased, its deployment became more predictable and better aligned with integrated national priorities, especially where countries sought to address Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm obligations simultaneously. The process has indeed led to (hopefully significant) savings among key donor countries (Switzerland, in particular, as the main host country for the BRS conventions).

The synergies framework helped the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (formally involved only as part of the Stockholm Convention financial mechanism) move toward a more integrated chemicals and wastes programming approach, enabling projects to address multiple convention obligations within a single intervention rather than through fragmented, convention-specific projects. As coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions improved—particularly through joint secretariat planning, harmonised guidance, and aligned COP decisions—the GEF was better able to design and approve multi-focal-area and programmatic projects (notably under POPs, mercury, and waste management) that reflected national implementation realities. In practice, this reduced transaction costs for countries, improved coherence between enabling activities and investment projects, and supported a gradual shift from isolated compliance projects toward more systemic national chemicals and waste management frameworks.

Finally, the synergies process strengthened policy coherence at the interface between national, regional, and global levels. Joint outreach, information systems, and clearing-house mechanisms improved access to guidance and best practices, while coordinated reporting and compliance-related discussions reduced confusion and overlap. Over time, this contributed to a more holistic understanding of chemicals and waste governance among national authorities, reinforcing the conventions' collective objective of protecting human health and the environment through mutually reinforcing implementation pathways.

3. Political/policy-related benefits and opportunities for cluster expansion

The joint nature of the BRS Secretariat has given all three conventions a higher profile within the UN system, and, in all likelihood, this enhanced profile has led to an overall strengthening of their positive influence. The joint head of the BRS Secretariat is of a higher rank than its predecessorsⁱⁱⁱ; thus, having more weight in higher-level decision-making and improved access to such levels.

By adopting similar decisions at the same triple BRS COPs, the political coherence from a Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm and overall perspective is better assured.

In addition, three simultaneous COPs have a better chance to attract high-level participation from Parties (e.g., Ministers, or even higher-level officials) than if there were three individual separate COPs.

ⁱⁱⁱ Recognising that the previous executive heads of the three individual conventions were at the D1 level at the time of merging of the Secretariats. The Basel Convention had a previous Executive Secretary at D2.

In future, additional related conventions/agreements (such as the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Global Framework on Chemicals, the Intergovernmental Science - Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP), etc.) could be successfully formally incorporated into this clustering effort with a positive effect on their effectiveness and costs.

4. The need for further improvement of delivery for these Conventions

The synergies process has undergone regular, formal reviews for the respective Conferences of the Parties (the latest was in 2017). The 2017 review ([UNEP/FAO/CHW/RC/POPS/SYN/REP/ReviewSynergiesArrangements](#)) concluded that the BRS synergies arrangements had produced clear organisational and operational benefits, but that gains were primarily incremental and managerial rather than transformative. Furthermore, for example, for the Stockholm Convention, analyses prepared for the Conferences of the Parties based on Parties' National Implementation Plans ([UNEP/POPS/COP.8/INF/32](#)) revealed a persistent gap between identified implementation needs and available resources. Aggregated NIP assessments indicated that the financial requirements for full implementation—particularly for PCB phase-out, monitoring infrastructure and environmentally sound waste management—substantially exceeded the resources available through the financial mechanism, with GEF support functioning primarily as catalytic financing rather than comprehensive coverage. At the same time, the Secretariat noted a pronounced shortfall in technical assistance and institutional capacity, with many developing-country Parties identifying deficits in expertise, laboratories, regulatory frameworks and reporting systems. Together, these findings underscored that implementation constraints were driven not only by funding shortages but by systemic capacity gaps at national and regional levels.

Could the UNEP Administered Biodiversity Conventions Follow a Similar Approach?

The approach to clustering the UNEP-administered chemical and waste conventions is a proof-of-concept. It is still a work in progress, as expressed in the previous section.

The UNEP Governing Council [decision SS.VII/1](#) (February 2002) explicitly encouraged enhanced collaboration among multilateral environmental agreement secretariats where substantive overlap existed.

“In particular, there is 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, including the interim secretariats, as well as biological diversity-related conventions.” (SS.VII/1)

The intent was to follow up after the chemical and waste clustering with a similar approach to the UNEP-administered biodiversity conventions.

There are three UNEP-administered biodiversity conventions, but the scene is more cluttered as there are a number of biodiversity-related MEAs whose secretariats are not provided by UNEP, including the BBNJ Agreement that recently entered into force, but that

doesn't feature anywhere yet in the landscape of coordinating/collaborating bodies bringing the secretariats and parties of MEAs together^{iv}. Unlike the BRS MEAs, the secretariats of the biodiversity conventions are located in different countries.

The challenge we are facing

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; promote site-based conservation; 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 that covers biodiversity across all areas, terrestrial and marine, including areas beyond national jurisdiction. 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.

Biodiversity Conclusions

This paper focuses on the following:

- (i) Maps the mandates and legal obligations of the biodiversity-related MEAs whose secretariats are provided by UNEP,
- (ii) 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

The secretariats of the UNEP-administered biodiversity MEAs are currently located in different geographic locations, a difference compared to the UNEP-administered Secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions prior to the synergies process. Following the BRS example in its entirety would probably require relocation to a single location. The CBD is located in Montreal, CITES in Geneva, and the Convention on Migratory Species in Bonn. While location might seem an issue, the focus should be on the desirability of clustering and the political context - in these days for global networking, location is a second-order issue.

1.1 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Protocols

The CBD entered into force in 1993, only 18 months after being signed in Rio at the Earth Summit. 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

^{iv} Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention); World Heritage Convention (WHC); International convention on the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW and its creature The International Whaling Commission (IWC); International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA); International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC); United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

are obligated to prepare and implement National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and to report at regular intervals. The national reports form the basis for monitoring the implementation of the conventions.

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 Utilization operationalizes 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 entered into force in 1975 and regulates international trade in CITES-listed animals and plant life through a system of appendices and permits, supported by compliance review and trade-related compliance recommendations by its Standing Committee. Its focus is targeted—ensuring that international trade is sustainable, legal, and traceable and does not threaten species’ survival—complementing broader conservation duties under CBD, CMS, and other biodiversity-related conventions. “The provisions in the Convention create a regulatory requirement at national borders....” It is legally binding, and although not self-executing, domestic measures must be adopted to implement its provisions, including those that penalise trade without the required permits.

CITES’ decisions and periodic reviews create regulatory effects at national borders, with enforcement conducted by national authorities, typically delegated to customs, police, wildlife, and other authorities responsible for wildlife law enforcement. Police authorities are a vital part of the CITES enforcement in line with national legislation. CITES is unique among biodiversity conventions in its mandate to review compliance and, in some cases, recommend trade suspensions.

CITES and the WTO (World Trade Organization) maintain a collaborative relationship, where CITES trade-related measures are generally considered compatible with WTO rules, providing a leading example of how environmental and trade regimes support each other.

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

CMS entered into force in 1983. It is a legally binding agreement. Species are listed on one of two Appendices, and Range States are prohibited from taking those species on Appendix I, unless one or more narrowly focused exceptions are used. For species listed on Appendix II, the emphasis is on cooperation across range states to conserve migratory species and their habitats, often via MoUs and specialised regional agreements. Its ‘umbrella’ function has catalysed the development of multiple instruments and action plans across taxa and flyways.

There is a fourth biodiversity convention that might be considered - one that is not administered by UNEP but by IUCN - the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971). There was a ten-year process to bring Ramsar under UNEP, which was originally supported

by all member states, but at the last moment, it was not approved. Perhaps it's time to revisit this.

The present state of cooperation between the biodiversity conventions

The following cooperation and collaboration structures referred to here relate to synergies at a strategic level rather than administrative functions.

The [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (KM-GBF) is the basis by which the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its protocols will be achieved, and is directly relevant to other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), in particular those [administered by UNEP](#). This is a first stage which could be started during the UN80 process.

There are two structures and processes that aim to foster synergies and cooperation within the UN System - the “**Environment Management Group**” (EMG) and the “**Biodiversity Liaison Group**” (BLG) among the secretariats of biodiversity-related MEAs, respectively.

In addition, there is a party-led process to foster dialogue, coordination, and collaboration between biodiversity-related conventions in support of the effective and synergetic development and implementation of the KM-GBF, the “Bern Process”.

It is an informal process whose activities are organised by UNEP in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the CBD, the Government of Switzerland, and other partners. Since its launch, the role and contribution of the Bern Process have been [recognised by several MEA governing bodies](#).

The **Bern Process** began with the [Bern I Workshop](#) in June 2019 in Switzerland, initiated in response to CBD COP decisions [14/34](#) and [14/30](#). Over 120 participants, including representatives from global biodiversity-related conventions, gathered to discuss the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Co-chaired by Switzerland and South Africa, the workshop focused on identifying cross-cutting issues and contributions from other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), [informing the CBD Open-ended Working Group](#)’s first meeting. [Bern II](#) followed in early 2021, held online due to the pandemic and co-led by Cambodia and the EU, and continuing the dialogue with 13 MEAs and resulting in [informal conclusions](#) aimed at enhancing collaboration. In June 2023, the Bogis-Bossey Expert Meeting was convened in response to [intergovernmental calls](#) and CBD COP [decision 15/13](#), providing crucial [advice for shaping Bern III](#).

Subsequently, in January 2024, [Bern III](#), co-chaired by Mexico and Sweden, brought together representatives from 16 MEAs to further discuss collaboration for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. (Notes 1)

At the **United Nations Environment Assembly-7**, in December 2025, the [decision 7/4](#) on promoting synergies, cooperation or collaboration for national implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and other relevant environmental instruments was agreed to:

“(c) Continue providing support to the Bern process, to strengthen synergies, cooperation or collaboration for the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework;”

UNEP administered Biodiversity Conventions

- **Convention on Biological Diversity:** [decision 15/13](#) on cooperation with other conventions and international organisations, CBD COP [decision 15/4](#) on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, CBD COP [decision 15/6](#) on mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting, and review associated with implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, CBD COP [decision 15/13](#) on cooperation with other conventions and international organisations
- **CITES COP:** decision 17.56 ([Rev. CoP19](#)) on cooperation with MEAs and other international organisations, CITES COP [decision 19.11](#) on the CITES Strategic Vision.
- **Convention on Migratory Species:** [decision 13.4](#) on options for a follow-up to the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023

UNEP administered the regional convention:

- **Carpathian Convention:** [decision 7/4](#) on cooperation with UNEP, [decision 7/6](#) on implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, decision 17/XII on collaboration with global MEAs:

IUCN-administered convention:

- **Ramsar Convention:** [resolution XIV/6](#) on enhancing the Convention’s visibility and synergies with other MEAs and international institutions, [resolution XIV/6](#) on enhancing the Convention’s visibility and synergies with other MEAs and international institutions. There have been various attempts to bring the Convention under UNEP auspices. Despite general agreement among most Parties, this has not yet been formally agreed upon.

Other UNEP-administered conventions

- **Minamata Convention:** decision MC-5/17 on Mercury and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (not yet available online), decision [MC-4/12](#) on international cooperation and coordination, decision MC-5/17 on Mercury and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (not yet available online), decision MC-5/7 on artisanal and small-scale gold mining (not yet available online), decision MC-5/11 on review of the financial mechanism of the Minamata Convention on Mercury (not yet available online):
- **Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions:** In decision BC-15/25, decision RC-10/14 and decision SC-10/21 on international cooperation and coordination with other organizations, the COPs of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, In decision BC-16/22, decision RC-11/9 and decision SC-11/21 on international cooperation and coordination with other organizations, the COPs of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions.

Bern is larger than the UNEP-administered conventions; it has decisions on cooperation from:

- **International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture:** [resolution 13/2022](#) on cooperation with the CBD, [resolution 1/2023](#) on the role of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, [resolution 13/2023](#) on cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity, [resolution 13/2022](#) on cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity, [resolution 13/2023](#) on cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity, [resolution 1/2023](#) on the role of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, [resolution 14/2023](#) on cooperation with other international bodies and organizations
- **World Heritage Committee:** [44 COM 7.2](#) on conservation issues, [44 COM 7.2](#) on conservation issues.
- **UNFCCC COP:** serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA-5) outcome of the first global Stocktake (available as an advanced unedited version).
- **UNCCD COP:** Decision 9/COP.12 (2015) – “Leveraging of synergies among the Rio conventions and promoting partnerships with other international agencies and bodies”; Decision 8/COP.15 (2022) – “Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies”; Decision 8/COP.16 (adopted at COP16, 2024) –cooperation theme + Rio-synergies emphasis.

What role could EMG, the BLG, and the Bern process play?

In a synergies strategy for biodiversity-related MEAs, the EMG, BLG, and the Bern Process are complementary because they operate at different “levels” of the governance ecosystem.

The UN Environment Management Group (EMG) is a UN system-wide coordination body (chaired by UNEP) with a mandate to facilitate inter-agency coordination across the UN system to strengthen system-wide environmental coherence. Building on its experience in developing system-wide Common Approaches on Biodiversity and Pollution, the EMG can contribute to mapping institutional linkages, identifying opportunities for programmatic alignment among coordination mechanisms, and supporting the translation of global environmental commitments into more coherent country-level delivery through UN Country Teams.

The Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG) is a secretariat-level coordination mechanism among biodiversity-related conventions, designed to improve day-to-day coherence (information exchange, aligned work areas, coordinated messaging, and—where feasible—harmonization of tools/approaches) while respecting each treaty’s mandate; its potential contribution is the practical operationalization of synergy actions that have either its grounding in the respective treaty mandates or have been authorized/decided by respective treaty bodies e.g., interoperable guidance, aligned indicators/reporting elements, and joint capacity-building offers that reduce transaction costs for national focal points. Its members are composed of the Heads of the Secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),

the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and the World Heritage Convention.

The Bern Process, by contrast, is an informal, party-led and UNEP-facilitated cooperation track explicitly aimed at catalysing dialogue, coordination and collaboration among biodiversity-related conventions in support of KMGBF implementation; its added value is political: it can surface and socialise a cooperation “menu” (including cross-cluster linkages) that Parties can then translate into COP mandates and that secretariats (including through the BLG) can convert into deliverables. If steered and managed well, it could be the basis for action in the respective treaty bodies that mandate further synergy actions.

Together, these platforms can help reinforce a more connected ecosystem of environmental governance by strengthening horizontal collaboration across entities and vertical integration from global frameworks to national implementation, while avoiding duplication and building on existing mandates and capacities.

What could be the steps for the three UNEP-administered biodiversity conventions to cluster?

The first step **MUST** be a decision within each Convention Governing body to initiate such a process, as only the Party signatories to each Convention can decide to begin taking steps to consider clustering the conventions. No other body or process could mandate this to each individual convention, as their decisions are not legally binding.

It was within the chemical-related conventions themselves that decisions were taken to consider clustering and to determine the areas of integration.

No one MEA, even the CBD, could decide on clustering for another MEA. Especially because not all countries are Parties to all 3 conventions.

UN 80 could initiate the call for each convention to explore the issue of clustering.

A further Bern meeting will probably not take place before the 17th meeting of the CBD Conference of the Parties scheduled to take place in Erevan, Armenia, in October 2026.

The so-called “Global Stocktake” on the implementation of the KMGBF to be undertaken at the meeting could be a good starting point for further efforts.

2026: Thus, could there be an immediate follow-up during the UNGA 2026, leading to a UN80 nudge?

2027: The 8th UN Environment Assembly, to be held in December 2027, could be an opportunity to make another effort in that direction, followed up at the 18th meeting of the CBD Conference of the Parties in 2028.

2028: The 21st meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) COP

2029: The 16th meeting of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals CMS) COP

2030: The post 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

What are the advantages of clustering the Biodiversity Conventions?

Extending cooperation among UNEP-administered MEAs would be only a first step, but steps could be extended to MEAs part of the BLG and beyond in due course. The BLG and Bern Process (both extended slightly to cover all relevant MEAs) could work on a practical synergy agenda for biodiversity-related MEAs that could comprise actions and projects such as:

1. **Joint Work Plans under the KMGBF:** Review and continue to develop time-bound, target-linked joint programs among CBD, CITES, CMS, while also looking to develop these for Ramsar, WHC, UNCCD, ITPGRFA, and (as it matures) BBNJ. Prioritise cross-cutting areas, including ecosystem restoration, invasive species, wildlife trade, and genetic resources. The different conventions have been ratified by different sets of countries.
2. **Harmonised Reporting and Data Architecture:** Scale up the UNEP 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:** Promote reciprocal participation of scientific bodies (e.g., SBSTTAs, CMS Scientific Council) and further formalise channels between IPBES and all biodiversity MEAs.
A first step might be to consider the ToRs of Committees, as agreed by the Parties, to determine whether this is realistic. This emphasises the need to unpack all the requirements and processes to inform consideration of what is feasible in practice.
6. **UNEP/EMG/BLG and UNEA Leadership:** Utilise UNEA to adopt resolutions inviting the secretariats and the governing bodies of relevant MEAs and UN agencies to report on synergistic implementation and to pilot joint service.
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. The ability to learn from the different approaches means that not all can be consolidated. The CMS action plans are quite different from CITES implementation, which involves permitting and enforcement
8. **To enhance knowledge management** among the MEAs through an enhanced use of the United Nations Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements

(InforMEA). It is a one-stop portal for information on Multilateral Environmental Agreements searchable by key terms across treaty texts, COP decisions, national plans and reports, laws, court decisions, and more.

Conclusion

While practical steps as outlined in this paper appear, assuming political will by parties, feasible and realistic, a “BRS-type process” for biodiversity-related MEAs (i.e., moving toward shared services, joint bodies/meetings, while keeping separate legal identities) runs into a set of structural and political-economy obstacles that are sharper in biodiversity than they were for chemicals and waste.

Biodiversity-related MEAs: species/trade (CITES), migratory species (CMS), wetlands (Ramsar), sites/heritage (World Heritage), genetic resources (CBD/ITPGRFA), etc. Different legal architectures and levels of normative “bite.” CITES enables the use of permits and enforcement as part of its delivery.

Ramsar encourages designation/wise use; CMS mixes agreements/MoUs; CBD is framework-like; WHC has its own compliance dynamics. A BRS-style convergence quickly runs into questions like: whose compliance model sets the tone? Institutional incumbency and identity politics. Secretariats, scientific/technical bodies, standing committees, and COP bureaux have built distinct communities of practice, stakeholder coalitions, and visibility. Any shared-services or joint governance proposal can be read as a zero-sum game over influence, staffing, hosting arrangements, and agenda control, even when framed as an efficiency measure. There is no need to have a single compliance model, and it would probably be very difficult to achieve.

In biodiversity, funding streams are fragmented (GEF focal areas, bilateral initiatives, philanthropic flows, vertical funds, and convention-specific trust funds). Parties may resist pooled budgeting if they fear cross-subsidisation (their contributions financing “other conventions’ priorities”) or blurred accountability lines for results.

Conference governance and political priorities diverge. The political coalitions that drive outcomes differ substantially across biodiversity MEAs (e.g., trade ministries and enforcement communities in CITES; environment ministries in CBD; heritage/culture constituencies in WHC, Foreign Offices in BBNJ). Joint COPs or strongly synchronised agendas could amplify conflicts because the underlying negotiating dynamics and stakeholder pressures are misaligned.

In biodiversity science-policy interfaces, they span IPBES, FAO, regional bodies, and convention-specific science advisory structures, and often embed value-laden judgments (e.g. sustainable use, restoration, offsets).

Biodiversity-related MEA secretariats are geographically dispersed and institutionally diverse (UN-administered, UNEP-administered, and in one case by IUCN). Any move toward consolidation or shared services quickly raises practical and political questions about seat, host agreements, employment conditions, and administrative law. This should be part of the discussions and reflections once there is an agreement to move towards clustering.

In biodiversity, the feasible pathway would have to be modular and function-specific (shared tools, aligned capacity-building, interoperable data/reporting elements, coordinated guidance on cross-cutting themes) rather than deep institutional integration (joint COPs, shared governing bodies, pooled budgets).

In any case, the parties to the respective MEAs are firmly in the lead, as they would have to be on board for any such changes. Saying that, if member states want to do this, it could be achieved by 2030 and set biodiversity on a strong footing for the 2030-2050 period.

[Annex I](#)

Notes 1: Taken from the UNEP [website here](#).

Key Legal and Institutional Decisions Underpinning the BRS Synergies Process

1. UNEP Governing Council [decision SS.VII/1](#) (2002), *International Environmental Governance*.
Download: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/461427/files/UNEP_GCSS_VII_1-EN.pdf
2. Stockholm Convention COP-1 [decision SC-1/18](#) (2005); Basel Convention [OEWG-IV/10](#) (2005) (have to examine as part of the final report); Rotterdam Convention COP-2 [decision RC-2/6](#) (2005).
Download: <https://www.brsmeas.org/Portals/4/download.aspx?d=UNEP-CHW-SYN-PUB-SynergiesDecisions-1.English.pdf>
3. Stockholm Convention COP-2 [decision SC-2/15](#) (2006); Rotterdam Convention COP-3 [decision RC-3/8](#) (2006); Basel Convention COP-8 [decision VIII/8](#) (2006).
Same source.
4. Basel Convention COP-9 [decision IX/10](#) (2008); Rotterdam Convention COP-4 [decision RC-4/11](#) (2008); Stockholm Convention COP-4 [decision SC-4/34](#) (2009).
Same source.
5. Omnibus decisions [BC.Ex-1/1](#), [RC.Ex-1/1](#), and [SC.Ex-1/1](#) (2010), adopted at the simultaneous extraordinary COPs in Bali.
Same source.
6. Enhancing cooperation and coordination decisions [BC-10/29](#); [RC-5/12](#); and [SC-5/27](#) (2011).
Same source.
7. Decisions adopted at the 2013 joint meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions.
Download: <https://www.brsmeas.org/2013COPs/Decisions/tabid/1200/language/en-US/Default.aspx>
8. 2017 Review of Synergies: Moore Stephens LLP (2016). *A review of the synergies arrangements (ref. paragraph 5 and annex of decisions BC-12/20, RC-7/10 and SC-7/28): Final Report*. Prepared for the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions on behalf of the Conferences of the Parties.
Download: [UNEP/FAO/CHW/RC/POPS/SYN/REP/ReviewSynergiesArrangements](#), 13 October 2016.
9. Report on the assessment of funding needs of the Parties that are developing countries or countries with economies in transition to implement the Stockholm Convention for the period 2018-2022. [UNEP/POPS/COP.8/INF/32](#) (2017)

Overview and Strategy Documents

10. Secretariats of the Basel Convention, the Rotterdam Convention and the Stockholm Convention (2012). [Compilation of decisions related to enhancing cooperation and coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions \(2005-2011\)](#). UNEP/BRS Secretariat, Geneva.
11. Perrez, F. (2013). [Building an effective, future-proof international chemicals and waste regime](#). Guest article, **Chemicals and Wastes Policy & Practice**, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), posted 6 August 2013.

Key Legal and Institutional Decisions Underpinning the Biodiversity Conventions

1. Mandates for the [Bern Process](#) and cooperation in implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

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 HLPF processes.

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multilateral environmental agreements and global conferences, such as UNCED 1992, Rio+20, UNFCCC, UNCBD, and the international Ozone Treaties, and also served as president of the Implementation Committee of the Montreal Protocol.

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