

‘Reversing the current trend of global environmental degradation would require strengthening of environmental governance at all levels, which in turn would require international institutions and processes to become more coherent and effective and to cooperate more in addressing important existing and emerging global environmental challenges.’ [UNEP: Report to Governing Council \(A/63/25\)](#)

Background

The debate on strengthening international environmental governance gained renewed momentum following the World Summit Outcome in 2005 ([GA Resolution 60/1](#)). It recognised the ‘need for more efficient environmental activities in the UN system, with enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance, strengthened scientific knowledge, assessment and cooperation, better treaty compliance, while respecting the legal autonomy of the treaties, and better integration of environmental activities in the broader sustainable development framework.’

In 2006, the General Assembly started an informal consultation process on the framework for IEG, co-chaired by ambassadors Enrique Berruga of Mexico and Peter Maurer of Switzerland. In their update to the President of the General Assembly in June 2006, the co-chairs concluded that there was wide recognition that the system needed strengthening to improve coordination and coherence. They also highlighted that some delegations felt that strengthening of the current framework would be sufficient, while others felt broader institutional reform was required. In June 2007 an [options paper](#) was presented to delegates, highlighting a number of options and building blocks to strengthen the current framework, while continuing the debate on whether a new organisation should be formed to be the principal environmental body within the UN system (UNEO).

The consultations continued following the options paper, and in May 2008 a [draft Resolution](#) was presented. The draft resolution focused on a number of areas, the most notable being the absence of any recommendations on creating a new UN environmental organisation, instead emphasising the need for the UNEP to remain the principal UN body for environmental activities. It did, however, suggest that the debate needs to continue, although not expressly mentioning UNEO.

Following debate over the draft Resolution, a [revised draft](#) was presented by the co-chairs in July 2008. This contained a number of changes to the original, emphasising UNEP as a coordinator and promoter of scientific research and softening the language around the coordination among MEAs. The concept of

Revised Draft – Key Features

- Calls for increased coordination and cooperation at the level of agencies.
- Reiterates that UNEP is the leading authority on trend analysis, policy advice and early warning information.
- Stresses the importance of strengthening UNEP’s scientific role, including promoting research, working with other scientific bodies. It also invites the Governing Council to consider a ‘Chief Scientific Capacity’ within UNEP.
- Recommends placing the EMG under the direct leadership of the secretary general.
- Recognises the increased importance of MEA coordination, invites identification of areas for strengthened cooperation and coordination, and emphasises the need to explore potential for cluster-wise cooperation among MEAs.
- Calls for strengthened regional presence.
- Stresses the need to improve capacity building and technology support for developing countries and urges the full implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan.
- Recommends to continue informal consultations on IEG, and to continue the examination of a more integrated structure.
- Recommends that UNEP and MEAs ask for formal inclusion as observers in all relevant committees of the WTO.

improving the use of Environmental Management Group (EMG) for coordination was retained, as was the call for better integration between EMG and the Chief Executives Board (CEB).

The resolution calls for little substantive action. Instead, it makes a statement on the importance of increasing the capacity and capability of the governance system. The co-chairs have stressed the need to take a step-by-step approach to reform, favouring a gradual change rather than a full transformation of the system.

Key Debates

In addition to the progression of the debate in the General Assembly, various sources, including GC/GMEF debates and country statements, have indicated that there are a number of key issues surrounding the development of a strengthened IEG system.

UNEP or UNEO

Proposals to form a United Nations Environmental Organisation (UNEO) have not reached the drafting stage. There is a significant divide among states as to whether improved IEG can be achieved through its current structure, or whether broader transformation is required. There is continuing support for UNEO from Europe, and belief that this is needed to overcome the current structure's difficulties with political authority and resources.

The subject of UNEO was a talking point in the 10th Special Session of the GC/GMEF (see [Earth Negotiations Bulletin Vol. 16 No.66](#)):

- France stressed its continuing efforts and support towards UNEO
- Iceland emphasised its importance in a policy-setting environment

- There was also support from a number of other delegates, including the Republic of Korea and Zimbabwe
- There were, however, reservations expressed, with a number of delegates stating a preference to strengthening the current system first, including Mexico, who favoured 'regeneration' of UNEP.
- The US acknowledged the divergence of opinions on the issue, and stated that the General Assembly Resolution would help identify common ground.

UNEP Medium Term Strategy

Perhaps one of the important moves in the debate around IEG recently is the formalisation of the need for a strengthened system in the [UNEP Medium Term Strategy](#). It stresses the need to strengthen environmental governance at country, regional and global level, that interlinkages between MEAs should be identified to provide more effective implementation and that UNEP will help improve coherence and cooperation between environmental mechanisms. It also places emphasis on developing countries capacity to implement MEAs.

At its 10th Special Session in February 2008, the GC/GMEF welcomed the Strategy's emphasis on strengthening the UNEP as the principal UN environmental body.

In addition, UNEP is undergoing significant reform, aiming to strengthen the current IEG structure, and implement the 2002 'Cartegena package.' This includes increasing its science base, enhancing capacity to deliver on the Bali Strategic Plan, strengthening its financial situation, enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of its secretariat, and undertaking internal organisational reform.

The reality, however, has been that the Resolution has delayed the debate, instead deciding to continue examining the issue.

Financial Arrangements

'It comes as no surprise that the most contentious issue in the resolution is the section on financing... even if we could agree on the need for more resources for environmental governance, or environmental activities in general, we might still not be in a position to agree on where the additional resources should come from.' [Co-chairs' presentation on the revised draft Resolution.](#)

There has been a divergence of views in discussions around the financial arrangements for strengthened IEG. Some states have supported an increase in funding, whilst others have said the current funding arrangements should not be increased.

The draft Resolution made a number of suggestions:

- New and additional resources from the Secretary-General
- A doubling of the contribution of the regular UN budget
- A substantially increased fifth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund
- The continuation of a voluntary indicative scale of contributions
- That the GC provide, as a matter of urgency, the resources needed for implementation of UNEP's programme of activities

Little change was made from the first draft, with the co-chairs preferring to resolve the issues on this at a later point.

UNEP-GEF relationship. It also stated that there should be improved dialogue between UNEP and other GEF implementing agencies.

Predictable, Adequate and Timely Funding

The EU and Indonesia, among others, have made reference to the need to the IEG system to receive predictable, adequate and timely resources.

- Indonesia raised concern that the proposals within the draft did not address the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness of funding.
- The EU stressed the need to make more efficient use of existing resources and financial structures. In particular, the need to improve the financial basis of UNEP through a clear identification of core functions and a better balance between earmarked and non-earmarked resources.
- Both supported the Voluntary Indicative Scale of contributions, with Indonesia stressing that it should be revisited for developed countries and that no options should place an additional burden on developing countries.

IEG and Sustainable Development

'Environmental governance is designed to facilitate sustainable development which rests on three indispensable pillars: economic development, social equity and environmental protection' [Statement on the draft Resolution by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia.](#)

This view, held by a number of countries, is expressed in the revised draft. The Preamble recognises that strengthening IEG should be undertaken in the context of the three pillars of sustainable development (PP8). However, in their presentation the co-chairs stress that, whilst they included references to this, the resolution should be focused on the environmental activities of the UN.

It has also been recognised by the Governing Council that well-governed and effectively managed institutions are important in achieving sustainable development, and UNEP should promote this and lead by example. (Decision SS.X/5.)

The debate is particularly relevant to considering how a strengthened IEG system can fit with other sustainable development institutions. The principle of enhancing the capacities within the UN system to integrate environmental objectives into related areas, such as development, trade and health, was put forward in the 2007 Options Paper. It was suggested that the roles be clarified, particularly with regards to implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan.

The EU, in its [statement of IEG financing in May 2008](#), supported this, and stated that further reflection is needed on this UNDP-

In their [May presentation](#), the co-chairs stated that one of the weaknesses of the current system is a lack of a common, over-arching framework, and that sustainable development, environment, climate change, global public good perspectives, and many other concepts, shape and inform different policy agendas. In their [presentation on the revised draft](#), the co-chairs stressed that the integration of EMG in the CEB would

have the important advantage to guarantee that CEB would coordinate activities in all three pillars of sustainable development; the EMG would coordinate environmental issues and the CEB sustainable development issues.

There doesn't appear to be contest against the principle of better coordination among agencies, but there is debate on how to do this. For example, China, although stating that discussions on UNEO are still needed in light of the divergence of opinions, think there should be an emphasis on mutual cooperation and coordination, and agencies shouldn't be 'integrated for the sake of integration.' ([Statement by the Chinese Delegation at the Informal Consultation, Sept 2007](#)). Others maintain that this can best be achieved through the development of UNEO.

Key Debates

- How to coordinate MEAs more effectively, without taking away their autonomy or diluting the authority of the Conference of the Parties.
- How to finance a strengthened IEG system
- Whether the current institutional structure should be strengthened, or a new structure created.
- What the relationship should be between EMG and CEB, and how best facilitate sustainable development
- Resources for capacity building and technology support, and the relationship between IEG and the Bali Strategic Plan
- How to take forward the debate on broader transformation
- How to strengthen regional presence

IEG and the Millennium Development Goals

Goal 7 of the MDGs is to ensure environmental sustainability. There is increasing recognition that environmental degradation is threatening sustainable development and the attainment of the MDGs. A common theme is that achieving the MDGs is going to need better global governance, including environmental. Practical suggestions have included:

- Enhancing UNEP's relationship with UNDP (Poverty and Environment Facility and MDG Fund)
- Building on the current Memorandum or Understanding between UNDP and UNEP
- UNEP directly participating in the One UN pilot, in all 8 pilot countries and through their enhanced relationship with UNDP.

With regards to the current progress in the General Assembly, the importance of the relationship between IEG and the MDGs has been highlighted in the preamble of the Draft resolution. In the operative part, it also encourages UNEP, UNDP, GEF and the World Bank to cooperate in implementing their agreements (although not expressly mentioning the MDGs).

Next Steps

Given the history of the debate around strengthening IEG, it seems that it is some way from being resolved. The original timeline was to reach an agreement on terms for the negotiation of broader transformation by September 2008. However, the debate has not moved on significantly in the last six months, and the agreement reached during the

consultation process is that the discussion on broader transformation will be through further informal consultations. The co-chairs dismissed the idea of the more formal mechanism of an Open-Ended Working Group, proposed by the EU. This is some way off the negotiation process which was envisaged to have started by September.

The changes that are now proposed are the first step. If agreed, there will be some strengthening of International Environmental Governance, but this will be a long way off what has been envisaged by proponents of UNEO. Even the draft Resolution, which put aside the debate on UNEO, has been weakened through the consultation process. This is likely to be furthered when it reaches the point of formal negotiation. It is unclear when this will be. In October the President of the General Assembly asked the co-chairs to continue the consultations on IEG, but there does not yet appear to be any firm commitment on timeframes for agreeing the Resolution.

It is likely that any agreement on broader transformation will be during the 64th Session of the General Assembly at the earliest, and that it will be some time before there are any major legal changes strengthening the UN institutional structure for environmental governance.

Further Information

- UNEP Medium-Term Strategy 2010-2013, available at www.unep.org/gc/gcss-x/download.asp?ID=473
- UNEP : report of the Governing Council, 10th special session (A/63/25) (see Appendix II(III.)), available at <http://unbisnet.un.org>
- Draft Resolution on Strengthening the Environmental Activities in the UN System (July 2008), available at www.un.org/ga/president/62/issues/environmentalgov/resolution230708.pdf
- IISD, Earth Negotiations Bulletin, vol.16 no.66, available at www.iisd.ca/unepgc/unepss10
- 'Panel Discussion on Financing of the International Environmental Governance as part of the informal consultation process – Statement by Ana Kalin on behalf of the European Union' (May 2008), available at www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_7789_en.htm
- 'Comments of the European Union to the draft presented on 2 May 2008' June 2008, available at www.un.org/ga/president/62/issues/environmentalgov/IEGEU.pdf
- Talking Points Presentation on Draft Resolution, May 2008, available at www.un.org/ga/president/62/issues/environmentalgov/TPresIEGLAST.pdf
- Talking Points Presentation on Draft Resolution, July 2008, available at www.un.org/ga/president/62/issues/environmentalgov/TalkingPointsEIG.pdf
- 'Intervention by Achmad Rizal Purnama, Third Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations before the Informal Consultation of the Process on Strengthening International Environmental Governance' (May 2008), available at www.reformtheun.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=3148z
- 'UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives: Secretariat Briefing – IEG' June 2008, available at intranet.unep.org/PDF/CPR-IEG-June-08-FINAL-REV.pdf