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## High-level Seminar on Global Environmental Governance

An IISD Summary

By Richard Sherman

*This summary was prepared by IISD and does not represent a consensus statement or view.*

IISD, in cooperation with the Danish and Kenyan Missions to the United Nations in New York and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hosted the High-level Seminar on Global Environmental Governance on October 16, 2007. The seminar brought together over 30 ambassadors and senior officials from a number of countries to review a broad range of creative ideas for the reform of global environmental governance with a view to accelerating positive movement towards such reform and building consensus around particular reform proposals.

The seminar was designed to broaden the debate beyond the confines of the current definition of international environmental governance (IEG), which focuses only on the package of issues agreed to under the UN Environment Programme's "Cartagena" Decision and the World Summit Outcome Document, towards the broader definition of global environmental governance (GEG) as proposed in the IISD publication, namely that GEG is "*the sum of organizations, policy instruments, financing mechanisms, rules, procedures and norms that regulate*



Participants discuss global environmental governance in New York. The seminar was designed to "broaden the debate," writes Sherman.

*the processes of global environmental protection*” (Najam *et al.*, IISD, 2007). What this means, really, is that we need to focus not only on the narrower but important organizational and managerial issues of organizations, but also the larger purpose of GEG. The latter places much more emphasis on performance in environmental terms. The central question for any reform discussion should be: What do we need to do in terms of governance to improve the condition of the global environment? The ultimate goal of governance has to be placed in focus: real improvement in the real environment for real people.

The seminar, which took place under the Chatham House Rule, addressed the outcomes of the IISD publication *Global Environmental Governance: A Reform Agenda*, and consisted of two sessions, which addressed: Elements for Stronger Global Policy Advice: Knowledge and Interlinkages; and Mainstreaming Global Environmental Governance. The seminar provided an opportunity for an informal substantive dialogue between participants on the elements of a reform agenda, including, for example, a more detailed look at non-state actors (including business) in global environment governance; reform in all institutions that impact the global environment, including, but not only, UNEP; novel approaches to questions of financing which explore innovative sources as well as uses of resources for better global environmental management; and challenges of knowledge-driven global environmental policy, a subject that has gained new prominence with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Seminar participants addressed a number of key issues and formulated some advice, namely:

1. The need for a new narrative on international environmental governance (IEG), particularly one that enables the discussion to move beyond on the narrow zero-sum game thinking and provides additional perspectives that incorporates a broader view of the governance challenges;
2. Given the inordinate number of actors involved in global environmental governance, ways in which differentiated approaches for coordination and coherence may provide a useful mechanism for addressing the myriad of GEG actors;

3. The merit in mapping-out which governance decisions are best made where, and who is best placed to focus on what governance aspects, particularly in relation to the recommendations from IISD’s GEG book;
4. On science-based decision-making, while there are important lessons to be learnt from the successes of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), participants expressed caution over merely duplicating the IPCC and MA models, and suggested that it would be more appropriate to design mechanisms that assess which scientific models are most appropriate and which experience is most relevant when undertaking or reforming scientific assessment for decision-making;
5. The importance of establishing a mechanism for tracking financial flows related to the environment;
6. The need, in respect of poverty and the environment, to bring environmental issues “down to earth,” by country-led linkages to poverty, bottom-up and demand-driven approaches that link environment and poverty eradication progress together; and
7. Regarding trade and environment, the importance of treating environmental concerns as more than just an afterthought. In pursuit of this there is need for GEG reform efforts to interact with, and ensure effective participation in other global policy processes, especially with regard to the World Trade Organization (WTO). One major opportunity might involve engaging both the trade and environment communities in operationalizing the WTO preamble on environment and sustainable development. The environmental community might, further, take the initiative of working to harmonize non-trade-distorting environment norms and standards as well as an international investment framework that addressed environment and sustainable development standards.

*Presentations made at the seminar are available at [http://www.iisd.org/governance/geg/reform\\_options.asp](http://www.iisd.org/governance/geg/reform_options.asp)*

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