

*International Environmental  
Governance Reform:  
Inputs to the African preparatory  
process*

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*Mark Halle and Adil Najam with assistance from Christopher Beaton*

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## **International Environmental Governance Reform: Inputs to the African preparatory process**

October 2011

Written by Mark Halle and Adil Najam with assistance from Christopher Beaton

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## *Foreword*

On May 23–24 2011, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) convened a consultation of African stakeholders, representing governments, intergovernmental organizations at the global and regional levels, and civil society and academia, to identify and articulate African concerns and priorities in respect of international environmental governance (IEG) in the lead-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), “Rio+20.” Options were then spelled out based on the concerns and priorities expressed by the participants. These formed the core of a second consultation on September 8–9 2011. The rich discussion led to new options being tabled, existing options being modified and fleshed out, and others dropped as unrealistic in the present political climate.

This paper draws from the two consultations to offer a number of key options for consideration by participants in the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference for Rio+20 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on October 20–25, 2011. While it has been inspired by the consultations, the paper does not represent a consensus view of its participants. It is an IISD contribution to the debate that in no way pretends to represent any African position. It presents instead a number of options on key IEG challenges that we hope will enrich the African debate on IEG. Readers are invited to consider whether some of these options might be considered and discussed in refining the common African position on IEG and IFSD as the process moves forward.

IISD is grateful to both the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for their advice and support throughout this process, as well as the participants in its consultations, whose intelligent debate and kind dedication of time and effort has made this paper possible.

IISD would also like to thank the Danish government, which has funded this project. However, the opinions and ideas expressed are those of IISD alone.

## *Introduction*

With a high proportion of its population directly dependent on renewable natural resources and ecosystem services, Africa suffers more acutely than other regions from environmental degradation. It follows that the inadequacy of environmental governance mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels translates directly into serious problems for African peoples. At the national and regional levels, these mechanisms have tended to be weak and unable to ensure that resources and ecosystems support sustainable livelihoods. However, at the global level, too, environmental governance has failed Africa.

The international environmental governance (IEG) regime is fragmented, complex and overlapping; further, it gives undue priority to global assessment and to ongoing negotiations, leaving enforcement, compliance and implementation by the wayside. In addition, the institutions are not in place at the regional and sub-regional level to ensure that what is decided globally translates into action on the ground. IEG will never work well unless there is both horizontal (across sectors) and vertical integration (from the global, through the regional, sub-regional and national level, to the local level).

Moreover, many of the most important resolutions and decisions are never translated into real action on the ground. Accountability—in the sense of a strong link between promise and realization—is very weak. Financial resources tend to follow donor priorities, are applied inconsistently and often weighed down by inappropriate conditionality. Further, priorities tend to shift with the political winds. And when follow-through is disappointing, there are few adequate mechanisms for redress or the settlement of disputes. It is those on the ground that suffer the most from this failure.

An IEG regime that fails to deliver is a serious problem for Africa, and one that can only get worse. The demographics of Africa are such that, in the absence of a serious reform that delivers results for the continent, as a continent it will suffer in higher proportion to any other region. And if environmental degradation continues to translate into lost livelihoods, the social situation will grow ever more volatile, and the possibility of violent outcomes cannot be dismissed. In Africa, more so than other developing regions, the environment is the economy. Thus the IEG challenge is more than just an attempt to address environmental priorities: it is about the future of Africa.

Despite the fact that Africa has a greater stake in a successful IEG regime than any other region, it has tended to have limited effective access to the reform process. Its voice is often drowned out in the clangour of international debate, in institutions far from African reality. This is in part because Africa has been divided, but it is also because the impact of poor governance on Africa's environment has been insufficiently recognized.

The past need not necessarily determine the future. Africa is growing economically at an impressive rate. African countries increasingly see that they are responsible for their future and accept that this means steadily improving governance both nationally and regionally, and opening decision making to a wider range of stakeholders. It means taking the lead in addressing the challenges of sustainable development and not hoping that donors will step in and take care of them. And it means working with outside partners to ensure that it is Africa's agenda that determines what is done. Since Africa's growth is matched or exceeded by other developing regions, Africa's links with other developing countries like China and India may henceforth count more than its traditional links with OECD countries, with strong implications for IEG in the future.

In the end, only by moving to a “green economy”<sup>1</sup> can Africa hope to ensure sustainable livelihoods for its growing population—especially for the millions of young people that will be added to the workforce over the coming decades. Healthy ecosystems, well-managed natural resources, and a cleaner technological base are essential preconditions for a healthy economy. Only with better mechanisms for environmental governance at both national and international levels can these preconditions be met.

The state of Africa’s preparations for Rio augurs well in this respect. Africa has designed and is implementing a thorough, bottom-up process that ensures that the perspectives and ideas of each sub-region are well-reflected in a common position, meaning Africa can speak with one, strong voice. The process is managed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) with strong substantive input from UNEP’s Regional Office for Africa. It is also sanctioned at the level of Heads of State of the African Union. To date, Africa has agreed to formulate and defend a single African view on IEG and has named as spokesperson the well-respected Henri Djombo, Minister of Environment of the Republic of Congo.

To date, the African Union has recognized that “current institutional structures do not fully address Africa’s needs in matters of the environment, sustainable development and climate change” and committed “within the context of revision of institutional frameworks for sustainable development, [to] TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION the need to strengthen, consolidate and transform UNEP into an international specialized institution for the environment based in Nairobi, Kenya” (AU, 2011).

This paper hopes to contribute to the current debate in two ways: by

- i. Identifying a number of fresh and innovative ideas that Africa might pursue beyond its current focus on the institutional role of UNEP.
- ii. Arguing that any strengthening, consolidation or transformation of UNEP must not be in name only. Focusing only the exact nature of the institution—a specialized agency or a new global organization—runs the risk of creating an “empty shell.” Demands for reform must be specific.

It is our hope that we might raise the level of ambition, since we are convinced that Africa will continue to suffer if reforms are timid and incremental.

The options below are organized according under a number of thematic headings, though they are all closely interlinked. Implementation, for example, depends on a more rational approach to international financing of environmental measures. A more active participation of the private sector in environmental governance would be facilitated by a more positive enabling framework of public policies. More robust accountability measures might lead to a more direct link between what is promised and what is actually delivered. The presentation of the options under five headings plus a section on institutional arrangements should not be taken as implying they are separate or that they stand alone. It is simply to facilitate their review and evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined by UNEP as an economy that results in “improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities” (UNEP, 2011).

## Principles

Before discussing governance reforms, it is necessary to set out a clear list of goals and advance a few well-articulated principles. IISD encourages the adoption of four simple principles that should guide the evaluation of reform options and serve as tests against which a final reform package should be screened: namely, that reforms must be:

- Sustainable development-focused:

The Rio+20 mandate places the IEG reform debate within the wider context of the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD). Proposals for IEG reform must be taken together with proposals for reform of the other challenges of the wider SD governance framework and must contribute to a coherent whole. Thus a reform that adequately addresses an environmental problem but aggravates social marginalization or undermines employment would not be deemed satisfactory. Similarly, an environmental reform that is among the least economic of the options available should be reconsidered.

*The purpose of IEG reform should be to mobilize environmental action such that it is mutually supportive with the action taken to address the social and economic development challenges that face society and the world community.*

- Equity-focused:

The world is, today, characterized by unacceptable inequities. The gap between the rich and poor countries has, in most cases, been growing. More worrying still, the gap between rich and poor within countries has also been growing in most parts of the world, with too few exceptions. This is a consequence of the economic paradigm that the world's nations have followed too uncritically for decades, either by their own choice or because it was a part of a policy package promoted by international financial institutions or a condition of joining the multilateral trade regime.

It is clear that sustainable development can only be achieved in a world where these equity gaps have been substantially reduced and where the problems that they cause—poverty, social marginalization, conflict, etc.—are well along the way to being solved. *Any environmental governance reforms must contribute to the improvement of equity among and within countries.*

- Accountability-focused:

The international system is characterized by a tendency to promise but not to deliver. The world of international environmental action is, sadly, no different. Far too few of the principles, strategies, actions plans, promises and undertakings adopted publicly and solemnly are in fact implemented. It has become too easy to make grand promises because there is essentially no price to be paid for failure to deliver. There is little point in continuing to promise grand things in the future if the link between promise and delivery is not reinforced.

*Any package of international environmental governance reforms must be accompanied by an accountability plan in which it is made clear who is entrusted with the action, against what timetable, with what human and financial means, and what the incentives are to take action and the consequences if the action is not taken.* Accountability mechanisms should not be about punishment – they should be about matching up promises with delivery, in ways that benefit all actors.

- Implementation-focused:

It would be preferable for far fewer environmental promises to be made if those that are publicly-declared are truly implemented. The international community is good at identifying what needs to be done, but much less good at making sure it happens. This implementation gap—closely related to the accountability gap—is one of the fundamental problems of the international environmental system.

*The international environmental governance reforms must focus on action that can be implemented and that will make a direct contribution to addressing the problem at hand. Implementation must take a higher priority when compared with analysis, planning, strategy development or project preparation.*

## Options for debate

### 1. Creating a Positive Enabling Framework for IEG

As many of the participants pointed out in the first consultation, Africa suffers due to a global economic policy framework that is stacked against it. If the terms that govern African access to international markets for their goods and services were truly equitable, African economies would earn from trade far more than they receive in development assistance. And what is true of trade is true of investment; Africa is obliged to offer strong protection of investors' rights in ways that can harm its development interests and that leaves it open to predatory behaviour on the part of investors. Subsidies in the OECD countries can further tilt the playing field away from Africa. Examples abound, and Africa's options to move towards a Green Economy are faced with a series of policy obstacles over which it has little control.

The first step in moving towards sounder environmental governance is to identify the counter-incentives that presently discourage such a move, and to deal with these in a positive and systematic fashion. This must be a primary function of any IEG regime. Options include the following:

- a. **All major macro-economic policies should, to the extent that they affect other countries in a significant way, be subject to an agreed process of "sustainability risk assessment."** This screening would aim to identify where international macro-economic policy is undermining prospects for sustainable development and at identifying alternatives that would meet the purposes for which the macro-economic policy was adopted in ways that advance sustainable development. Priority attention should be given to international policy on trade, investment, finance and subsidies, particularly with respect to a green economy. This might be undertaken by existing institutions or by new or upgraded institutions, such as a Sustainable Development Council or a strengthened UNEP (see section on institutions, below). The agreed process might involve two steps: the sustainability screening of existing policies, and a joint review of the results of the sustainability screening involving the Sustainable Development Council and the major international economic organizations (i.e., the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and/or International Monetary Fund). These joint reviews would aim to identify those policies that undermine established international sustainable development priorities and cooperate on finding alternatives that are more favourable to sustainable development.
- b. The transition to sustainable development requires higher environmental standards and the upgrading of technology. This gives a comparative advantage to rich countries who already implement higher standards and who possess the technology to ensure that these standards are met. Pressure to improve environmental standards in production and consumption are often met with suspicion based in the fear of green protectionism. This fear is partly justified. **The global community meeting at Rio+20 should agree to a set of specific and clear conditions and incentives aimed at accelerating the transition to a green economy while identifying and eliminating "green protection."** This should involve both greater access by poorer countries to the capacity building and technology needed to green their economies. This agreement could serve as an important step in implementing the Bali Strategic Plan (see implementation, below).

## 2. Implementation

Perhaps the strongest message to come from the Addis consultation was that the present IEG regime has signally failed to support Africa adequately at addressing its on-the-ground environmental problems. Instead, it is overly focused on the global and regional level and locked into a logic of perpetual negotiation in which action is agreed but rarely translated into reality. Much of the IEG infrastructure is dedicated to pushing further towards new agreements, new commitments, new institutional mechanisms for coordination and funding but is notoriously remiss in looking backward to see what has resulted from the decisions taken or mechanisms created.

At one level, this is understandable. Many of our multilateral environmental agreements are cast in vague terms that only further negotiation can elucidate. Many of our shared environmental problems remain un-addressed or inadequately addressed. In addition, new issues arise every day. At the same time, it now seems that far more good would be done for the environment were we to pause in our frenetic forward momentum and focus on implementing what has already been agreed in good faith. However, with all of our institutions geared and programmed for negotiation, it is not clear what institutional redesign is needed to move to a governance system focused on implementation. In seeking to move in this direction, the following options should be considered:

- a. Countries should undertake a **thorough review of all sustainable development goals, resolutions and recommendations adopted in international forums since the Rio Earth Summit** in 1992. This proposal builds on one put forward by Switzerland in the formal IEG process. Each of these should be designated as implemented, no longer relevant or superseded, or still to be implemented. In the latter case, the measure should be subject to the accountability mechanisms set out in Section 3 below. The consolidation and monitoring of this information might be undertaken by existing institutions or by new or upgraded institutions, such as a Sustainable Development Council, a reformed CSD or even a strengthened UNEP (see section on institutions, below). A preliminary assessment of this kind should be completed by Rio+20 and a process should be instituted to maintain and update this periodically in a transparent fashion.
- b. **A moratorium should be called on further new international negotiations on the environment** until such time as the implementation plan suggested in a) above is advanced to an agreed point. Existing and ongoing negotiations (e.g., on climate change) should, of course continue and hopefully conclude quickly, and exceptions to the moratorium could be made on specific agreement of the UNEP Governing Council or its Bureau but the exceptions should be rare.
- c. **A negotiated proportion of the budgets of all MEAs should be devoted to implementation of the decisions of the conference of the parties (COPs) at country level**, and to efforts to improve compliance and enforcement of COP decisions by Parties. Implementation of these country-level activities might be entrusted to an upgraded agency or joint implementation wings under the different clusters of MEAs. Equally, an agreed portion of the environmental budgets of the agencies and programs of the UN and of regional UN commissions should be devoted to country-level implementation activities under the Bali Strategic Plan.
- d. **The Bali Strategic Plan should be turned into a very specific and detailed action plan** for the UN family of organizations to ensure that developing countries have the capacity and the access to technology needed to address their environmental challenges by themselves. UNEP should convene a conference aimed at drawing up such an action plan and convincing the full range of UN agencies and programs to give it priority in their work planning. Implementation of this plan could be monitored by the Environmental Management Group (EMG).

### 3. Accountability

Accountability relates to the link between what is undertaken and what is accomplished. Unless there are consequences for failing to do what one has promised to do, the value of the promises sinks accordingly. One of the key weaknesses of the IEG regime is that, with few exceptions, there are no robust mechanisms for ensuring compliance with what has been agreed or for enforcing firm commitments. There is no environmental equivalent of the WTO's dispute settlement system which is empowered to rule on a country's compliance with the rules they agreed to respect and to impose economic sanctions if the violation is not corrected. As a result, countries have grown accustomed to make firm promises but then to ignore these when circumstances change or when the reality of what has been agreed becomes clear.

Many countries, especially developing countries, have resisted the institution of strong accountability measures, assuming that these would largely be used against them by the stronger countries and that their sovereignty might thereby be circumscribed. They also feared that there would be little sympathy for the lack of capacity and resources that underlies some of the compliance failure in the developing world.

This approach is now changing. First, it is clear that any accountability mechanism would have to be two-way and that failure to deliver agreed financing or access to technology or to take the equivalent action in the richer countries could equally be sanctioned. And, second, it is also clear that some of the most successful accountability measures work on the basis of rewards, not on punishments. Any robust IEG must be underpinned by a solid set of accountability mechanisms. Options to achieve this include:

- a. Beginning with the review of existing commitments called for above and henceforth in respect of all international commitments on sustainable development, **each decision or commitment should be accompanied by a specific statement of who is responsible for implementation, on what timetable, and with what resources.** Further, a monitoring system using specific and measurable goals and established under the authority of the Sustainable Development Council, should ensure that the spotlight is forever turned on the need to fulfill sustainable development promises. This monitoring should be based on a harmonized system of reporting for international agreements. Such a report should be periodically presented to a representative body—possibly the Sustainable Development Council. Ideally, MEA secretariats should move towards reporting back on achievement of goals rather than actions taken.
- b. Consider extending the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) to the global level, or to negotiate regional versions of the convention.
- c. **Establish an international peer review process on compliance with international agreements**, modelled on the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council, on the mutual review of development effectiveness undertaken by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the OECD, or on the WTO's Trade Policy Reviews. This could be integrated with existing, regional peer review processes, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism. Consideration should be given to matching this peer review system with some forum for mediation of international environmental disputes. Such a system might be established within a new regional African agreement modelled on the Aarhus Convention.
- d. Linked to a) and/or c) above, establish a system of rewarding countries on the basis of existing performance. This could include, for example, trade preferences, or preferential access to international credit or to global support funds such as the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). A country's performance should not only be compared to that of similar countries, but, most important, against itself. Is a country doing better over time?

## 4. Finance

Though rich in human and natural capital, Africa continues to host some of the poorest countries in the world. African countries struggle with very limited public budgets to meet a wide range of urgent development requirements. Funding for the environment can, in this context, seem like a luxury. For this reason, African countries have tended to turn to their international partners to support action on ecosystem and natural resource management. Even in times of economic boom, funds have been short, hard to access and often directed at actions that are not the government's priority. In times of economic downturn, financial resources are even harder to come by.

At the same time, the financial resources expended through the IEG system are not insignificant. The challenge, then, seems to be how to ensure that these resources are directed at the highest priority actions, how they might best be leveraged, and how they might complement rather than replace government effort. Options in this respect include:

- a. **Establish a transparent global mechanism for tracking all international financial resources flowing through the sustainable development system**, thus enabling a regular assessment of the extent to which existing resources are being applied to priorities, as well as enabling quick identification of the priorities that are failing to attract resources. At a minimum, the mechanism should track: the source of finance; the funds distributing finance; the institutional recipients of finance (specific bodies, i.e., inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs,) small and medium enterprises (SMEs) etc.); and the thematic application of resources (climate, desertification, youth, sustainable cities, etc.). With respect to thematic applications, tracking should record where funds have been allocated to more than one theme (e.g., climate change or desertification) as well as indicating the proportion of funds dedicated to any given theme that were dedicated to that theme only. This tracking mechanism should be entrusted to an institution that is: i) not involved in giving funding; and ii) not a recipient of funding for sustainable development, or involved in the implementation of sustainable development, ideally outside the UN family of organizations. This will also reinforce the spirit of all-round accountability for all stakeholders, in developing as well as developed countries.
- b. **Improve coherence in the use of international sustainable development funds**, e.g., by ironing out unnecessary duplication of mandates, pooling related resources and services where possible based on the tracking system called for above. This task could be entrusted to an existing group such as EMG or to a new one, such as the Sustainable Development Council. The ultimate goal (within three to four years) should be a drastically reduced number of funds—maybe just one large GEF-like facility—that eases the costs and difficulties of transactions (especially for developing countries) and that encourages cross-sectoral and sustainable development-relevant funding.
- c. Agreeing to provide key environmental agencies (such as UNEP) with stable, predictable and adequate funding to meet their mandates. This is also an investment in people in that it enables international agencies to offer longer contracts and to retain staff.
- d. **Better reflect the voice of Africa in funding decisions**, e.g., more democratic governance of funds such as the GEF and full implementation of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda. In applying international funds to national actions, donors should give priority to those relating to national priorities, namely those that receive a strong allocation from the national budget or for which significant funding is available from private domestic sources.
- e. **Countries should rationalize contact points** where the IEG system interacts with the national system, for example, by establishing limited points of entry for funds relating to the IEG system so that they might be better

applied to meeting national needs and creating a focal authority that can demand better coordination from international funds and agencies.

- f. Applying international funds only to expenditures reflected in national budgets or for which significant funding is available from private domestic sources. This would guarantee that the expenditure is in line with established national priorities.

## 5. The Role of Civil Society and the Private Sector

One of the problems with the IEG regime is that it has failed to keep pace with major changes happening around the globe. The fundamentals of the intergovernmental system were designed immediately following the Second World War and correspond to the world we knew then. They have shown a very limited ability to evolve in a way that matches global change.

In one respect the IEG system especially, and the United Nations family of organizations more generally, has fallen behind. The intergovernmental system still operates as if governments not only set the policies but are largely responsible for implementing these policies at all levels. In reality, the authority of national governments has evolved significantly in three different ways: it has evolved upwards, with authority being transferred deliberately or inexorably towards international bodies like the IMF, or regional super-structures like the European Council and Commission. It has also evolved downwards, with authority transferred to sub-national jurisdictions such as states, provinces, or municipalities. Finally, authority has been transferred outwards, to the market, to corporations, to NGOs, church or student groups.

The cumulative impact of this transfer of authority is enormous, but the IEG regime largely chooses to ignore it, continuing to take decisions with ineffective input from civil society and the private sector and almost none from other levels of government. The mechanisms put in place to seek out such input have manifestly not delivered and need to be rethought from the bottom up. Options include the following:

- a. Rio+20 provides an opportunity to use the green economy as a framework that serves to better integrate civil society and the private sector into two key areas of sustainable development activity at the national level: i) agenda-setting and ii) implementation. **Countries should commit to drawing up a national plan for the transition to a green economy that features full consultation with civil society and the private sector**, both of whom would be expected to show support for the ensuing plan by investing time, effort and resources in its implementation. At the national level, countries should build on best practice examples of involving non-State actors in agenda- and priority-setting. This configuration should then be fully associated with steering and monitoring implementation of the plan, for example as participants in a national sustainable development forum. This should also align civil society and private sector activity with implementation of the plan. The plan should make far more use of the human resources in civil society and the private sector in implementing sustainable development activities, both to expand the capacity of the public sector and to extend its reach well into rural areas. This approach should also be employed by international agencies in implementing sustainable development actions in-country and regionally. This could be done by establishing networks of civil society organizations with implementation capacity and investing in building and extending that capacity.
- b. A mechanism should be established to better **focus on the sustainable development challenges for young people**. A particular focus on the green economy should be developing a future with enough “green jobs” for the young. This could benefit also from the mechanism outlined under Theme 1, above—setting clear conditions

and incentives for the acceleration of the green economy while identifying and eliminating green protection. Youth organizations should be mobilized to assist in this goal.

- c. In line with the above thinking, **the “Major Groups and Stakeholders” approach—focused as it is on the formal negotiation processes—needs serious rethinking, with better mechanisms for participation both upstream (in setting the agenda) and downstream (in implementation).** Governments should commit to reforming the way in which both civil society and the private sector interact with decision making at the international level on environmental matters. In choosing representatives of civil society and the private sector in the different international forums, priority should be given to those active in similar processes at the national level.

## 6. Institutional options: From IEG to IFSD

There are several key challenges that must be addressed by the institutions of the IEG system, but the key ones are:

- a. Negotiation
- b. Institutional coherence and convergence
- c. Financial resources for action
- d. Operational capacity for implementation
- e. Monitoring, reporting and assessment of progress

It is also clear that the IEG system is currently sub-optimal in respect of all of these. Considerable effort has gone into understanding the functions that need to be ensured by the IEG regime, especially through the “Nairobi-Helsinki process” and the debate has turned to the institutional forms that can best fulfill these functions.

Much of the focus has been on the options for UNEP in a reformed environmental governance system. While it is clear that UNEP must continue to be the central player in a reformed IEG system, the debate has focused on the institutional form that a relaunched UNEP should take, to some extent at the expense of a much-needed debate on the content of its new mission.

Certainly, we need a consolidated environmental body in the international system, whether through strengthening UNEP and clarifying its mandate, turning UNEP into a specialized agency of the United Nations, or through creation of a World Environment Organization with considerable autonomy and independence. In order that the change be more than simply to its name, this environmental body should have the following qualities:

- a. A strong mandate to fulfill the principal functions of an IEG set out in the Nairobi-Helsinki outcomes, and to work with major economic and sectoral agencies at the international level to ensure that their policies are optimally supportive of sustainable development;
- b. The necessary resources (including stable and predictable finance) to fulfill this mandate;
- c. Increased authority over the range of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), beginning with an acceleration of efforts to cluster MEAs, establishing common administrative, human resources and financial services and a simplification of funding mechanisms.
- d. A greatly increased ability to fulfill the mandate given to UNEP under the Bali Strategic Plan. This must include arrangements to meet the priority environmental needs of its members, either through the development of operational capacity or through reliable arrangements with partners, for example in the context of UN country teams.

- e. A greatly strengthened presence in the different regions of the globe, including a stronger operational presence.
- f. Reliable and predictable funding for its core mandates and activities.
- g. The ability to lead a process of system-wide strategic planning for the environment and to coordinate the inputs of the many agencies that have environmental mandates in the international system.
- h. The continued ability to mobilize science worldwide as the foundation of policy-making on the environment.

**However, simply making UNEP stronger alone will not fly.**

The agenda topic for Rio+20 is not IEG but the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD). Thus any effort at improving the IEG regime must play into the wider evolving framework for IFSD. While the scope of IFSD remains unclear, the IEG dossier cannot advance far unless it is seen as an important contribution to the construction of an IFSD. One of the key elements of that will relate to current mechanisms for integrating the three pillars of sustainable development, for which UNCSD specifically, and the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) more generally, have a mandate. IEG solutions that appear to isolate or give precedence to the environmental pillar are not likely to earn much political support, especially in the hard-scrabble atmosphere of New York UN politics.

The IEG reform package must be advanced in the framework of proposals for improving overall coordination and capacity for sustainable development delivery. It must thus include proposals in this respect alongside the specific measures for beefing up the environmental pillar, necessary though that clearly is. Options in this respect include:

- Upgrade the UNCSD into a Council on Sustainable Development modelled on the Human Rights Council and serving as the principal forum for monitoring the implementation of agreed international sustainable development commitments, reviewing compliance and enforcement, and providing the foundation for the exercise of accountability in the IEG system. It would also serve as the forum for the integration of the environmental component of sustainable development with the social and economic components, thus serving as the principal forum in the IFSD. The various transparency and reporting functions mentioned above should be instituted within this body. It is important that this be seen NOT as a punitive forum, but a forum for handholding and mutual assistance amongst nations to improve overall global governance.
- Applying the principle of subsidiarity, greatly strengthen regional and sub-regional mechanisms within the IEG to serve member countries more directly, to feed their concerns and priorities up to the global level, and to consolidate a legitimate voice for the environment at the international level. These mechanisms should be further strengthened through the creation of a strong and vibrant network of environmental initiatives at the level of sub-national jurisdictions, and especially municipalities and local communities with close links to the apex environmental body at the international level. These can serve in particular to mobilize youth and student groups.

## *Moving forward*

It is always pleasant to sit back and imagine a world very different from the one in which we all live but we have resisted that temptation in this options paper. While the best result would no doubt come from wiping the slate clean and redesigning the IEG system *ab novo*, what characterizes the options above is that none of them can be deemed non-starters from a political point of view, even if they may not be fully achieved by the time of Rio+20.

That said, we are fully aware of the difficulty of achieving reform at the international level and of the many disappointments there have been over the years. We have taken as our task to add ambitious options to the African preparatory process, if only to stimulate active discussion, to draw on innovative ideas from African stakeholders, and to underline just how badly Africa is served by the present IEG regime. In doing so, however, we take as given the following realities:

- a. There is serious institutional resistance to the abolition or creation of any international body; it is easier to change what existing bodies do or to combine existing elements in new configurations.
- b. Developed countries are unlikely to promise and deliver large amounts of new and additional funding for environmental priorities. Far more likely is agreement on redirecting existing funds.
- c. There are some aspects of necessary IEG reform that is well beyond the scope of Rio+20. For example, any changes in international trade rules needed because they undermine sustainability will have to be debated in the WTO and decided by its members. Addressing sustainable development properly will involve long negotiations between the IEG and other parts of the global governance system.

Finally, while we must be ambitious for Rio, June 2012 is not the end of history. Provided that Rio makes enough of an advance to generate serious momentum for change, that momentum can carry forward and build over the years and around the wider international system. With more to lose from the status quo than any other region, it would be appropriate for the strongest push for change in Rio to come from Africa.

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