

# The Road Ahead: Conclusions and Action Agenda

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We live in a time of contrasts. Ours is an era of fast-paced change and yet persistent problems. More people are wealthier than ever before in history – and yet billions remain desperately poor. News travels in an instant across the planet – and yet old beliefs, values, and prejudices only slowly change. New actors from multinational corporations to non-governmental organizations are playing an increasingly central role on the global stage – and yet, nation-states continue to be the dominant mode of political organization. Transformative technologies, such as the internet, bind us together ever more tightly – and yet old divides remain deep, and new ones seem to be emerging. On one level, the lines between “us” and “them” appear to be more sharply etched than ever. But on other levels, past distinctions have blurred. What is clear is that success in achieving old goals – such as providing opportunities for lives of peace and prosperity, liberty and happiness – will require fresh thinking, refined strategies, and new mechanisms for cooperation.

Recent events have clearly revealed the interdependence of the nations and peoples of the world. Security issues have been in focus but interdependence extends beyond these concerns. Economic integration has demonstrated that some global-scale forces are beyond the capacity of national governments to regulate and control. Simultaneously, we are becoming ever more aware of our ecological interdependence. From shared natural resources such as fisheries and biological diversity to the potential for transboundary pollution spillovers across the land, over water, and through the air, we now understand that the traditional notion of national territorial sovereignty cannot protect us from global-scale environmental threats.

This volume seeks to address the environmental dimension of interdependence. It highlights a set of issues that make the present different from the past and promise to make the future dramatically more dissimilar. The environmental challenges and other problems of

sustainability we now face are not all new, but the scope and scale of the threat they pose are unprecedented.

The need to coordinate pollution control and natural resource management policies – across the diversity of countries and peoples, political perspectives and traditions, levels of wealth and development, beliefs and priorities – may seem awkward. But, however uncomfortable, there really is no choice. Ecological interdependence is now an inescapable fact. Moreover, the rapid pace of economic integration has led to interlinked world markets and economies, demanding synchronization of national policies on a number of issues. One dimension of this coordination concerns the environment.

Given the global-scale issues and linkages highlighted in this volume, it is imperative that we manage our ecological interdependence and related economic relationships thoughtfully, explicitly, and effectively. Four basic “governance” options can be distinguished:

- Do nothing;
- Refine the status quo governance structure;
- Launch a new Global Environmental Organization;
- Develop a new governance approach: a Global Environmental Mechanism.

### **Do Nothing**

If the harms that a global environmental regime would address were not serious, there would be a logic to a “do nothing” approach. As economists (Demsetz, 1967; Libecap, 1989), lawyers (Krier, 1974; Rose, 1991), political scientists (Haas, Keohane, and Levy, 1993) and environmental analysts (Esty and Mendelsohn, 1998) have demonstrated, unless the benefits of action justify the costs, the investment in coordination and governance cannot be justified. Organizing a response to a problem demands resources. “Collective action” at the global scale is especially complicated and expensive. Thus, simply put, if the costs of organizing for action are greater than the benefits anticipated, doing nothing makes sense.

Cost-benefit calculations represent an essential starting point in deciding whether to have a global environmental regime and what sort

of governance structure to create. But undergirding this analysis must be good data on the environmental problem set and the costs and benefits of taking action. All too often, however, economic costs have been easier to measure and benefits difficult to quantify, leading to “justified” inaction. We thus need refined economic models that more fully account for the ecological services on which the economy – and humanity’s existence – depend (see Hales and Prescott-Allen, and Figueres and Ivanova, this volume, calling for a more rigorous approach to environmental valuation). Carefully gathered, rigorously scrutinized, and thoroughly peer-reviewed information on the types of threats to which we are exposed, the risks they pose, the degree of harm threatened, and the value of the damage that might be inflicted must therefore underpin any governance debate.

As demonstrated by Speth and others throughout this volume, and elsewhere in the literature (Haas, Keohane, and Levy, 1993; Hempel, 1996; Vogler, 2000; Vig and Kraft, 2000), the evidence suggests both that investment in global scale environmental protection makes sense and that the current approach is not delivering good results. The question is not *whether* to design a structure of global environmental governance, but *how*. Therefore, we turn to a set of reform options.

### **Refine the Status Quo**

A number of commentators (Juma, 2000; von Moltke, 2001a; Najam, 2002, forthcoming) believe that the most feasible way to improve global environmental results is to revitalize the existing regime centered on the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). They argue that what is missing is political will and claim that we have never tried to make the current system work. Thus, their reform package focuses on giving UNEP a sharper mandate, bolstering its funding, and developing better coordination across UN bodies.

On a practical level, those who favor a refined status quo generally fear that any broader gauge reform effort will fall flat politically. They emphasize the difficulty of carrying out fundamental changes within the UN system and point to the likely bureaucratic obstruction and fierce turf battles that would be triggered by any program of wholesale restructuring. Others say that energies put into revolutionizing the global environmental regime are misplaced. The priority, they suggest, should be strengthening national level environmental capacity.

Some proponents of a refine-the-status-quo strategy also argue that proposals to consolidate global-scale environmental responsibilities might diminish the effectiveness of the system. They note that the range of problems that must be addressed is diverse, making a decentralized structure of multiple international organizations and individual treaty secretariats a virtue. Other reformers have argued for a “clustering” of the various pieces of the existing environmental regime so as to improve policy coherence, tighten potential cross-issue linkages, and avoid the duplication of effort that comes from full decentralization (von Moltke, 2001b; UNEP, 2001a, 2001b).

### **Launch a Global Environmental Organization**

Proposals for major structural reform derive from the conclusion that the existing global-scale environmental architecture is deeply dysfunctional and structurally flawed, making a fresh start easier than reform along the margins. A number of leading politicians (Ruggiero, 1998; Chirac, 2001; Gorbachev, 2001; Panitchpakdi, 2001), academics (Runge, 1994, 2001; Esty, 1994a, 1994b; Biermann, 2000; Schellnhuber et al., 2000; Whalley and Zissimos, 2001) and others (Charnovitz, 2002; Zedillo Commission, 2001) have come to this conclusion. Beyond the difficulties of trying to fix a failed structure, those arguing for a new approach often note that the existing regime was designed for a pre-globalization era, before the full spectrum of worldwide environmental problems was understood and the depth of current economic integration was achieved.

The substantive case for a major overhaul of the environmental regime builds on a number of arguments: (1) the “public goods” logic, which suggests that collective action must be organized at the scale of the problem to be addressed (Olson, 1971), combined with the recognition that some problems arise at a worldwide scale, making national level responses inadequate; (2) the potential to overcome the fragmentation of the current structure, to obtain synergies in addressing problems, and to take advantage of opportunities for better issue prioritization, budget rationalization, and bureaucratic coordination; (3) the benefit of having a body that could serve as a counterpoint and a counterweight to the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the other international economic institutions, thus ensuring that environmental sensitivities are systematically built

into the international economic regime; and (4) the practical value of having an authoritative international body with a first-rate staff, a reputation for analytic rigor, and the capacity to take on tasks such as dispute resolution.

### **Develop a New Governance Approach: A Global Environmental Mechanism**

Another option for strengthening global environmental governance focuses on creating a structure that can deliver the *functions* needed at the global level. Such an approach acknowledges the diversity and dynamism of environmental problems and recognizes the need for specialized responses. Proponents of a Global Environmental Mechanism (GEM) argue that no bureaucratic structure can build an internal organization with the requisite knowledge and expertise to address the wide-ranging, dynamic, and interconnected problems we now face (GEM PAG, 2002; Esty and Ivanova, this volume). The issues demanding immediate attention arise on various geographic scales, requiring a multi-tier response structure (Esty, 1999). They demand capacities in multiple areas, including ecological sciences, public health, risk assessment, cost-benefit analysis, performance measurement, and policy evaluation. What is necessary is not only a multi-tier but also a multi-dimensional governance structure (Esty, 2003, forthcoming). Today's global environmental governance challenge thus requires a more virtual structure with a multi-institutional foundation capable of drawing in a wide array of underlying disciplines through governments, the private sector, NGOs, and global public policy networks.

As we argue in this volume, a Global Environmental Mechanism could emerge in various ways, driven by functional needs. Its core capacities might include: (1) provision of adequate information and analysis to characterize problems, track trends, and identify interests; (2) creation of a "policy space" for environmental negotiation and bargaining; and (3) sustained build up of capacity for addressing issues of agreed-upon concern and significance. A Global Environmental Mechanism could build upon the expertise of existing institutions and create new mechanisms where key functions were deemed to be non-existent or inadequate. Initial elements might comprise a global information clearinghouse with mechanisms for data collection, assess-

ment, monitoring, and analysis; a global technology clearinghouse with mechanisms for technology transfer and identification and dissemination of best practices; and a bargaining forum, along the lines proposed by Whalley and Zissimos in this volume, to facilitate deals that improve environmental quality and reconcile the interests of different parties.

While it would take time to weave the dense fabric of relationships across actors and institutions that is required for successful global environmental governance, the concept of a Global Environmental Mechanism would allow for the progressive growth of the regime. It could begin with “the art of the possible” and gradually assemble the elements of an effective institutional structure as issues and mechanisms are identified and developed, building on a core set of functions such as information provision and a mechanism for dissemination of policy and technology strategies. A Global Environmental Mechanism could expand into more ambitious domains such as bargaining, trade-offs, norm development, and dispute settlement as (and only if) the value of those activities is demonstrated. A Global Environmental Mechanism offers a new model of governance that is light, more virtual and networked, and potentially more entrepreneurial and efficient.

#### **TOWARD EFFECTIVE ACTION**

In deciding what route to take, careful thinking is needed about what is required from the international environmental regime. The chapters in this volume identify a number of critical roles and functions in a global environmental governance system:

- Problem identification and definition;
- Analysis and option evaluation;
- Policy discussion and coordination;
- Financing and support for action;
- Outreach and legitimacy.

### **Problem Identification and Definition**

Understanding the range of pollution control and natural resource management issues the world community faces requires good data and information. As Hales and Prescott-Allen demonstrate in their chapter, the foundations for effective decisionmaking in the international environmental and sustainable development realm do not exist. With a better picture of the problem set and issue trends, the logic of collective action at the global scale would be clearer and the specific institutional needs might come into sharper focus. Such clarity would help to define the challenge, furnish us with a compass and a roadmap, and make it easier to identify the best path forward.

### **Analysis and Option Evaluation**

Progress depends on more than data. Once a problem is identified, it must be studied so that the risks it poses are understood and the costs and benefits of action or inaction can be calculated. Given the range of issues that must be addressed and the variety of circumstances under which these issues arise, those responding to international environmental challenges need access to significant analytic capacity. Without a global-scale policymaking apparatus, however, critical transboundary issues will likely be neglected (Dua and Esty, 1997). And as Karlsson argues in this volume, the high degree of uncertainty that exists in the environmental domain and the diversity of underlying values and assumptions means that the analytic process needs to draw on a wide range of perspectives.

Managing interdependence in the context of great diversity seems to call for an “open architecture” of decisionmaking that encourages data, information, risk assessments, cost-benefit analysis, policy options, and evaluations to be brought forward not just by governments, but by the business community, environmental groups, and others in civil society who can enrich the foundation on which decisions are made. In their chapter, Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu highlight some of the benefits of a more open and inclusive governance process. Streck’s analysis in this volume explains, moreover, how global public policy networks can forge effective working arrangements across sectors and could be part of the answer to the complexity of international environmental problems and the diversity of perspectives that need to be considered.

**Policy Discussion and Coordination**

Successful intervention to address environmental challenges requires more than analysis; a course of policy action must be agreed upon and executed. Getting all of the relevant parties on board an action plan is never easy. Coordinating effective policies in the international sphere is especially difficult. There is, of course, no global legislature. Thus, one of the critical functions that a global environmental regime must serve is as a forum for dialogue. As Koh and Robinson stress in their analysis in this volume, the current consensus-driven approach to internalize problem solving has resulted in multiple political agreements, but has failed in implementation. What is needed is a mechanism for generating on-the-ground progress. Whalley and Zissimos, in their chapter, suggest a novel option: a “policy space” for sustained environmental interaction, negotiation, and bargaining. Such a forum might engage not only governments in trying to forge multi-country “deals” to address particular issues, but could also draw in the business community and other potential parties.

**Financing and Support for Action**

Real progress cannot be achieved without resources – and to date the commitments made in this regard have generally been regarded as inadequate. Another aspect of the global environmental regime that therefore demands attention is funding. The financial support required for action could come from a variety of sources: (1) increased government funding and development assistance; (2) a redirection of existing funding, perhaps through a “rechartering” of the World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP); (3) increased economic growth and better channeling of private capital flows (including foreign direct investment (FDI) and national private sector investments); and (4) new commitments of resources from foundations, enlightened citizens, and social entrepreneurs. Given the magnitude of the challenge it seems likely that all of these strategies will need to be pursued. In this volume, Koch-Weser offers an innovative strategy for jump-starting this process through a Johannesburg Commission on Sustainable Development Finance.

### **Outreach and Legitimacy**

A further challenge in the global governance arena emerges from the need for legitimacy. At the national level, governments are usually elected and thus derive authority and legitimacy from their “popular sovereignty.” International decisionmaking inevitably involves officials whose claim to power does not derive directly from having won elections. Because they are somewhat removed from the majority-vote-based popular sovereignty, international organizations must make special efforts to ensure their legitimacy (Esty, 2002). They must build bridges to publics around the world, and explain their decision processes, drawing in views and guidance from the citizens of the world community on whose behalf they are meant to act. NGOs can play a useful role in this give-and-take. As Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu explain in their chapter, international organizations must also demonstrate their effectiveness and thus the value of their role as coordinators of worldwide action.

International bodies in general, and any global environmental regime in particular, must also be perceived as fair and equitable. Fairness encompasses both procedural and substantive elements. Procedural fairness requires access to decisionmaking on an equitable basis, with both a horizontal dimension – across governments and bridging the North-South divide – and a vertical dimension – providing individuals and groups as well as governments a chance to be heard. As Figueres and Ivanova suggest in this volume, substantive fairness demands that the polluter pays principle be enforced and the “ability to pay” be recognized in setting the course of international action and in deciding how the costs of intervention will be borne.

### **THE JOHANNESBURG OPPORTUNITY**

As we hope this volume has demonstrated, there are many paths to progress in global environmental governance. The creation of a functioning and effective environmental regime will require years of work and refinement. But windows of opportunity to define the agenda and take major steps do not come around all that often. One exists in 2002: the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

We urge the countries participating in the Johannesburg process to seize the opportunity and demonstrate a commitment to action with four concrete initiatives, addressing:

- Global environmental data and information;
- Financing for sustainable development;
- Technology promotion;
- Exploration of options for strengthening global environmental governance.

#### **Global Environmental Data and Information**

The weak foundations for global-scale environmental decisionmaking could be shored up with a modest commitment of resources to a new coordinated program of global environmental data gathering and information sharing. Building on existing efforts, such an initiative might focus on ensuring that a core set of baseline environmental indicators (covering air, water, and land) were tracked in every country in the world on a methodologically consistent and rigorous basis that would permit cross-country comparisons. Furthermore, individual countries or regional groupings might supplement the global data set with additional metrics addressing local priorities.

Information systems could reveal new policy options and lead to better decisionmaking, improved performance, and greater efficiency through reduced uncertainty, enhanced comparative analysis, and greater ability to define points of policy leverage. Data that are comparable across countries also facilitate benchmarking and the identification of best practices, creating both a spur to lagging jurisdictions and a guide for all. A more “measured” approach to environmental problem solving would not only enhance analysis and decisionmaking, it would make it easier to evaluate policy and program performance, track on-the-ground progress in addressing pollution control and natural resource management challenges, and identify successful (and unsuccessful) efforts and approaches.

### **Financing for Sustainable Development**

Any commitment to enhanced global environmental efforts must come in the context of a “global bargain” that commits the world community to a more aggressive program of poverty alleviation. The Johannesburg process creates an opportunity for such a dual commitment with a major initiative to promote economic progress across the developing world. Such an initiative might include several elements: (1) an expanded emphasis on phasing out trade barriers and broader commitments toward progress in the Doha Development Round; (2) a rechartering of the World Bank and UNDP to redouble their efforts to promote development in the poorest countries and to finance global public goods, including environmental programs; and (3) a new mechanism (or, at least, the launching of a process to create a new mechanism) to promote financing for sustainable development harnessing government, business, foundation, and individual resources.

### **Technology Promotion**

“Technology transfer” has become a buzzword. But too little has been done to translate the concept into action. A step forward could be taken by launching a technology initiative that would seek to make use of Information Age breakthroughs to resolve international environmental challenges. Beginning perhaps as a technology clearinghouse, such a facility might ultimately provide a mechanism for North-South cooperation and for creating incentives for the private sector to develop technologies in response to needs in both developing and developed countries. Engaging leading information technology companies in this initiative would be useful – and could be seen as part of a strategy to bridge the “digital divide.”

### **Exploration of Options for Strengthening Global Environmental Governance**

To give momentum to the process of exploring options for strengthened global environmental governance within the context of the Johannesburg process, a Commission could be launched to identify and evaluate the world community’s needs in the international environmental realm and various ways of addressing these needs. Comprised of eminent persons from the North and the

South, including a number of environmental ministers as well as distinguished business leaders, academics, and non-governmental organization officials, the Commission could be given a mandate to report back within eighteen months with an evaluation of the options and a recommended blueprint for action.

### **THE ROAD AHEAD**

We have entered a new era of public policy, defined by a growing number of concerns that straddle national borders and transcend national interests. Global environmental challenges represent an issue set on which collective action is critical and through which experience could be gained on how best to build broader mechanisms for international cooperation. Narrow, unstructured government-to-government approaches are no longer sufficient. The global problems we currently face will yield only to a carefully targeted, sustained, and coordinated effort involving novel coalitions of actors and innovative institutional arrangements.

As Speth emphasizes in the opening chapter of this volume, the goals and principles of global environmental governance have been elaborated over the past two decades, and “it is clearly time to launch a second phase moving us from talk to action.” With this volume, we hope to contribute to the unfolding debate on concrete options and opportunities for strengthening global environmental governance.

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