

Understanding Science Policy Interfaces – Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and beyond

WORKSHOP REPORT

Brainstorming Workshop, Geneva, Switzerland

Organized by the Environmental Policy Unit, Law Division, UNEP

13 – 14 November 2023

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Background and Introduction | 2 |
| Session 1 | 2 |
| Introductory Session | 2 |
| Session 2 | 2 |
| Understanding Science Policy Interfaces..... | 2 |
| Session 3 | 3 |
| Gaps in science policy interfaces – what these are, how to close the gaps. | 3 |
| Session 4 | 5 |
| Recent development in technology and knowledge management and impacts on SPIs.. | 5 |
| Session 5 | 5 |
| Strengthening science policy interfaces | 5 |
| Session 6 | 6 |
| Exploring elements of a strategy on science policy coherence..... | 6 |
| Summary | 6 |
| Annex 1 | 8 |
| Workshop Agenda..... | 8 |
| Annex 2 | 11 |
| Participant list | 11 |

Background and Introduction

The brainstorming workshop titled *Understanding Science Policy Interfaces: Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and Beyond*, was held in Geneva, Switzerland, between 13 – 14 November 2023. The workshop was organized by the Environmental Policy Unit under the Law Division of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The workshop had the format of a brainstorming session with the objective to discuss how Science Policy Interfaces (SPI) have shaped the environmental agenda, including those under Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). The space was given to participants to give different ideas, perspectives, and share their experiences on how science policy interfaces might have shaped decision-making processes related to MEAs, and how various science policy panels have contributed to the MEAs agendas. The ideas and discussions from the brainstorming session will work to inform UNEP's actions on strengthening science policy interfaces in environmental governance through the work of the Environmental Policy Unit and its partners.

Session 1

Introductory Session

Arnold Kreilhuber, UNEP Regional Director for Europe, opened the meeting by stressing the importance of science policy interfaces, which was also emphasized during [UNEP@50](#), and the need to promote and strengthen SPI for intergovernmental debate, negotiations, and decision-making.

The facilitator of the session, Balakrishna Pisupati, Head, Environmental Policy Unit, UNEP, introduced the agenda and expectations of the workshop – to discuss ideas for UNEP's work in strengthening science policy interfaces in promoting environmental governance. The session also raised the issue operationalizing the political declaration that emerged from UNEP@50. Participants were informed that the 6th session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) will host a [high-level dialogue on science policy interfaces](#).

Session 2

Understanding Science Policy Interfaces

During this session, participants heard from organizations and MEAs on how they are addressing science policy interfaces, their experiences in strengthening the interfaces, and impacts of their work.

Key points stressed during the session included how the science policy interface is nonlinear and is often subject to political processes, and the specific actors and evidence involved can influence the nature and effectiveness of the exchange of ideas and information. It was also highlighted that there is a growing consensus that social sciences and natural science need to be linked to increase the reach, spread and impact of science-policy communication – in which the uptake and use of technology plays an integral role.

Participants were invited to brainstorm on a series of questions related to strengthening science policy interfaces to promote environmental governance. Comments and ideas raised by participants can be seen under the respective questions below:

1. How have science and other forms of knowledge contributed to policy making in MEAs? Where are the gaps, and how can these be addressed?

Considering that MEAs represent best examples of science policy interface at work,

- The role and engagement of citizens, stakeholders, and communities in the dialogue on SPI could be further acknowledged and supported. For example, their role in data collection – such as on biodiversity.
- Openness when it comes to data and knowledge sharing is critical and should be further encouraged.

2. How do science policy interfaces help the decision-making processes within your MEA, and which platforms/products do you use or plan to use and why?

The MEAs use science-based decision making to a significant extent. However, the following need attention.

- Existing gaps between the use of SPI and policy formulation processes could be examined further as these gaps are currently not well understood and experiences captured.
- The recommendations from UNEP@50 report could be further followed up.
- There is immense value in learning what different stakeholders within the MEAs spaces are doing and what they are gaining from those processes. Such learning needs to be across MEAs and processes.

3. How will you describe and prioritize science policy interface issues within your work plans during the next 5-10 years?

- Collaboration among expert panels and stronger interactions within them should be prioritized in work plan formulation.

4. What are the key needs from MEAs in contributing to stronger and more effective science-policy interface products?

- Increased support needs to be provided to address data and information gaps in MEAs implementation on the ground.
- New considerations of science policy linkages could be explored, as well as issues related to social sciences and science-policy-society links. This includes evaluating the performance of interfaces in supporting decision making processes, which requires relevant performance indicators.

Session 3

Gaps in science policy interfaces – what these are, how to close the gaps.

During this session, the participants worked in groups to discuss issues of recent developments in SPI, gaps and closing the gaps. Four questions were posed to guide discussions. Comments and ideas raised by participants can be seen under the respective questions below:

1. Given the rapid developments in use of data, information, and technology, how much impact do these developments have in strengthening or weakening the science policy work?

- There is a need for defining data governance and data management principles at the national level.
- It was noted that stakeholders are not always willing to share data, and trusting data sources can be challenging, leading to some being selective in the use of data.
- In the absence of data governance and management principles and approaches, one cannot discuss data and information issues related to science policy issues.
- Although data and information are rapidly evolving, there are limited actions to strengthen science policy work, especially in a form and structure that can be used for policy making.
- The private sector has taken up technology more rapidly than public and other institutions, much of which is not being used for strengthening science policy interfaces.
- Data and information could be consolidated for use by sectoral and cross-sectoral global modelling exercises.

2. What are the new considerations for science-policy linkages that MEAs need to keep in mind with focus on technology, social science links (science-policy-society) and the related?

- SPIs at national level could be strengthened to support the effective implementation of MEAs.
- The role of social sciences within scientific discussions and decision making around MEAs could be strengthened. For example, the role of behavioral sciences in SPI related action is critical, similar is the issue of focusing on traditional and indigenous knowledge.
- Identifying and using the tools that sector-specific already utilizes best ways to communicate with that sector or institution. Trans and interdisciplinary approaches will be needed.

3. How can the performance of science-policy interfaces in supporting decision-making by MEAs be assessed, and are there any obvious key performance indicators?

- Some of the indicators could include national ownership, collaboration, and cooperation among and within MEAs and science policy panels and platforms, the number of issues that cut across themes and sectors contributing to broader sustainable development and environmental governance agendas.
- As part of operational processes, the responsibility for synergies and cooperation could be taken to national level and various panels (and authors) could share their work. Information sharing across stakeholder groups could be strengthened.
- Gaps exist between the different platforms that are based in different domains, such as IPCC, IRP, IPBES and others, and ways to bridge these gaps could be considered.

4. What processes, platforms and/or approaches could be used to further strengthen the links between SPI and MEAs?

The following were identified as available platforms and processes to strengthen SPI-related work.

- UN Country Teams
- The SDG reporting platforms and engagements, including HLPF.
- UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
- The UN Science Policy Business Forum
- UN Environment Assembly
- UNEP Regional Offices and Divisions
- Regional and national agencies responsible for environmental management and decision making.
- Science academies
- Academic and research institutions.

Session 4

Recent development in technology and knowledge management and impacts on SPIs

Participants discussed recent developments in science and technology, knowledge management, and policy making processes, and how such developments might impact future of science policy interfaces.

In his presentation, Balakrishna Pisupati, Head, Environmental Policy Unit, UNEP, highlighted that technology development is rapidly enabling more accurate and efficient tools for data collection, but in many cases, particularly in areas with abundant biodiversity, the data has still not yet been collected. The research needs to focus on bringing the availability of data in line with what is possible. Points and comments raised by participants during the session included:

- Data must follow certain standards in terms of fairness and fairness to the user. Data that is accessible, interoperable, and repeatable is needed.
- Reference was made to the biodiversity monitoring framework, including the GBF monitoring framework.
- Private sector data exists in certain areas, but not much environmental data is being collected and maintained by private companies currently in a way we can use.
- Translating or communicating publications and scientific reports and assessment to a wider audience and language that can be picked up in policy making can be challenging.

Session 5

Strengthening science policy interfaces

During this session, the participants discussed how to strengthen SPIs across MEAs (UNEP and non-UNEP and clusters of MEAs) and map potential interest areas. Points and comments raised by participants during the session included:

- Horizon scans and foresight approaches are important tools in the SPI space that can identify cross-cutting issues before they occur, these could be used across MEAs.

- Financing social science research is important to strengthen SPIs across MEAs, including behavioral change insights and how these can be examined in the context of SPI.
- Political buy-in and advocacy for the importance of science to inform policy and decision-making is a critical aspect of strengthening SPIs across MEAs.
- Engaging policy makers to share practices with science panels on ways to penetrate policy spaces at national, regional, and global levels was highlighted.

During this session, presentation was made by Mr. Partick Caron from CIRAD on ongoing discussions related to SPI and food systems.

Session 6

Exploring elements of a strategy on science policy coherence

During this session, the facilitator summarized some of the comments and ideas from the two-day brainstorming session which could potentially inform UNEP's future work on science policy interfaces and related issues. Reference was made to the UNEP@50 Report which notes the following:

Imperative of exchange of evidence and lessons learned. Other commentators on Science-Policy Interface theory stress the importance of a productive exchange of evidence between individuals who can use this information to influence the outcomes of policy decisions on the environment. Given UNEP's mandate and operating context, a dynamic Science Policy Interface can support informed decision-making in the environment, while also engaging a broader array of stakeholders to drive progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Summary

The two-day brainstorming session provided an opportunity for participants to share comments and ideas on how to strengthen science policy interfaces and related work. The ideas and discussions from the brainstorming session will work to inform UNEP's actions on strengthening science policy interfaces in environmental governance. Some of the key observations from the brainstorming session are summarized below:

- Openness in terms of data access and knowledge sharing is critical when it comes to science and diverse types of data and information sources contribution to policy making in MEA processes. The role of citizens, private sector stakeholders, and communities in data collection and knowledge generation also needs to be further acknowledged and their engagement encouraged.
- Regarding how SPI can help the decision-making processes within the respective MEAs, existing gaps between the use of SPI and policy formulation processes need to be examined further as it is currently not well understood. This can be based on available experiences from the functioning of SPI across MEAs and science policy platforms.
- For the rapid developments seen in the use of data, information, and technology to strengthen science policy work, data governance and data management principles are fundamentally

required at the national level. The private sector has taken up technology more rapidly than public and other institutions, much of which is not being used for strengthening science policy interfaces. A mindset change towards increased collaboration between these different actors is needed for joint action to strengthen science policy work, especially in a form and structure that can be used for policy making.

- The need to strengthen the role of social sciences within scientific discussions and decision making around MEAs is critical. For example, the role of behavioral sciences in SPI related action needs attention.
- Some of the indicators to assess the performance of SPI in supporting decision-making around MEAs include national ownership, collaboration, and cooperation among and within MEAs and science policy panels and platforms, and the number of issues that cut across themes and sectors contributing to broader sustainable development and environmental governance agendas. The need to share information across stakeholder groups is also critical, as is the need to bridge gaps that exist between the different platforms that are based in different domains, such as IPCC, IRP, IPBES and others.
- Adopting a foresight approach and conducting horizon scans can be important for identifying cross-cutting issues before they occur to strengthen science policy interfaces across MEAs. Political buy-in and advocacy for the importance of science to inform policy and decision-making can also be critical to strengthen SPI across MEAs. This includes engaging policy makers to share practices with science panels, entities, and bodies on ways to penetrate policy spaces at national, regional, and global levels.

The meeting ended with a word of thanks to all participants.

Annex 1.

Workshop Agenda

Understanding Science Policy Interfaces: Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and beyond

Brainstorming Meeting

Date: 13-14 November 2023

Venue: ROOM 2, International Environment House-1, Geneva

AGENDA

13 November 2023

Welcome and Introductions

09:30 – 10:00

During this session, welcome remarks will be provided by UNEP, UNEP Regional office for Europe followed by self-introductions from all the participants.

Technical Sessions

Session 1

Expectations, and description of the consultations

10:00 – 10:30

The meeting will take a deep dive into understanding how science policy interfaces have shaped environmental agenda, including those under the MEAs besides understanding how the various science policy panels have contributed to MEAs. It will come up with some ideas for work in strengthening science policy interfaces in promoting environmental governance in the future.

Presentation - UNEP

Session 2

Understanding science policy interfaces

10:30 – 12:00 (*with a health break, in-between*)

During this session, the participants will hear from organizations and MEAs on how they are addressing science policy interfaces, experiences in strengthening the interfaces, impacts of their work.

Key considerations for presentations:

1. How has science and other forms of knowledge contributed to policy making in MEAs? Where are the gaps, and how can these be addressed?

2. How do science policy interfaces help the decision-making processes within your MEA, and which platforms/products do you use or plan to use and why?
3. How will you describe and prioritize science policy interface issues within your work plans during the next 5-10 years?
4. What are the key needs from MEAs in contributing to stronger and more effective science-policy interface products?

Presentations from MEAs, IPBES and others

Facilitator – Jerry Harrison, UNEP WCMC

Session 3

Gaps in science policy interfaces – what these are, how to close the gaps.

12:00 – 13:00 & 14:00 – 15:00

During this session, the participants will work in 2-3 groups addressing the issues of recent developments in science policy interfaces, gaps and closing the gaps.

Group Work

During the group work, participants will focus on the following questions:

1. Given the rapid developments in use of data, information, and technology, how much impact do these developments have in strengthening or weakening the science policy work?
2. What are the new considerations for science-policy linkages that MEAs need to consider with focus on technology, social science links (science-policy-society) and the related?
3. How can the performance of science-policy interfaces in supporting decision-making by MEAs be assessed, and are there any obvious key performance indicators?
4. What processes, platforms and/or approaches could be used to further strengthen the links between science-policy interfaces and MEAs?

LUNCH BREAK

13:00 – 14:00

Presentations from group work

15:00 – 15:45

Session 4

Recent development in technology and knowledge management and impacts on science policy interfaces.

15:45 – 17:00 *(with a health break in-between)*

Participants will discuss recent developments in science and technology, knowledge management and policy making processes and how such developments will impact future of science policy interfaces.

Interventions from participants and discussions

Facilitator – MEA Secretariat(s)

14 November 2023

Recap from day 1 discussions

09:30 – 11:00

11:00 – 11:30 Health break

Session 5

Considering potential elements of a UNEP strategy on science policy coherence for the future from MEAs perspective

11:30 – 13:00

During this session, the participants will work in 2 groups, both focusing on exploring elements of a potential strategy for future science policy interfaces issues and considerations for UNEP from MEAs and Science Panel's perspectives. Participants will also hear about the Montpellier process on SPI and food systems during this session.

Group work.

LUNCH BREAK 13:00 – 14:00

Session 6

Summary and wrap-up

15:00 – 16:00

END OF THE MEETING

Annex 2.

Participant list

| Brainstorming Meeting | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|--|-----------------------|
| Date: 13-14 November 2023 | | | | | |
| List of Participants | | | | | |
| 1 | Organisation | Names | Job Titles | Contacts | Mode of Participation |
| 2 | Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) | Jillian Campbell | Head of Monitoring, Review and Reporting | Jillian.campbell@un.org | Virtual |
| 3 | Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) | Dagmar Zíková | Scientific Officer (Executive Secretary/ Nominee) | dagmar.zikova@un.org | In-person |
| 4 | Minamata Convention on Mercury | Marianne Bailey | Senior Management Officer-Minamata Convention | marianne.bailey@un.org | In-person |
| 5 | Minamata Convention on Mercury | Maria Irene Rizzo | Associate Expert | irene.rizzo@un.org | In-person |
| 6 | BRS Conventions | Maria Cristina Cardenas-Fischer | Head of Unit & Senior Policy Advisor (Policy and Strategy Unit) | maria-cristina.cardenas@un.org | In-person |
| 7 | UN University | Adam Day | Head of Geneva Office, UNU Centre for Policy Research | adam.day@unu.edu | Virtual |
| 8 | IPBES | Simone Schiele | Head, Work Programmes | simone.schiele@un.org | Virtual |
| 9 | IPCC | Raman Sukumar | Vice-Chair, Working Group II | rsuku@iisc.ac.in | In-person |

| | | | | | |
|----|--|-------------------------|---|--|-----------|
| 10 | Director de Cooperación e Implementación en Biodiversidad, CONABIO | Hesiquio Benítez | SBSTTA focal point | hbenitez@conabio.gob.mx | In-person |
| 11 | WCMC | Jerry Harrison | Head of Development | jerry.harrison@unep-wcmc.org | In-person |
| 12 | UNEP | Jinhua Zhang | Regional SPC - SPI | zhang6@un.org | Virtual |
| 13 | UNEP | Tomas Marques | Regional SPC - SPI, Europe | tomas.marques@un.org | Virtual |
| 14 | UNEP Law Division | Balakrishna Pisupati | Head of Unit, Environment Policy Unit | balakrishna.pisupati@un.org | In-person |
| 15 | UNEP Law Division | Ruci Mafi Botei | Programme Management Officer, Environment Policy Unit | ruci.botei@un.org | Virtual |
| 16 | UNEP | Yassin Ahmed | Sub-Programme Coordinator, Environmental Governance | yassin.ahmed@un.org | Virtual |
| 17 | CORDIO | David Obura | CEO, CORDIO Africa | dobura@cardioea.net | Virtual |
| 18 | EMG | Hossein Fadaei | EMG Secretariat | Hossein.fadaei@un.org | In-person |
| 19 | UNEP regional office | Arnold Kreilhuber | UNEP | Arnold.kreilhuber@un.org | In-person |
| 20 | Nairobi Convention | Theuri Mwangi | Sr. Programme Officer | theuri.mwangi@un.org | Virtual |
| 21 | CIRAD | Patrick Caron | Vice President, International Affairs | Patrick.caron@cirad.fr | in person |
| 22 | Ramsar Convention | Filip Aggestam | Scientific and Technical Officer | aggestam@ramsar.org | In-person |
| 23 | UNEP Europe Office | Wondwosen Asnake Kibret | Policy and Partnerships Coordinator | wondwosen.asnake@un.org | In-person |