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**International environmental policy and
governance issues: synergies among the
biodiversity-related multilateral environmental
agreements**

**Enhancing synergies among the biodiversity-related
multilateral environmental agreements**

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report highlights the progress made in efforts to enhance synergies and cooperation among the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements in response to decision SS.XII/3 of 22 February 2012, on international environmental governance, of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme.

* UNEP/EA.2/1.

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 1 of decision SS.XII/3 of 22 February 2012, on international environmental governance, the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recognized the importance of enhancing synergies, including at the national and regional levels, among the biodiversity-related conventions, without prejudice to their specific objectives and recognizing their respective mandates, and encouraged the conferences of the parties to those conventions to strengthen efforts further in that regard, taking into account relevant experiences. In paragraphs 2 and 3 of the same decision, the Executive Director was invited to undertake, as appropriate, further activities to improve the effectiveness of and cooperation among multilateral environmental agreements, taking into account the autonomous decision-making authority of the conferences of the parties, and he was requested to explore the opportunities for further synergies in the administrative functions of the multilateral environmental agreement secretariats administered by UNEP and to provide advice on such opportunities to the governing bodies of those multilateral environmental agreements.

2. The Governing Council adopted the above-mentioned decision after its consideration of international environmental governance. The need for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of international environmental governance, in particular by reducing fragmentation and the potential for duplication, was pointed out in the first and second reports of the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit on review of environmental governance within the United Nations system.¹ In addition, in paragraph 89 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development “The future we want,”² Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives encouraged parties to multilateral environmental agreements to consider further measures, in the chemicals and waste cluster and others, as appropriate, to promote policy coherence at all relevant levels, improve efficiency, reduce unnecessary overlap and duplication, and enhance coordination and cooperation among the multilateral environmental agreements, including the three Rio conventions, as well as with the United Nations system in the field.

3. Consideration was given to many completed or continuing activities, including activities by the secretariats and governing and advisory bodies of the conventions, United Nations bodies and other stakeholders, such as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, with the aim of addressing the above-mentioned concerns. In particular, the actions taken by the biodiversity-related conventions to formally recognize the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets as a useful common framework to facilitate the access of other conventions to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the Convention on Biological Diversity, and to actively assist countries with the development of inclusive national biodiversity strategies and action plans, were also acknowledged. Discussions emanating from the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals also guided the discussions, although specific information could not be included due to the negotiations under way on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These and other significant existing achievements, mandates, opportunities and activities were considered carefully by UNEP.

4. Through a project financed by the European Union and the Governments of Switzerland and Finland, the UNEP secretariat developed an “options paper” on enhancing synergies and cooperation among biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements during 2014 and 2015.

¹ JIU/REP/2008/3, JIU/REP/2014/4.

² United Nations General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex.

II. Action taken

5. In addressing the above-mentioned mandate, UNEP carried out online surveys and convened two expert meetings in 2014 and 2015 to discuss and elaborate options for identifying possible ways of enhancing synergies in the implementation of biodiversity-related conventions.³ Participants in the surveys and at the expert meetings, who took part in their personal capacities, included representatives of the UNEP secretariat and of relevant convention secretariats, as well as national focal points for the relevant conventions and other experts. Concurrently, UNEP also reviewed guidance, experience and lessons learned at the national level with respect to the coherent implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions, working closely both with convention secretariats and with national focal points and authorities.

6. The options paper prepared as a result of this process, entitled “Elaboration of options for enhancing synergies among biodiversity-related conventions”, sets out a range of options and actions, and could be used for discussion and possible further action in a number of forums, including the United Nations Environment Assembly, the governing and advisory bodies of each biodiversity-related convention, and the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions. The paper will also be one of several inputs to the informal advisory group of the party-led process initiated by the Convention on Biological Diversity under decision XII/6 on cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives.

7. An abridged version of the options paper is available in the addendum to the present document (UNEP/EA.2/12/Add.1).

III. Options

8. Specific options for action with respect to improving synergies and coherence in the implementation of the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements were identified in the options paper under the following seven related themes: national biodiversity strategies and action plans, the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets; reporting, monitoring and indicators; the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and strengthening the science-policy interface; information management and awareness-raising; capacity-building; funding and resource efficiency; and institutional collaboration. The need for links to the furtherance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was also identified. Some 28 recommendations and 88 action points were also identified for consideration.

A. Overarching considerations

9. A number of overarching considerations were identified during the process, including:

(a) The benefits to be gained by implementing the biodiversity-related conventions in a synergistic and coherent manner so as to increase their national implementation, efficiency and effectiveness;

(b) The importance of acknowledging and building on past, existing and planned activities of biodiversity-related conventions and others in order to identify and address opportunities to build synergies and increase coherence in the implementation of the conventions;

(c) The value of engaging with the activities of UNEP (and other relevant entities, including the United Nations) to identify and address opportunities to further build synergies and increase coherence in the implementation of the conventions;

(d) The potential opportunities as well as the need for further promoting synergies among the biodiversity-related conventions in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets;

³ The conventions included in this work were the Convention on Biological Diversity; the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and its family of legal instruments; the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention); and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Reference to “biodiversity-related conventions” also includes the protocols to such conventions, e.g., the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

(e) The need for all actors, including Governments, United Nations entities, convention bodies and secretariats and other stakeholders, to continue to promote and undertake mutually supportive efforts and approaches aimed at enhancing coordinated and coherent implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions at all levels, dealing with issues of reporting and information-sharing systems, and building on existing activities and experience.

B. Options for action by the United Nations Environment Programme

10. There is a clear need to focus and enhance the work of UNEP in supporting the implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions at the national, regional and global levels, including, where appropriate, in promoting and facilitating collaboration and cooperation in their implementation in those areas that fall within the UNEP mandate. Such efforts should both acknowledge and build on past, existing and planned initiatives, within and outside UNEP, and identify new opportunities for synergies, including, but not restricted to, the following actions that emerged from the expert discussions:

(a) **Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and Aichi Biodiversity Targets as a framework for action:** Ensure the effective reflection of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets in the medium-term strategy and programme of work of UNEP, recognizing that these not only are key to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services, but provide a framework with which biodiversity-related conventions and United Nations entities have already aligned themselves, and within which synergies in the implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions can be addressed in a systematic and integrated way;

(b) **National biodiversity strategies and action plans:** Communicate at all levels the importance of national biodiversity strategies and action plans as high-level policy instruments for delivering the coherent implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions, including mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem services into relevant sectors through all appropriate national planning processes, building upon what has already been achieved by the biodiversity-related conventions and others, and taking advantage of the resulting opportunity to leverage resources;

(c) **Support at the regional level:** Strengthen the support provided by the UNEP regional subprogramme coordinators for ecosystem management and biodiversity, including for the implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions, and secure funding for such support. Working in collaboration with the secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions and relevant regional, subregional and other organizations, UNEP could develop a coherent framework for the work at the regional and subregional levels. This framework could guide UNEP regional-level support for the development and implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and more synergistic implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions, and link it to the work of UNEP with United Nations country teams so as to contribute to United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks;

(d) **Resource efficiency and mobilization:** Encourage the creation of enhanced opportunities for coordination and synergies, and share information on work to support parties to multilateral environmental agreements in terms of resource mobilization that promotes cooperation among the biodiversity-related conventions. Such efforts could involve supporting parties in prioritizing the coherent implementation of multilateral environmental agreements in national plans on which donors base their funding priorities (such as United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks), pursuing a coordinated approach to accessing funding from GEF and the Green Climate Fund among the biodiversity-related conventions, and promoting the benefits of synergies among multilateral environmental agreements to GEF and donors, including by sharing experiences on how such synergies can increase the cost-effectiveness of action on biodiversity. Emerging opportunities through the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda should also be considered in the context of achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(e) **Capacity-building:** In accordance with paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”, which empowered UNEP to lead efforts to formulate United Nations system-wide strategies on the environment, promote possible ways to strengthen coherent system-wide action on capacity-building for facilitating cooperation and collaboration in the implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions. Such efforts should build on the previous work of the Issue Management Group on Biodiversity of the Environment Management Group and take into account the current follow-up work of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets task force, the capacity-building work being done under the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building (UNEP/GC.23/6/Add.1, annex).

Working with the secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions, as well as through collaborative mechanisms, such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets task force, to explore the development of a more coherent capacity-building framework to help achieve these aims. In addition, working with the members of the United Nations Development Group, support the increased integration of biodiversity considerations into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework process in order to more effectively address the Aichi Biodiversity Targets as a coherent framework for action on biodiversity and ecosystem services;

(f) **Coherent approaches and practical tools for information and knowledge management:** Working with the secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions, continue with and further enhance the contribution of UNEP to interoperable data, information and knowledge and tools that support the coherent implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions, including tools to support information-sharing, management systems and reporting. To continue working with key stakeholders, including convention secretariats and parties, on the further development and improved delivery of tools, such as UNEP Live, online reporting tools and the InforMEA information portal for multilateral environmental agreements, for mapping the contributions of the biodiversity-related conventions, United Nations entities and other relevant organizations to the implementation of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the UNEP *Sourcebook of Opportunities for Enhancing Cooperation among the Biodiversity-related Conventions at National and Regional Levels*.⁴

11. The options proposed are aimed at achieving two main outcomes:

(a) Increasingly coherent implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions, involving greater collaboration and cooperation among convention parties, convention secretariats and key partners, leading to more efficiency and effectiveness in achieving the aims of those conventions;

(b) Increased collaboration and cooperation in the implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions at all levels, facilitated engagement with other sectors, and improved opportunities for mainstreaming biodiversity objectives into other policies and sectors (including through the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and in furtherance of the Sustainable Development Goals).

12. The options paper was presented to a meeting of the informal advisory group established by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in its decision XII/6, as well as to the governing bodies of other relevant multilateral environmental agreements through their respective secretariats.

IV. Activities of the United Nations Environment Programme in support of enhancing cooperation and synergies among the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements

13. In support of enhancing cooperation and synergies among the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements, UNEP has undertaken a series of activities that include but are not limited to the following:

(a) Since 2009, with funding support from the European Union and Norway, UNEP has appointed a number of regional-level focal points for biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements. The mandate of the focal points is not only to enhance support for the effective implementation of the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements at the regional and national levels, but also to identify and support actions related to synergies and cooperation among those agreements. The regional focal points have organized regional workshops and events to support national focal points in implementing some of the global biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements and have participated effectively in the work of relevant bodies in the Asia and the Pacific, West Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean regions;

(b) Supported by the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans Forum – a collaborative partnership established to help countries revise and update their national biodiversity strategies and action plans – UNEP has undertaken actions to enhance synergies among the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements by providing inputs for such actions in the revised national biodiversity strategies and action plans as well as by helping countries to review their national biodiversity strategies and action plans in response to specific requests;

⁴ <http://www.unep.org/ecosystemmanagement/Portals/7/Documents/cooperation-sourcebook-biodiversity-conventions.pdf>.

(c) UNEP facilitated the establishment of InforMEA, a multilateral environmental agreements information and knowledge management initiative that brings together a number of multilateral environmental agreements to develop harmonized and interoperable information systems for the benefit of the parties to the respective agreements and the international community at large. Work is under way in the context of InforMEA on enhancing outreach to practitioners working on issues related to synergies. UNEP Live will facilitate this process;

(d) In addition, UNEP is developing a guidance document for use at the national level by parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in finalizing their national biodiversity strategies and action plans in order to mainstream issues related to implementing actions on synergies between the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements. The guidance document is expected to be ready during the first quarter of 2016;

(e) UNEP has developed the *Sourcebook of Opportunities for Enhancing Cooperation among the Biodiversity-related Conventions at National and Regional Levels*,⁵ which provides guidance to help countries achieve synergies using several case studies and examples from around the world on how national actions are enhancing cooperation;

(f) Based on the sourcebook, an e-learning module is being developed that will be used during the proposed regional workshop on South-South cooperation in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries scheduled to be held in March 2016;

(g) In addition, UNEP is organizing a series of webinars on the topic of enhancing cooperation and synergies among the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements at the global and regional levels to enhance outreach and to reach more stakeholders, providing information on the processes and options available to achieve synergies.

14. The UNEP programme of work for 2016–2017 and the draft programme of work for 2018–2021 consider elements from the options identified for enhanced cooperation and synergies among the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements.⁶

15. Acknowledging the important contribution that the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements can make towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, UNEP intends to focus on supporting countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through the implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements using options such as the revision and realization of goals under the national biodiversity strategies and action plans and others, and the provision of guidance on implementing the decisions of governing bodies that focus on issues of development.

16. UNEP stands ready to support action at all levels to enhance cooperation and synergies among the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements, recognizing fully the autonomous nature of their governing bodies and the guidance that will be provided by those governing bodies to the respective secretariats.

V. Conclusions

17. Considering the set of options identified in the options paper, the United Nations Environment Assembly may wish to:

(a) Request that Member States create an enabling environment for promoting actions to enhance synergies and cooperation at the global, regional and national levels;

(b) Suggest that the forthcoming discussions and decisions of the governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements, the GEF Assembly and other processes support actions to enhance synergies and cooperation among the multilateral environmental agreements so that the elements identified in the options paper can be translated into actions on the ground;

(c) Request that UNEP and the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements work towards enhancing actions supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at various levels, including by identifying suitable indicators and establishing a mechanism for periodic review of progress achieved;

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For example, refer to components under subprogramme 4 on environmental governance.

(d) Suggest that UNEP initiate actions for building capacity and institutional mechanisms at the national level focusing on enhancing delivery of local synergies-related actions that contribute to improved implementation of multilateral environmental agreements as well as supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
