



PERGAMON

Global Environmental Change 13 (2003) 61–68

GLOBAL
ENVIRONMENTAL
CHANGE

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UNU MONITOR

UNU Monitor is a quarterly review of the United Nations University's (UNU) current research activities, publications and forthcoming projects in the area of environment and sustainable development. This issue features an article by Dr. Jerry Velasquez and Mr. Uli Piest of UNU that describes the results of the national and regional case studies that the UNU Inter-linkages Initiative [1] and its partners conducted in 2001 and 2002. The Inter-linkages Initiative was the topic of two previous GEC articles [2,3]. For further information regarding the Initiative contact Dr. Jerry Velasquez, UNU Global Environment Information Centre, UNU/GEIC (E-mail: jerry@geic.or.jp, fax: +81-3-3407-8164, web-site: <http://www.unu.edu/inter-linkages/>).

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doi:10.1016/S0959-3780(03)00002-5

Case studies on inter-linkages and environmental governance in 14 Asia and Pacific countries

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1. Introduction

Studies on environmental policies and the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) in four Pacific island countries and the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were conducted during 2001 and 2002 by the UNU. These studies were conducted in close collaboration with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the ASEAN Secretariat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Pacific, the United Nations Environment Programme Asia Pacific (UNEP/ROAP) and the Institute of International and Strategic Studies (ISIS) Malaysia. These country studies are part of a series of case studies agreed upon during a regional workshop on inter-linkages, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in February

2001 (National and Regional Approaches in Asia and the Pacific, 2002).

The countries that participated in the studies so far are the Cook Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu in the Pacific (Fig. 1); and Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam in Asia. The overall objective of the studies is to examine prospects and challenges for environmental management, provide a practical approach to supporting synergies and coordination on a national and regional level, and offering a means of identifying opportunities and gaps in both national and regional environmental governance (UNU, 2001; National Action Key to Success of Inter-Linkages Approach, 2001).

In the South Pacific study (Pacific Islands Countries Case Study, 2002; Papua New Guinea Case Study, 2003), 29 MEAs were examined. Among these—as examples of possible synergies—particular attention was paid to the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Waigani Conventions, addressing the management of hazardous

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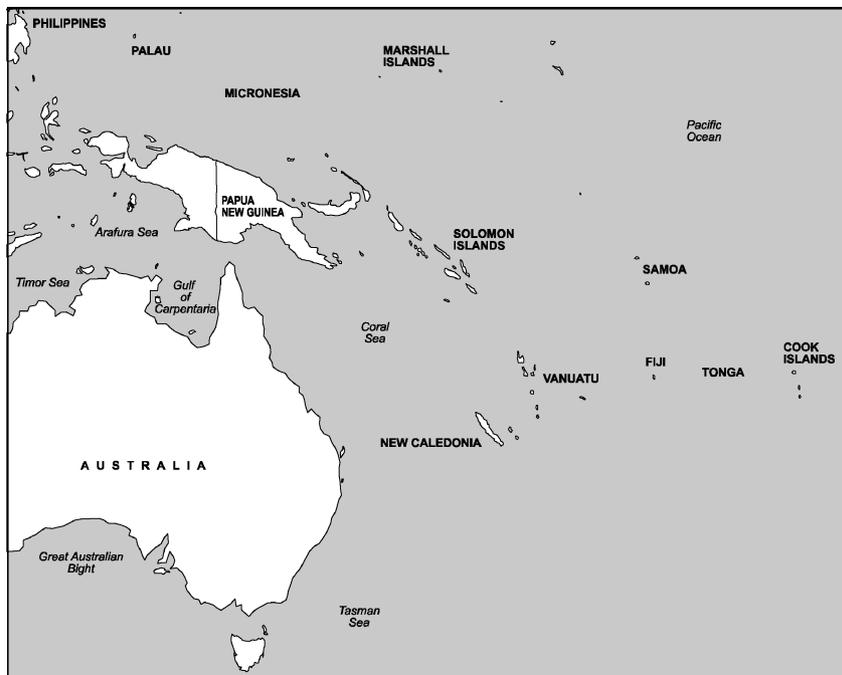


Fig. 1. The South Pacific Region

and chemical wastes and pollutants on a global and regional scale. In each of the four countries examined, the MEA processes proved to be placing substantial demands on the capacity of various government agencies involved in negotiation, ratification and/or implementation. At times, international demands actually compete for limited resources against domestic policy implementation. This shows that while MEA processes may be the key to building up resources and capacities for addressing the full range of environmental issues over the medium to long term, in the short term they can impose significant additional pressure on small island developing countries. One of the goals of the study was to identify ways in which the inter-linkages approach can be utilized to reduce these burdens. In this regard, a number of common themes emerged.

In the ASEAN region, the issues covered in the studies (ASEAN Case Study, 2002) included protecting the ozone layer, mitigating climate change, sustaining biological diversity and protecting endangered species, controlling transboundary movements and disposal of hazardous wastes, and practicing sustainable management of forests. While ASEAN member countries (AMCs) are not major contributors to global environmental problems such as climate change, ozone layer depletion, and hazardous wastes disposal, they are most vulnerable to their adverse effects. The majority of AMCs are still grappling with domestic environmental problems such as water and air pollution, degradation of land and loss of biodiversity, in addition to providing basic human needs and addressing poverty. Never-

theless, AMCs have contributed substantially to addressing these global issues despite their scarce resources and other pressing national priorities.

Despite considerable differences in geographical, demographic, social, economic and environmental conditions—and different systems of government—the 10 AMCs are collaborating in various environmental issues of common interest. The AMCs have established mutually consistent understanding in international fora regarding global environmental issues and share a common aspiration for continued socio-economic progress while maintaining balanced development based on the principle of environmentally sound sustainable development. Recognizing the importance of global environmental issues, ASEAN has established a Working Group on MEAs to discuss and coordinate implementation at the regional level, and to undertake regional activities that are of common interest to all member countries. These include establishing common positions or understanding as appropriate, sharing of information and experiences, and joint training and capacity building activities.

2. Challenges to preparation and negotiation

In the South Pacific, the negotiation and signature of environmental protocols requires substantial internal coordination involving different government agencies, such as foreign affairs, environment and other departments or agencies that later become involved in

implementation and enforcement processes. It is often not possible to allocate adequate time to the development of a priori briefings on complex issues where line departments have limited staff. Consequently, and while each situation was unique, it was generally found that small island developing countries were rarely able to send delegations with high levels of technical expertise to regional and international negotiations. There is a core need, therefore, to achieve an adequate level of technical knowledge for negotiators whose professional background is typically more likely to be legal/diplomatic than scientific/technical. It is also critically important that once these negotiators return, they find the mechanisms in place to report effectively, quickly, and widely on negotiation results, and that they are able to disseminate the materials distributed during the negotiating session to all relevant government agencies and departments. This creates scope for convention secretariats and regional organizations to provide meaningful assistance to countries through the development of clear briefing papers with executive summaries of the technical issues. Regional organizations could also support countries to develop their responses to key negotiation issues by providing timely, relevant, and accurate materials relating to the merits of consolidated regional positions.

The Republic of Palau addressed this challenge through the establishment of the Office of Environmental Response and Coordination, which serves as a national focal point (NFP) in collecting and disseminating information during negotiations and ratifications of MEAs and subsequent secretariat meetings. Although its initial role was limited to one MEA, it surpassed these restrictions and became a central hub for information sharing and cooperation in implementing activities in Palau. An essential element for the success of such coordination bodies lies in the position and the importance they are given within the political and administrative structure. In Palau, for example, the coordination office is positioned directly under the Prime Ministers Office and gains from this commitment.

The Cook Islands followed Palau's encouraging example by creating its own coordination unit. Initially the unit had difficulties living up to expectations as the administrative procedures with other agencies involved in environmental management were not formalized, leading to different positions and parallel strategies. The situation has recently been improved resulting in a better coordination between the main agencies. Establishing offices to coordinate information flows and the implementation efforts of various agencies offers a model that may prove to be adaptable to the situation of other countries.

In Papua New Guinea, the government is sometimes struggling to bridge the diplomatic process at the international level to the national ratification and

implementation processes. Formal procedures outlining the process of preparation and consultation prior to PNGs participation in international environmental negotiations are mostly vague or not formalized. Although the Department of Foreign Affairs, focal point and lead agency for international negotiations, recognizes the need for technical consultations with line agencies such as the departments for the environment, mining or fisheries, and other stakeholders, in reality consultations rarely take place or do not take place in a meaningful and timely manner. One often-cited reason is the lack of capacity, both human and financial. Because of the burdens already placed upon foreign affairs staff, the process of preparation and consultation often only begins shortly before international meetings are scheduled, depriving the line agencies of the necessary time to prepare the relevant technical information. The fact that the issue of internal capacity is never really considered or reflected when starting to strategize or plan before MEA negotiations adds to the circular nature of this problem.

The PNG government is well structured enough that various government departments are represented at each other boards (e.g., the forestry board is chaired by the head of the environment department and co-chaired by the head of the planning department). However, there is an apparent lack of properly defined functions or responsibilities below department head levels in order to strategize cross-sectoral priorities. This situation, together with capacity constraints, weakens formal procedures for consultation, preparation, and planning both horizontally across different departments and vertically, within specific departments and agencies.

There are significant challenges in the preparations for, and conduct of negotiations for Meetings and Conferences of Parties (M/COPs) within the AMCs. These include lack of sufficient expertise (especially in the scientific and technical context), lack of relevant data/information, scarce human and financial resources especially for consultation in the preparatory processes, and to send a sufficient number of delegates to respective M/COPs. Time constraints are a particular issue here, as they are in the Pacific. Significant challenges also exist to coordination among delegations and with related stakeholders (for joint meetings and report composition), including reaching consensus among sectoral government institutions which may have competing interests and mandates. The complex nature of the issues, coupled with insufficient capacities, results in non-adherence to timeliness in submission of inputs/comments from concerned parties. To overcome some of these constraints, AMCs have endeavored to work towards sharing views and understating and establishing common positions on a regional basis at meetings of the ASEAN Working Group on MEAs. AMCs have also assigned lead countries for each of the major MEAs

whose role is to monitor developments, and provide inputs for collective regional consideration of the member countries. As a result, ASEAN several times developed regional responses to MEA negotiations.

3. Ratification

Ratification denotes national acceptance of an obligation to implement the provisions of an MEA. Where this has an impact on government bodies that are involved or might get involved during the implementation process, good information flow is important to prepare them for any new or altering legal responsibilities in the course of the ratification of an MEA.

The speed and efficacy of ratification and subsequent implementation processes also depends on the constitutional requirements of countries. In terms of formulating and implementing the required legislation, countries differ considerably with regard to timelines and political complexity. The best possible way for convention secretariats, or regional organizations, to support countries with regard to legal processes is through the production and distribution of clear policy documentation. This should cover the commitments, obligations and responsibilities of countries implementing a respective convention, and should, again, include concise executive summaries.

Even though in some countries in the Pacific the consultative processes for the signature of conventions work well, their ratification involves another complex and time consuming process to achieve the necessary legislative changes. This process is particularly vulnerable to changes in government and the processes of review and re-evaluation of priorities, which usually follow such changes.

There are two ways to ratify a signed agreement in the Pacific. In the Cook Islands, once negotiated, the ratification of a particular MEA is an executive decision, which does not require parliamentary approval. For Palau and other Pacific Island countries, ratification requires authorization through national legal bodies. Domestic implementation of an MEA requires domestic legislation to be in place. Usually, the bill to implement an international agreement is presented to parliament by the responsible ministry (typically foreign affairs) sometimes in consultation with the implementing national agency. Provided there is no significant opposition in parliament, this is usually a straightforward process to be achieved in a few months.

The requirement for legislation to be developed so that a signed convention can be ratified imposes substantial resource and time demands which are often underestimated. The implementation of a convention may require new legislation and consequential changes to several chapters of existing legislation. These issues

are not supported by the fact that often only a handful of professional legal staff or advisors with training in international law are in charge of integrating new legislation into the existing national framework.

Generally, the process of ratification appears to proceed well in the Cook Islands. However, during the case study it was noted that there are no well-established protocols and procedures between the Office of International Law of the foreign affairs ministry and other agencies. Similarly, consultation with the Crown Law Office, which is eventually responsible for advice on domestic legislation following ratification of an MEA, seems to be ad hoc. Although the solicitor general is a member of the core body responsible for vetting all cabinet submissions, there seems to be no coherent process of co-ordination between the solicitor general and the Office of International Law.

PNG also faces some difficulties in turning international obligations into workable policies on the ground. This relates to long delays (often several years) for translating international obligations into national legislation and national and provincial policies and responsibilities. For the Montreal Protocol for example, the enabling national legislation was only developed after international support was specifically provided through the Multilateral Fund—several years after PNG's accession in 1993. This derives again from the apparent lack of capacity, both physical (the number of people involved) and technical capacity to deal with pending legislation and ratification processes. Again, ratification stages and documents seldom consider existing capacity constraints, further aggravating the management of these MEAs, even after it gets approved by the Parliament. Due to these challenges, PNG risks missing out on the financial opportunities available under some of the more recent MEAs (e.g. the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism), unless the required legislation is speedily developed and working level procedures established.

On the other hand, the AMCs have shown a strong commitment to accede to MEAs as early as possible. ASEAN overall has a greater rate of ratification in comparison to the Asia Pacific region. ASEAN has achieved almost 90% ratification for the older and established conventions such as the Vienna Convention, Montreal Protocol, UNFCCC, CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The recent conventions such as the chemical related conventions have, understandably, lower rates of accession, as member countries need to study the implications and ensure national preparedness to fulfill the obligations of becoming a party. However the process of ratification is greatly assisted by sharing experiences among AMCs during meetings of the ASEAN committees.

Due to the relatively recent accession to most of the biodiversity-related MEAs, only Indonesia and the

Philippines already have developed national strategies and action plans for the conservation of biodiversity, while Cambodia and Lao are in the process of developing national strategies. Other activities undertaken so far range from country studies on biodiversity, including an inventory of wetland ecosystems, national wildlife registers, public awareness raising programmes, and capacity development activities for related governmental agencies, to name a few.

Throughout the ASEAN region, many activities to protect its biodiversity are under way, reaching from training for officers in charge, development of national plant and animal inventories, to information campaigns. However, most of the activities seem to focus on the national level, without taking into account synergies that could derive from a stronger multilateral or regional cooperation.

4. Implementation of MEAs

MEAs usually address a multiplicity of interconnected environmental, economic and social issues, which cut across the responsibilities of different government agencies and governance levels. Given this, along with global and regional efforts, the implementation of MEAs requires coordinated activities at the national and community levels. The challenge is to translate international obligations under MEAs into national and local environmental agendas to receive political support and to make them meaningful to the general public.

One of the key problems in the implementation of MEAs identified by the case studies is the lack of linkage and synergy between domestic environmental issues and the objectives of MEAs and actions they require to be addressed. The general sentiment is that especially international environmental issues are not considered a priority in the countries itself and are not deemed relevant to local circumstances. This is despite the fact that a number of domestic environmental issues, such as waste management or nature conservation, complement obligations under different MEAs.

Contrary to what seems to be a widespread view, the prevailing MEAs and regional environmental agreements are often designed to provide a framework for international cooperation and support to address specific domestic environmental issues. MEAs in general and regional environmental conventions in particular allow for states to monitor environmental standards at the domestic level. It is important to take into consideration what global organizations can offer to developing MEA Parties. For example, the GEF guidelines for the implementation of the POPs convention offer funding opportunities for signatories. It is therefore important to ensure that intended activities under

MEAs are taken into consideration in the annual budget planning processes.

The implementation of MEAs not only requires horizontal synchronization of activities between departments and agencies involved, but also vertical coordination at the national, provincial, municipal, and rural community levels. To ensure that this coordination takes place in an efficient and effective manner (or even at all), focused analysis is required during the early stage of the negotiation and ratification processes. This analysis should aim to identify the broader human and financial resource as well as training and public information requirements that are necessary for the effective implementation of conventions. This is a highly specialized and resource intensive task and, as such, represents an area in which the international community and relevant regional organizations could play a useful, if not crucial, supporting role.

The effective implementation of MEAs not only calls for cooperation and collaboration at the national level, but also is a requirement under most MEAs. Generally, there is a tendency to pursue coordination at the project level rather than in the political and institutional arena as this allows to avoid conflicts of interests and long-term decisions. Nevertheless, a well-established consultation process including all stakeholders could decrease overlapping activities, improve joint problem identification and solution finding, increase the degree of ownership of implementation measures and assign clear responsibilities within the existing governmental structures.

The environments of small island oceanic countries, their marine ecosystems in particular, and their efforts to address their environmental goals are of fundamental global importance. In almost all instances, the achievement of these goals requires resources beyond the internal scope of small island resources. Given this reality it is becoming increasingly important that an overall strategy be developed for the medium to long-term support of small island developing countries as they attempt to meet their responsibilities under various MEAs. This strategy must be developed on the basis of an appropriate needs analysis and involve all relevant members of the global community, such as, UN bodies, regional and bilateral funding agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

The first and foremost problem that countries in the Pacific face in the implementation of MEAs is the incoherence or even absence of an effective and comprehensive legal framework. For example, the Cook Islands do not have a unified national environmental legislation. The *Rarotonga Environment Act 1944–1995* applies only to the main island of Rarotonga and not to the outer islands. Since 1992, and with a view to developing comprehensive national environment legislation, an environment bill has been proposed, but it is not

yet enacted. Vanuatu also drafted a comprehensive environmental legislation, which, once endorsed, might encourage synergies. A substantial body of environmental laws exists, but mostly through sectoral legislation, not stimulating integrated approaches to environmental management and sustainable development.

Many people consulted identified the need for an adequate framework for consultation in all aspects of environmental issues, including the negotiation and implementation of MEAs. Consultation takes place in the Pacific islands, although this process is often disrupted between the negotiation, ratification and implementation phases. Sometimes, there is also uncertainty regarding the responsibilities among ministries and agencies. Cooperation and communication between government agencies and NGOs improved in the Cook Islands though, especially since the establishment of the International Environmental Advisory Unit. For example, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) South Pacific has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Cook Islands government providing a framework for cooperation on environmental issues generally. WWF Cook Islands is also exploring the possibility of developing an MOU with SPREP with regard to the implementation of SPREP projects in the Cook Islands. In Palau, the Office of Environmental Response and Coordination serves as an important NFP in collecting and disseminating information during negotiation and ratification of MEAs and subsequent secretariat meetings.

Beyond the national governance level, coordination and cooperation with NGOs, private businesses and the communities is necessary in order to convert a national policy into local action and vice versa. Including societal actors into the planning and implementation processes enhances local ownership of implementation and can serve as an important feedback practice into the planning itself.

Both the Cook Islands and Palau already took first steps in the direction of a more comprehensive approach, although many environmental NGOs hope for broader participation opportunities and a continuous and institutionalized procedure of including the civil society into the national and regional implementation of MEAs. At the last SPREP Governing Council in September 2002—after the study was conducted in the Cook Islands—the delegation from the Cook Islands comprised a representative of the Prime Minister's Office, two representatives of the environment service and a NGO-representative.

In PNG, the institutional and capacity challenges already noted above are also key issues for the implementation of MEAs. There is a structure of cooperation, but the lack of a specified framework for cooperation hampers not only the preparation, negotia-

tion and ratification of MEAs, but more importantly, the implementation of these agreements as well. Similarly the cyclical nature of capacity constraints poses serious problems to the implementation of many government policies, be it environment-, health-, or education-related.

PNG's size, its diverse and comparably large population and the many languages its people speak, combined with a centralized, western style government, creates an additional challenge not present in other South Pacific countries. Not only does this complicate the implementation of existing policies, it also complicates the transfer of legislative and enforcement procedures as well as implementation and monitoring responsibilities to the provinces and local levels. The lack of necessary government resources creates a vacuum in implementation which is then taken up either by the private sector (as in forestry management in some instances) the church (in education), NGOs (awareness raising and locally based activities) and many other stakeholders. However, in some cases, this vacuum was never leveraged to promote the government's key activities, as there is no continuous cooperation between the government and some of these actors. This is in spite of the fact that mutually beneficial arrangements are already established in the area of education between the government and the church (the church runs 50% of all PNG schools—the government develops the curricula and pays for the teachers salaries, but the church owns and maintains the properties). Many NGOs in PNG receive international funding, and thus will require very little government assistance in their work.

Within the ASEAN, institutional arrangements for the environment vary widely, depending on the national circumstances. Most countries have established full-fledged ministries or agencies devoted solely, or primarily, to environmental matters. More recently, Thailand and Viet Nam have established ministries devoted solely to environment and natural resource management. All AMCs have established NFPs for each of the MEAs ratified; they are mostly situated within the ministries of environment, agriculture and forestry, or other agencies. Their functions range from liaison with the MEA secretariats and relevant international organizations, coordinating implementation of MEAs among various sectoral agencies at the national level, and formulating national laws, policies and strategies for implementation of their obligations under the MEAs.

A significant problem AMCs are facing is the capacity of the NFPs to respond to the demands of coordinating and implementing MEAs. Most focal points have only a few officials assigned to handle MEAs, and in addition to a number of MEAs each has to handle, they are also invariably involved in other pressing national environmental activities. The lack of sufficient personnel, technical expertise and financial resources limits the

ability of AMCs to effectively manage MEAs at the national level. However, in spite of these challenges, ASEAN has made significant achievements in implementing MEAs; most notable among these is the phase-out of ozone depleting agents.

The main concern for AMCs though is related to the effective utilization of financial resources, especially from donor agencies, rather than the lack of resources itself. Greater coordination among collaborative agencies within and outside ASEAN is needed to ensure that there is no duplication and unnecessary depletion of meager resources. Often, resources are consumed unreasonably for management and coordination expenses which do not directly benefit delivery of services and outputs. The use of external expertise, even though such expertise is available in the region, not only adds extra costs, but also does not build capacities and expertise within the region. The tendency to segment activities based on single conventions and to implement these on a country-to country basis, where regional implementation could be more efficient and effective, compound the issue.

ASEAN therefore embarked upon promoting synergies and coordination in the implementation of MEAs through encouraging the use and transfer of expertise available within the region, especially from the established member countries to the newer associates of ASEAN. Such activities include training, provision of experts, advice on formulation of laws, policies and strategies, and establishment of mechanisms for enforcement. ASEAN, in accordance with its mandate, has sought to coordinate regional programmes undertaken by other regional and international organizations.

Another challenge faced by some AMCs is related to jurisdiction over natural resources among federal, state and provincial governments. In Malaysia, for example, land resources come under the jurisdiction of state governments, while the responsibility for MEA negotiation and ratification is with the federal government. This may be one of the reasons for the delay in the ratification of the Ramsar Convention by Malaysia, requiring the designation of a wetland site before acceding to the convention. However any such problems could be overcome by close cooperation between the various entities. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that such an arrangement provides a distinct advantage in terms of decentralized implementation and supervision at the local level, which is essential for effective biodiversity management.

Monitoring and enforcement measures pose challenges for most AMCs without sufficient resources, especially for those countries with large land and marine areas such as Indonesia and the Philippines. Therefore even though many of the AMCs have enacted laws and regulations, the enforcement of these instruments needs greater attention.

These are some of the challenges that do exist in the area of MEA implementation, serving here to highlight some of the problems. In addition to these problems, examples of further challenges to the implementation of MEAs include linking the provincial and local levels, working with civil society, education and awareness programmes, resourcing and information management, priority-wise not necessarily in this order.

Many of the MEAs deal with highly technical and complex issues, such as the conventions related to biosafety, toxic chemicals and climate change to name a few. Furthermore they are cross-sectoral and highly integrated, and action in one area might lead to unintended consequences in other areas. As such many developing countries are struggling to effectively implementing these conventions. Furthermore the lack of technical expertise and relevant and timely information compounds the problem. The AMCs and the Pacific island states, both assisted through the ASEAN Secretariat and the SPREP, respectively, are therefore working towards addressing these problems on a collective and synergetic regional basis.

5. The way forward

Success or failure of environmental policies cannot be explained by choice of instruments or intervention mechanisms alone. Of equal importance are structural conditions such as institutional, legal and information frameworks and human and financial capacities to implement a particular policy.

The case studies identified some common issues in both the ASEAN and the Pacific regions:

Sufficient means to enable countries to manage and meet their obligations and responsibilities under the conventions and protocols they are party to.

At present, the greatest challenge for effective implementation of MEAs in the ASEAN and Pacific regions is probably the lack of sufficient institutional, financial and human capacity. Capacity in this sense includes aspects that are physical (i.e., the number of professionals actually involved in the negotiation and implementation of MEAs), qualitative (i.e., the knowledge required to analyze, store and disseminate information), and sustainability-related (i.e., continuity and transfer of know-how). Capacity development not only improves responses to and the effectiveness of MEA implementation, but also the ability to prepare for and participate in regional and global negotiations.

Much can be done, however, to use existing resources in order to enhance inter-linkages so that national obligations to international treaties can be fulfilled, at the same time as real progress is made with the country's own development strategy. Existing national and regional centers are obvious starting points for

coordination and collaboration. For example, they could organize courses for targeted groups on technical issues relevant to a number of MEAs and other agreements that promote sustainable development, in cooperation with the respective convention secretariat. It should be noted that even the best capacity building programme could have only limited results if incentives that encourage the trainers to train are not in place.

Information policies to enable the agencies involved to better cooperate and to translate international obligations under MEAs into national and local environmental agendas to receive political support and to make these agendas meaningful to the general public.

A country's capacity to collate, coordinate, disseminate and share information is one of the centers of an inter-linkages approach. Information policies and knowledge management for example, can support to identify actors and programmes. Data gathered in the context of one MEA might prove to be of relevance to other MEA implementation schemes, if the data is appropriately collated and shared, even beyond the national level.

Reporting and data collection, requirements under most MEAs, pose significant challenges to scarce resources in developing countries as elaborated above. This area calls therefore for coordination and streamlining, not only at national and regional levels, but especially for convention secretariats to ease its Parties' burden.

Bridging the gap between the international environment agenda and national or local priority issues is strongly related to education. Most educational institutions do not adequately incorporate development and environmental issues into curricula, although Parties to MEAs are often obliged to do so. There is a widespread need for attractive, locally appropriate and easily understandable materials, outlining the links between MEA objectives and local ecological processes and day-to-day behaviour.

Effective regional support mechanisms that reflect the regional interest in promoting in-country capacity

development and, at the same time, are able to represent regional concerns in the global context.

For both the global community and the relevant regional organizations, centers or mechanisms, the ultimate goal is to attain the best balance between benefits offered by approaching different issues and functions, such as coordination, information management or awareness raising, at regional, national and local levels. It is crucial, for example, that the specific technical capacity and needs existing at the national level be supported by benefits and efficiency to be gained by collective capacity development approaches at the regional level.

While international agencies identify coordination and cooperation as key elements of any inter-linkages capacity development strategy, the field remains wide open. With the ongoing proliferation of MEAs, effective coordination and synergy is needed at the international, regional and national levels. After having conducted these national and regional case studies, the UNUs Inter-linkages Initiative will move forward to develop regional capacity development frameworks together with the national stakeholders and international and regional partner organizations.

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