



United Nations and the Environment

United Nations Association of Southern Arizona

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Environmental Management

The United Nations has a long record of assessing and seeking to resolve a broad array of environmental issues. Here is a brief look at just some of its main functions and programs.

The United Nations and the World Meteorological Society formed the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC summary report for governments was issued in February 2007 and other reports will follow in the coming year. The IPCC Summary report conclusions were drawn from 2,500 scientists worldwide and all government representatives accepted the report's conclusions.

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) provides credible and up-to-date scientific information on the environment and emerging issues which strengthens decision-making on environmental management. The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) is a series of reports; the main assessment product of UNEP. GEO work is undertaken at regional, national and local scales around the world, and is supported by resources such as the GEO data portal, and a network of collaborating centres and experts.

Globally, UNEP supports multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), such as the conventions on biodiversity, climate change, migratory species, wetlands, desertification, ozone, and hazardous wastes. UNEP coordinates with other UN efforts, through the Environmental Management Group (EMG). The EMG works for cooperation in the field of environment and human settlements within and beyond the UN system.

UNEP's work covers a wide range of areas that support environmental management. For instance, UNEP divisions and branches carry out work in related areas:

- Chemicals Branch assists governments in the sound management of chemicals
- Division of Technology, Industry and Economics focuses on the private sector and on cleaner production and sustainable consumption.
- Division of Environmental Law and Conventions manages implementation of the Global Program of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA)

Climate Impacts

The UN's Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA) provides policy-relevant environmental data and information for decision-making and action planning for sustainable human development. UNEP/DEWA focuses on identifying issues which take much longer to develop and might better be identified as emerging environmental threats. DEWA also administers the Secretariat for the United Nations Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) in Vienna.

The United Nations System-wide Earthwatch mechanism is a broad UN initiative to coordinate, harmonize and catalyze environmental observation activities among all UN agencies for integrated assessment purposes.

Agreements and Treaties

The Commission on Sustainable Development ensures effective follow-up of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where world leaders signed the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity; endorsed the Rio Declaration and the Forest Principles; and adopted Agenda 21, a plan for achieving sustainable development in the 21st century.

The Kyoto Protocol is an amendment to UNFCCC, which is an international treaty intended to bring countries together to reduce global warming and to cope with the effects of temperature increases that are unavoidable after 150 years of industrialization. The provisions of the Kyoto Protocol are legally binding on the ratifying nations, and stronger than those of the UNFCCC.

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) is a global blueprint for disaster risk reduction efforts during the next decade. Its goal is to substantially reduce disaster losses by 2015 - in lives, and in the social, economic, and environmental assets of communities and countries.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) develops national and human capacities and the dissemination of scientific knowledge and technology. Education and training are a priority for development of renewable technologies in developing countries. UNESCO's also draws the attention of governments to the need for legislative action to eliminate barriers to an increased use of renewable energies create structures for development and dissemination of relevant technologies.

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