

UN organizations. Unlike specialized agencies of the UN, UNEP does not normally execute or finance projects. Arguably, this is a source of both strength and weakness: strength in that the catalyst and coordination roles represents a workable approach to the diverse range of activities that comprise sustainable development; and weakness in that direct or substantive control of projects, financing and policies that contribute to sustainable development are not fully within UNEP's mandate.

Two areas that would require only marginal commitments of political will, and would therefore be candidates for more-or-less immediate action within the UN system are (a) increasing transparency; and (b) broadening, deepening and making more accessible the information and analytical base available to decision-makers. Increased transparency could involve joint UNEP/UNDP assessments of a country's sustainable development practices; but, if even this is asking too much of the existing political climate, other avenues could be pursued. UNEP could work toward developing a model text to facilitate the negotiation of IEAs. This could bring some standardization to an area where there are presently no international rules or guidelines.¹³ UNEP could also work toward establishing procedural rules for the negotiation of international environmental agreements, including the role of nongovernmental organizations in the negotiating process.

The second point, increasing information and analysis, is an aspect of capacity building or developing a technically and politically informed understanding of sustainable development issues. While a broader issue than strengthening UNEP, there is a need to rationalize UN databases. A recent UN report noted that, while a great deal of information is submitted to UN bodies, "so far no system of interlinked databases is available that allows the useful exchange of data among the various organizations."¹⁴ For sustainable development, an interdisciplinary concern, such a state of affairs is clearly unsatisfactory. In respect to UNEP, there is a need for more UNEP ecological research to form the basis of future environmental treaty-making. There has also been some criticism of UNEP's Global Resource Information Database (GRID), where "the complexity of gathering all available environmental data from around the world has led GRID to become more preoccupied with data management than supporting analysis and assessment of environmental issues or situations."¹⁵ A

¹³Proposing that such a text include an effective enforcement mechanism as discussed in the Commentary would, however, require more than a marginal increase in political will.

¹⁴United Nations, E/CN.17/1995/21, 30 March 1995, p.4.

¹⁵United Nations, E/AC.51/1995/3, 8 March 1995, p.11.