

In practical terms, the role of the GEO would be to promote sustainable development. This raises some potential institutional complexities that are not readily apparent. In 1987 the Brundtland Commission defined the concept of sustainable development as: "Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future."⁶ This definition is often drawn upon. What, however, is not so often raised is the previous paragraph from which this definition appears in the Brundtland Commission report. The earlier paragraph sets out that the term "development" is being used in its broadest sense, and encompasses economic and social change as well ecological issues. It is a global concept that takes into account the interdependence of nations. From an institutional view, a GEO immediately faces a challenge of defining a role in promoting sustainable development that balances a focus on environmental issues while simultaneously taking into account economic and social issues, at both the national and international levels.

A New Paradigm and Institutional Reform

A GEO is about interdependence in an economic, social and ecological sense. Institutionally, this makes it difficult to demarcate various international institutions' areas of competence. Coordination amongst institutions may not be enough. A new paradigm of cooperation, collaboration and joint decision making may well be needed. Operationalizing such a paradigm would no doubt be difficult, but the nature of the interdependent linkages is such that segmented or even overlapping areas of competency is unlikely to result in the full coherence of policy-making. A GEO based on sound scientific and analytical work on environmental issues would not be effective without some direct input into funding for development projects. Consideration, for example, could be given to making major development projects sponsored by the World Bank and other international financial institutions conditional on an independent GEO project review. A GEO could also formulate guidelines for bilateral aid programs. While a GEO review of every planned bilateral aid project (however ideal) would be cumbersome, the development of generic guidelines would facilitate appropriate review and transparency by national and local authorities and nongovernmental organizations. It might even be feasible for the GEO to initiate a periodic review of a country's overall bilateral programs from an environmental perspective, along the lines of the WTO's trade policy review mechanism. Such GEO activities could go along way to integrating development and the environment.

⁶Ibid. p.40.