

Even this cursory review of developments since the 1972 Conference shows that many changes have taken place, perceptions have changed, there are greater insights and understanding of natural processes, and how they can be interfered with by human actions, with potential local and global impacts. And many choices exist for dealing with these problems in ways that may also produce multiple, local benefits in addition to global ones. Although it may be argued that not enough is being done to reduce environmental risks, nor to improve living conditions around the planet, certainly a lot more is going on throughout the UN system and beyond than is generally recognized.

There is already the expectation that the 1992 Conference will be "action oriented" and should produce more than declarations, "action plans" for future actions, and the like. As the preparatory process leading up to the 1972 Stockholm Conference demonstrated, it is possible with foresight to use the preparatory process itself to produce tangible, completed action by the time of the conference. For example, work already underway on various draft conventions can be accelerated to be ready for early approval and signature, just as they were in 1971 when Conventions on "Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" and on "International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora" were speeded in 1971 so as to be ready for endorsement at Stockholm. An even better example of action initiated and completed during the preparatory process was the negotiation of a global treaty on ocean dumping which was conducted as part of the Stockholm preparatory process itself under the authority of that Prepcom on the proposal of the Secretary General of the Stockholm Conference in February 1971.⁹⁴

Another example of action completed before that conference was the "General Principles for Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution" that were collectively endorsed at the Stockholm Conference "as guiding concepts for the Conference on the Law of the Sea" - then about to get underway.⁹⁵ As noted in a recent Report of the Secretary General on "Law of the Sea; Protection and Preservation of the Marine Environment", these principles, along with three from the Stockholm Declaration, "had an immediate and direct impact" on draft articles drawn up by the Conference on the Law of the Sea.⁹⁶

Comparable work now underway on possible conventions on climate change, and on biodiversity, offer similar opportunities for the UNCED preparatory process to contribute to or strengthen these parallel processes that will shape new institutional approaches at UNCED. As noted earlier, preparatory