

- make impact assessments before doing anything that might affect a shared resource or the environment of another state;
- give advance warning of detailed plans to affected states, and consult with them;
- compensate for any damage caused other states, and provide affected nationals of other states with the same administrative and judicial treatment as is available to their own citizens.

The WCS recommended that some international organization should take up the task of reviewing the conservation needs and problems of international river basins, giving priority to basins that are scheduled for major development or subject to severe erosion. UNEP took up the challenge five years later, with the setting up

tries in the Gulf took years to decide even on a name for the plan. Eventually they agreed: and so, rather oddly, in the list of regional seas programmes – Caribbean, Mediterranean, and so on – is found the Kuwait Action Plan, a name safely devoid of political overtones. Meetings on the esoteric subject of Gulf water pollution have been attended by participants from countries which were otherwise not on speaking terms.

The Zambezi Plan is an important diplomatic achievement, so far as it goes. But Africa is only one part of the problem. Every continent has international river basins, and a dozen of these are numbered among the rivers carrying the greatest sediment load – that is, basins experiencing the world's worst soil erosion – and most of these support very heavy populations.

Sometimes an international scheme to modify and control a

of EMINWA. But ironically – and not surprisingly – it was not able to begin with the basins where the need was most urgent.

Indeed it chose to attack a river, the Zambezi, which so far has not given rise to any major problems, and in which the affected nations (the South African Front-Line States), far from being at each other's throats, are already working together. An Action Plan was agreed earlier this year by six of the seven affected countries.

EMINWA FOLLOWS A PATTERN established by UNEP's successful Regional Seas programme, which has in the last fifteen years involved one hundred and twenty governments in improving coastal and marine environments around the world. These programmes have brought countries to work together which are far from friendly, as in the Persian Gulf.

I was told by a Kuwaiti environmentalist whom I met on a recent trip to UNEP headquarters in Nairobi that the participant coun-

river basin can be scuttled by straight political upheaval. For example, there has been for thirty years an organization known as the Interim Committee for Co-ordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin (another delightfully vague name!) whose aim is to bring that river under control. The Mekong rises at 5,000 metres on the Tibetan plateau, passes from China through or along the borders of Burma, Laos, Thailand, Kampuchea and Vietnam before discharging into the South China sea, 4,000 kilometres from its source.

Since this immense river basin receives most of its annual rainfall in only five months, it is subject to droughts and floods even in normal years. The inhabitants of the basin are mostly farmers – and they are among the poorest people in the world. They have good soils, plenty of sunshine – their main problem as farmers is the erratic availability of water.

The Mekong project covers irrigation, electricity, flood control, watershed management and so on, with a possible thirteen control dams, and a price tag estimated in 1970 at US \$12 billion. Fifteen years later only four per cent of this had been committed, largely because violent political changes that overtook much of Indo-China made it impossible to undertake any activities on the river's main stream.

Of course, when countries do get together to act on trans-boundary resources, they do not always act wisely. Somehow when river development is in prospect, giantism gets a deadly grip on the brains of politicians (in Canada, as elsewhere). When billions of dollars are poured into a scheme the emphasis is placed on an adequate return on investment, otherwise known as profit. There are many questions, for example, about the three-nation plan to control the Senegal river, to build two dams, two ports, generate electricity, irrigate land, and replace tradi-

tional local crops with crops for export. Environmental factors appear to have been overlooked in this massive scheme, which seems unlikely to have happened had UNEP been able to act as catalyst, as it hopes to do in other parts of the world.

SINCE PRESSURE ON INTERNATIONAL river basins is increasing in step with the deterioration of their waters, it could be regarded as a matter of some urgency to provide UNEP with the resources it needs if it is to initiate the creation of more co-operative institutions of the Regional Seas and EMINWA type. The Brundtland Commission recommended that UNEP be strengthened and given more money, but I found on my visit to

Nairobi in June that no one there expects governments actually to give more. I asked William Mansfield, deputy executive director, how much money UNEP could use if governments responded to the Brundtland recommendation, and he said that, given their present programmes, they could probably use half as much again as they now have – not a large sum in a world that spends as much on armaments in twenty minutes as UNEP spends in a year.

Canada's total contribution to UNEP last year was US \$818,148 – a little over C\$1 million – a pathetic figure when weighed against the lip-service the Canadian government always pays to environmental concerns in international meetings.

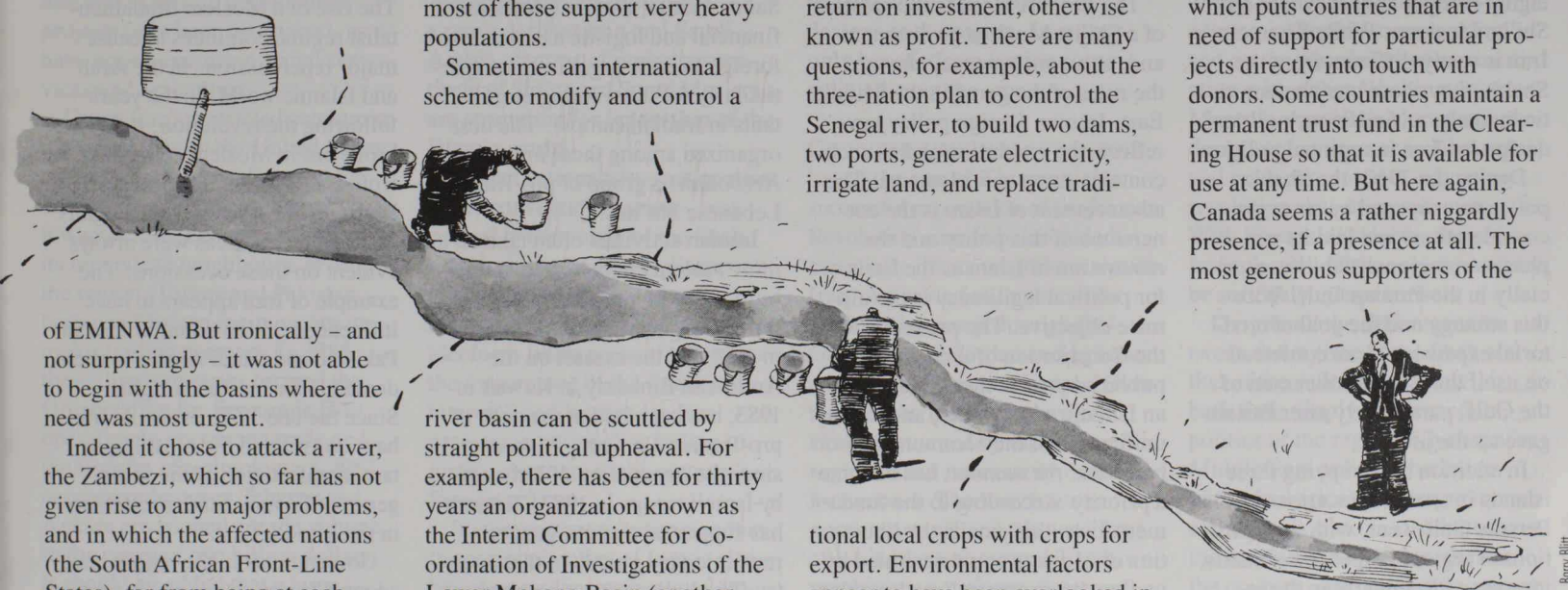
UNEP also raises quite a bit of money through its Clearing House, which puts countries that are in need of support for particular projects directly into touch with donors. Some countries maintain a permanent trust fund in the Clearing House so that it is available for use at any time. But here again, Canada seems a rather niggardly presence, if a presence at all. The most generous supporters of the

Clearing House are the Scandinavians, the Netherlands, Germany, and the EEC.

Since the work of UNEP has been given a rather generous mark of confidence by the Brundtland Commission, Canada, which has accepted the report so fulsomely, should add substantially to its voluntary contribution. If the government looked at UNEP's work as the peace and security effort it really is, perhaps Canada's monetary contribution would match its rhetoric. □

Further Reading

Arthur H. Westing, ed. *Global Resources and International Conflict*, Oxford: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Oxford University Press, 1986.



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