

help the public understand the significance of changes and to satisfy different groups of users: the scientific community needs reliable, consistent data for modelling on a global scale; the national decision-maker - who may be a Minister or Mayor or corporate Chief Executive Officer - needs data useful for local decisions, at local scales.¹⁶ Obviously, the two sets of data should be compatible, and economy dictates that it be collected with as little duplication as possible. The distributed system approach adopted by UNEP's Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) using geographic information systems under "GRID" - the Global Resource Information Database - is a good model. In effect, this approach encourages exchanges of information between national, regional and global "nodes" that provide global datasets at scales useful for national planners, and, by strengthening national capabilities, enlists more national monitoring programs in the global effort to measure, and understand, significant changes on a planetary scale.

WCED also recommended a Global Risks Assessment Program:

- to identify critical threats to the survival, security, or well-being of all or a majority of people, globally or regionally;
- to assess the causes and likely human, economic, and ecological consequences of those threats, and to report regularly and publicly on their findings;
- to provide authoritative advice and proposals on what should or must be done to avoid, reduce, or, if possible, adapt to those threats; and
- to provide an additional source of advice and support to governments and intergovernmental organizations for the implementation of programs and policies designed to address such threats.

Such a program can be seen as a logical extension of UNEP's mandate to "review the world environmental situation and ensure that emerging problems are adequately considered . . . " and might be centered on UNEP's Earthwatch program, enlarged beyond its present collaborators and possibly headed by a steering group of eminent individual experts. The broad need to improve international advice to governments under new and changing conditions is recognized by many organizations in the UN system and a feasibility study to provide this periodically is underway by UNESCO.

Increasing attention is given in recent environmental treaties to the obligation of parties to exchange various types of information that directly relate to the undertaking and are generally relevant to information requirements for sustainable development.

The 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, for example, specifies four categories of information: