

Agenda 21. A GEO should set priorities and work toward making some of Agenda 21's nonbinding commitments, with some modifications, binding obligations for parties to the new organization. Negotiation of environmental conventions is a multi-year effort, as Canada's pursuit for internationally agreed rules on sustainable forest management - a Global Forests Convention - has demonstrated. A GEO, by institutionalizing an active and formal negotiating forum, could facilitate negotiations.

Existing environmental and development institutions would need to be reformed and possibly consolidated to accommodate a GEO. Consolidation would also bring existing IEAs under one roof. Precisely which institutions and how their current functions would be undertaken in a GEO would require detailed discussion, and form part of a wider agenda of reforming the entire UN system. The most likely candidates for forming the substantive body of a GEO are; the United Nations Environmental Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the Commission for Sustainable Development. Besides this core group, a number of other international bodies, such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and some scientific and environmental-related activities of the Food and Agriculture Organization, appear to be good "fits" for inclusion in a GEO.

Dispute Settlement

Part of the new paradigm and a critical element of a GEO would be monitoring adherence to an agreement. To be fully effective, this role would require a dispute settlement mechanism to encourage compliance with a country's obligations. To date, environmental agreements have had weak monitoring and enforcement provisions.⁷ Countries have been reluctant to give up national sovereignty on environmental issues and to grant strong enforcement powers to environmental agreements. Negotiating a GEO dispute settlement mechanism could prove to be one of the more contentious elements of the organization. For an effective dispute settlement mechanism, countries' rhetoric on facing the challenges of global environmental degradation would need to be translated into countries' willingness to accept international obligations related to the environmental agenda and a willingness to be held accountable for falling short of their GEO obligations.

⁷See, inter alia, Lawrence E. Susskind, Environmental Diplomacy: Negotiating More Effective Global Agreements, 1994; United States General Accounting Office, "International Environment: International Agreements Are Not Well Monitored," Washington, D.C., 1992; and Keith H. Christie, "Stacking the Deck: Compliance and Dispute Settlement in International Environmental Agreements," Policy Staff Paper No.93/15, December 1993, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.