

The State of Global Environmental Governance 2019

International Institute for Sustainable Development,
Earth Negotiations Bulletin



Edited by: Jen Iris Allan, PhD
Contributing authors: Beate Antonich, PhD, Jennifer Bansard, Rishi Bhandary, Pamela Chasek, PhD, Natalie Jones, PhD, Faye Leone, Stefan Jungcurt, PhD, Delia Paul, Asterios Tsioumani, PhD, and Elsa Tsioumani, PhD

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Foreward

*Elizabeth Mrema, Acting Executive Secretary,
Convention on Biological Diversity*

Before beginning a new journey, one must know where they are starting from. As we embark on a new year, and a new decade, it is useful to take stock of the state of global environmental governance. Like many years in our efforts to protect the environment, 2019 was a year of successes and stumbles.

We learned a lot about our world in 2019. Scientists showed the world the extent of human impact on species, oceans, land, and the climate. The messages were stark. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warned that one million species are now at risk of extinction. This message, and others, were a wakeup call for the world highlighted by those, including youth in particular, marching in streets around the world demanding concerted action.

Science also highlighted the connections among different ecosystems. How we govern the environment must be equally holistic and integrated. What we do to protect species at risk may have implications for agriculture, climate change, and ocean health. Yet, many of us work on one, perhaps a few, issues. Keeping up-to-date with these developments across multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) is a real challenge. It is hoped that this publication can help to spark ideas of some solutions to consider. It distills the events and interconnections that shaped global environmental governance in 2019.

2019 was a consequential year for biodiversity governance. Discussions began for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Countries took the first steps to identify the future priorities for protecting biodiversity, and how this will be done. Nature was on the minds of many throughout the year. Nature-based solutions to support bending the curve for biodiversity loss moved to the core of climate change discussions and G7 communiqués.

The 2020 Super Year for Biodiversity culminating in the UN Biodiversity Conference hopes to make history. Working under the theme “Ecological Civilization: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth,” countries are expected to adopt a new, transformative and innovative framework to manage biodiversity. It will be a shared endeavor to protect the future of nature, the planet, and all people living on it.

The Earth Negotiations Bulletin team has a unique view of global environmental governance. For twenty-seven years, they have served as neutral rapporteurs, documenting our deliberations for the public, and for ourselves. Their work across many different negotiations processes informs this publication. The ENB team sees trends develop across environmental governance as they unfold. I hope this publication, by marking where we currently stand, helps us as we set off on an ambitious endeavor to protect the planet and human well-being.

Introduction

*This is the way the decade ends
Not with a bang but with a whimper.
(With apologies to T.S. Eliot)*

2020 has a ring to it, holding the promise of a new decade after leaving the old one behind. Each year starts with the possibility of a new beginning, but often still carries the baggage of the previous year. As 2020 begins, the international community faces deadlines to replace old frameworks and rules with new ones, and to conclude negotiations on new treaties and agreements.

It is timely to take stock of global environmental governance as the world enters a new year and a new decade. In this volume, the Earth Negotiations Bulletin team reflects on the successes, shortcomings, and overall trends of 2019. We also look ahead, with optimism that 2020 holds promise to regain the momentum recently lost.

In 2019 scientists were truth-tellers. Over the course of the year, international scientific bodies produced a range of reports on climate change, biodiversity, and the environment as a whole. Each report contains dire warnings for the future of the planet due to the impact of climate change on food production, of pollution on human health, and land incursions on species extinctions. Given historic inaction, nearly every system on the planet is in danger. Yet, despite the thousands of pages of scientific evidence, intergovernmental political processes remain

deadlocked on so many issues. Policy makers could not mount the type of response commensurate with the science.

Climate change governance had a particularly difficult year, limping to the end of the decade after the historic adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015. The demands for climate ambition are loud, and angry. Millions of children and youth, feeling their futures have been stolen, participated in climate strikes every Friday throughout the year. Hearing their calls, 67 countries pledged greater climate ambition at the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit in September, but these countries represent only a small fraction of global emissions. As the year came to a close, governments at the UN Climate Change Conference in Madrid (COP25) failed to issue a clear call for ambition and could not agree on rules for the market mechanism necessary to complete the Paris Agreement rulebook. The Paris Agreement officially begins in 2020 amid major questions about its ability to catalyze climate ambition and prevent global warming above 2°C.

There were a few bright spots during the year as some policymakers acted on the scientific truths. The first multilateral action to reduce global plastic waste, which amounts to millions of tons each year, was taken under the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Certain Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal. In May, parties to the Basel Convention agreed to include mixed, unrecyclable, and contaminated plastic waste exports into the control regime that requires the consent of importing countries before waste exports can

proceed. The fourth meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly sent a strong signal that production and consumption of single-use plastics should be reduced or phased out, and the plastics industry has been put on notice. In fact, over the course of the year more than 30 countries around the world, nearly half of which are in Africa, put in place bans on single-use plastic bags.

As we outline in the ‘Linkages’ chapter, 2019 was also notable for increasing recognition of the need for a more interconnected form of governance. More and more, actors drew linkages among environmental and sustainable development processes, especially biodiversity and climate change, land and climate change, oceans and climate change, human health and the environment, and economics, trade and climate change. The increased understanding about the impacts of degrading ecosystems and a warming climate on local and global economies alike, has led to a number of multinational companies and financial institutions announcing new climate-friendly policies and investments.

Of course, the links among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) are many and, as we hope in the ‘MEA-SDG Linkages’ chapter, complementary. The 2019 Sustainable Development Goals Report was released in time for the SDG Summit in September. The report outlined progress in some critical areas, including declines in extreme poverty and the under-5 mortality rate, increases in access to electricity, and greater efforts to respond to urbanization, waste, and illegal fishing. Nonetheless,

many areas need urgent collective attention, including climate change, ocean acidification, land degradation, hunger, education and gender equality. The report also stressed that the goal to end extreme poverty by 2030 is jeopardized as the world struggles to respond to entrenched deprivation, violent conflicts, and vulnerabilities to natural disasters.

It is abundantly clear that the world needs an urgent, ambitious response to unleash a social and economic transformation. But, in 2019, world leaders appeared detached from the crisis at hand, reading statements that were largely devoid of meaningful pledges. This reaction was in stark contrast to the verdict of the people who rose in protest during the Summit and throughout the year: leaders are failing to address the environmental and development emergency that the world is currently facing.

We head into the busy year of 2020 in the midst of waning political will, rising nationalism, and faltering support for multilateralism. The report ends with a look ahead, detailing the year on the horizon. 2020 is expected to conclude negotiations and establish new tools to address biodiversity, marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and a post-2020 strategic approach to international chemicals management. The SDGs are ten years away from their 2030 completion date, and governments still need to increase their ambition under the Paris Agreement. Positive, forward-looking outcomes are essential, but not guaranteed.



Hits of 2019

What did multilateralism achieve for the environment in 2019? It was a particularly big year for science, with the release of a wide range of authoritative reports. Governments took significant steps forward to address wastes, including plastics. Other key issues were finally put on the intergovernmental agenda, from legal and cultural issues like land tenure to new technologies such as digital sequence information (DSI).

Breakthroughs for Hazardous Wastes and Plastics

The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal traditionally receives little attention. In contrast, 2019 was the Convention's breakout year.

Parties to the Basel Convention took the first multilateral [action on plastic waste](#). Taking effect in 2020, the decision adds several types of plastic waste to the Convention's Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure. As a result, the global trade in plastic wastes will be more transparent and will empower developing countries currently struggling under mounting loads of plastic wastes arriving on their shores and at their borders. It is also hoped that the new multi-stakeholder platform established by the [UN Environment Assembly](#) will spur rapid action on plastic litter and microplastics.

In addition, the Convention's '[Ban Amendment](#)' entered into force after 24 years. The Amendment bans developed countries from exporting hazardous wastes to developing countries.

Strengthening Chemicals Management

After 15 years of negotiations, parties to the Rotterdam Convention on the PIC Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade [adopted, by a vote](#), a compliance mechanism. The new mechanism will assist parties to address gaps in complying with their obligations under the Convention.

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) slated new chemicals for elimination or restricted use, including the industrial chemical perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). This is a group of more than 4,000 chemicals with a wide range of uses, from Teflon cookware to firefighting foams.

Science Sounds the Alarm

Scientific bodies successfully produced a series of reports, each drawing stark conclusions for the fate of the planet. For many, this led to the question of whether the multilateral system is able to mount an effective response.

Global environmental governance benefited from landmark reports by UNEP, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

- [Global Environmental Outlook](#) (GEO): The [GEO-6 Report](#), titled Healthy Planet, Healthy People, shows that the overall environmental situation globally is deteriorating, necessitating urgent, transformative change. It particularly

highlighted the human health costs of air pollution, the loss of critical pollinator species, and human consumption of microplastics contained in seafood, among other issues.

- [IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land](#) (SRCCL): lauded by many as the first IPCC Special Report to successfully take a more systemic approach to a specific sector, [the report](#) considers impacts, mitigation, and adaptation together. For example, the report outlined how land degradation exacerbates climate change and its impacts, and increases vulnerability to desertification, food insecurity, and loss of habitat for humans and other species.
- [IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate](#) (SROCC): Again taking a holistic approach, [this report](#) documents the effects of climate change on the ocean and cryosphere and the potential for a healthy ocean and cryosphere to be part of climate adaptation. Although the Special Report did not touch on mitigation (as parties decided this would be outside its scope), it is significant in that geographically it covers 80% of the planet.
- [IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: This report](#), which covers all land-based ecosystems (except Antarctica) as well as inland water and the open oceans, explores the impacts of trade and other global challenges to nature, and assesses policy, technology, governance, behavior changes, options and pathways to reach global goals. It shows that biodiversity, among other environmental assets, continues

to decline at a dramatic pace and that most 2020 targets, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and relevant SDGs, will not be met, such as SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land).

- [The FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture](#) (CGFRA) report on the [State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture](#): This report underscores that many of the key components of biodiversity for food and agriculture are in decline, at genetic, species, and ecosystem levels. An increasing proportion of livestock breeds are at risk of extinction, while the diversity of crops in farmers' fields is declining.

While it is too early to gauge the impact of these scientific reports, there are some early, positive signs. In 2019, the UNCCD's Committee on Science and Technology [adopted](#) six decisions addressing guidance for developing a global indicator on drought, interfacing science and policy and sharing knowledge, building on the IPCC and IPBES assessment reports.

New Issues on the Agenda

Sometimes, it is a win to get an issue on the intergovernmental agenda. Beginning discussions can, hopefully, lead to future decisions and actions.

Digital Sequence Information (DSI)

DSI has become an issue under discussion in several biodiversity-related forums. Although the terminology has not been agreed upon, DSI refers to the information content of genetic resources. Advances in bioinformatics allow the extraction, processing, and exchange of the information content of the genetic resource in its own right, detached from the physical

genetic resource, posing challenges for access and benefit sharing (ABS) frameworks.

As we note in the next chapter, parties are deadlocked on the issue in some bodies. In particular, it is proving difficult in the ongoing discussions on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). However, the [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\) agreed in 2018, following several years of discussion](#), to a work programme on DSI. This is an interesting example of how multilateralism, which is often characterized by protracted negotiations, can try to keep pace with rapid technological developments.

In 2019, the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA), the intergovernmental body which focuses on the conservation of, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from, the sustainable use of these resources, agreed to future work on DSI. Specifically, [the Commission agreed](#) to address:

- the opportunities for innovation that DSI poses for genetic resources for food and agriculture;
- the challenges related to access and using DSI; and
- its implications for the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture, and the sharing of benefits.

Taking on Land Tenure and Drought

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) “took a bold step into the politically-charged arena of land governance” by including [land tenure as a thematic issue](#). The agenda-setting decision treads the line of national sovereignty,

encouraging parties to recognize legitimate tenure rights, including customary rights, in a way that is consistent with national legal frameworks. The decision also encourages parties to follow the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, which were endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security of the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Another hard-fought outcome of COP 14 in September 2019 was the [establishment of](#) an intergovernmental working group on effective policy and implementation measures for addressing drought under the UNCCD. African countries, in particular, aim to ensure that sufficient international resources are directed to this critical issue, hoping this first step leads to an agreement on establishing a Drought Protocol to the UNCCD.

Of course, it is too early to tell if 2020 will fulfill the promise of addressing these new issues. It is now up to the leaders, negotiators, and implementing agencies to advance global environmental management.



Misses of 2019

Multilateral environmental negotiations are complex undertakings characterized by incremental progress and major breakthroughs, but also setbacks. Here, we take stock of key “misses.”

Some of these setbacks are specific to individual MEA processes, and we discuss disappointments in climate and biodiversity governance below. But, 2019 unfolded amid rising nationalism and weakening multilateralism. Japan left the International Whaling Commission and resumed whaling in its coastal waters. The US officially confirmed its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, widening the leadership void in global climate diplomacy.

A conspicuous event of 2019 occurred at the UN Environment Assembly in March. While the Assembly identified key priorities for global action, it could not agree to start discussions on how to govern solar geoengineering and carbon dioxide removal technologies. An inevitably controversial Swiss proposal called for an assessment of potential governance frameworks, with proponents arguing that global cooperation is necessary to responsibly manage these technologies. Whether one regards this as a missed opportunity or not, it is a notable example of a lack of agreement on an emerging issue.

Stalled Momentum for Climate Ambition

2019 was a difficult year for climate change governance. The momentum gained through the adoption and entry into force of the Paris Agreement appears to have stalled.

The [UNFCCC’s COP 25](#) ended with an atmosphere of disappointment. Delegates did not reach agreement on guidance for the two market-based mechanisms under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, although climate-vulnerable countries preferred this outcome over adopting a text containing loopholes that could have undermined the environmental integrity of international carbon markets.

Many lamented that COP 25 also failed to issue a clear call for climate ambition. This was especially disappointing as 2019 was marked by bleak messages from science, including the latest IPCC reports showing that climate impacts will be more severe than previously anticipated, and that current action is insufficient to limit the global average temperature increase to 2°C.

The UN Secretary-General’s [Climate Action Summit](#) also disappointed on the climate ambition front. Several key actors, including the European Union and China, were not ready to announce new commitments under the Paris Agreement, citing domestic procedures

underway. Many of the “big emitters” and large economies, such as the US, Australia, Saudi Arabia, and Brazil, were conspicuous by their absence from the stage. Other countries ignored the UN Secretary-General’s ambition criteria to stop building new coal power plants—including Japan and South Korea.

Climate inaction was one of the reasons for worry in the broader SDG landscape. “We are not yet on track and must step it up,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized at the [High-level Political Forum \(HLPF\) meeting](#) on the SDGs. The SDG Progress Report released in July indicated that progress on the Goals is insufficient and some trends for specific SDG targets are moving in the wrong direction entirely.

Biodiversity Blockages

Following six years of negotiations, parties to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) were unable to enhance the functioning of the Treaty’s multilateral system of access and benefit-sharing. The revision process related to facilitating access to material for agricultural research and development, and to improving fair and equitable benefit-sharing from transfers of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. After progress in the Working Group [in June](#), consensus collapsed at the [meeting of the Governing Body in November](#). Substantively, the deal breaker was benefit-sharing from use of genetic sequence data or DSI. This was a particular blow given the [CBD’s 2018 decision](#) to address DSI.

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CAAMLR), could not agree to proposals to establish marine protected areas in the Weddell Sea, Antarctic Peninsula, and

East Antarctic in the Antarctic Ocean. This failure is striking for the East Antarctic proposal which has now been considered for eight years.

Deliberations in the Intergovernmental Conference on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) are due to conclude at the next meeting in March 2020. 2019 marked the [beginning of textual negotiations](#) on a “zero draft” of the treaty text. After 15 years in the process towards adopting a high seas biodiversity treaty, many felt that a start to text-based discussion, while useful in clarifying delegations’ positions, is too low a benchmark for success. There remains a fundamental divergence between states upholding the principle of common heritage of humankind and those defending the principle of freedom of the high seas.

So what to make of these challenges? Observers across processes increasingly note a lack of good faith in negotiations. A few countries seem increasingly willing to block progress, leading some to worry that progress might only be achievable in the context of “coalitions of the willing” or “club diplomacy” rather than in more inclusive forums such as UNEA and MEAs.

These continuing struggles lead to questions about the ability of the international community to keep pace with environmental problems. The scale of the environmental crises we face requires collective responses. While some countries may be key to solutions, many countries are affected by the effects of environmental degradation. Likely, the world needs functioning MEAs now more than ever.



Identify gaps in co...
global stocktake referred to in para...
well as possible measures and good...
international cooperation and related...

- b) Summarize key political n...
recommendations from the events referred...
action and scaling up support, in accordance
- c) Be contained in a decision for co...
declaration;

II. Sources of input

36. Agrees that sources of input for the global stocktake...
workstreams referred to in paragraph 5(b) above;

37. Also agrees that the sources of input for the global stock...
up-to-date aggregated information at a collective level on:

- a) The state of greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation efforts...
including the information referred to in Article 13, paragraph 7(a), [an...
paragraphs 7, 15 and 19.] of the Paris Agreement;
- b) the overall effect of their nationally determined contributions and o...
made by Parties towards the implementation of their nationally determined co...
including the information referred to in Article 13, paragraph 7(b);
- c) The state of adaptation efforts, support experience and priorities, including...
information referred to in Article 7, [paragraphs 2, 10, 11 and 14, of the Paris Agreement...
and the reports referred to in Article 13, paragraph 8, of the Paris Agreement;
- d) **Option 1:** The mobilization and...
Article 2, paragraph 1(c), A...
Article 11, paragraph 3...
Option 2: The...
information referred to in...
Standing...

Option 1: The mobilization and...
Article 2, paragraph 1(c), A...
Article 11, paragraph 3...
Option 2: The...
information referred to in...
Standing...

AMA.

... support, including information referred to in...
paragraphs 4 and 6, Article 10, paragraph 6,
paragraphs 9 and 10, of the Paris Agreement;

... assessment and overview of climate finance flows of the...
relevant information;

... technology and capacity-building gaps...
opportunities to enhance...
increase support under Article 13

... development, historical responsibilities, deve...
development, including Sustainable Deve...
tries in achieving low-emission and climate-r...
opportunities to enhance...
increase support under Article 13

... considerations under the global stocktake could incl...
information, for example, indicative and non-prescriptive...
relating to equity, as voluntarily provided by Parties in th...
contributions, affirming that equity relates to mitigati...

Linking Environmental Governance

As the international community wrestles with tackling varied environmental crises, interconnections among agreements and issue areas have become more salient. In 2019, many of the connections newly drawn, or increasingly emphasized, related to the ocean and marine life. Linkages mostly emerged from the scientific community. While 2019 showed just how difficult it can be to manage issues across agreements, many view focusing on interlinkages across issue areas as a way to raise the ambition of the system as a whole.

Global Pact

The Global Pact for the Environment talks aimed to knit together the many agreements negotiated for specific issues. Although the process began with a French proposal for a legally binding agreement to address gaps in global environmental governance, any notion of a legally binding agreement is now off the table.

In 2019, the [Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group completed its mandate](#), forwarding recommendations to the General Assembly, which in turn will send these recommendations to the United Nations Environment Assembly for its consideration in 2021. The initial idea of a legally binding Global Pact did not make it to the final recommendations, due in part to wariness about re-opening longstanding principles of international law and worry about how this instrument would affect existing commitments.

Regardless, the talks were significant. They highlighted the complex interlinkages among various MEAs, and strategies for better linking different regimes. Discussions focused on, for example, the need to promote policy coherence across environmental

instruments, enhance collaboration and cooperation among governing bodies and secretariats of MEAs, and strengthen system-wide inter-agency cooperation on the environment. The question of how to deal with interconnections will continue to come to the fore as the process continues.

Oceans and Climate

2019 was the year the link between climate change and oceans went mainstream. But while science drew connections, politics struggled to follow up. The High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy produced the first of its “Blue Papers” in 2019, outlining many interlinkages between the ocean and climate change including oceans as a source of renewable energy, emissions from shipping, impacts of climate change on coastal and marine ecosystems as well as fisheries, and carbon sequestration in the seabed. [Even whales were tapped](#) for their ability to sequester carbon. Perhaps the most authoritative account of 2019 was the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. It provided the [scientific basis of the climate-ocean link](#) that underlined the political push.

Chile used its role as the UNFCCC COP President to bring together climate and oceans on the global stage, declaring [COP 25](#) the “Blue COP.” Despite presidential enthusiasm, the outcome was rather subdued. The COP asked the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice to hold a dialogue in 2020 on climate change and oceans. For several countries, the mandate to produce a summary report fell short of their preferred result of developing recommendations and starting a programme of work.

Marine Life

Figure 1. The complexity of ocean governance

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) sets forth the rights and obligations of states regarding the use of the ocean, its resources, and the protection of the marine environment.

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) organizes and controls activities in the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) applies to processes and activities carried out by its parties in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). The CBD has developed a process for designating ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), special areas in the ocean that support its healthy functioning.

Regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) have management powers to set catch limits and adopt conservation measures. Some manage all the fish stocks found in a specific area; others focus on particular highly-migratory species (notably tuna) across vast geographical areas.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) monitors compliance with conservation and management measures and the code of conduct for responsible fisheries. FAO further coordinates the Common Oceans ABNJ Programme.

The International Maritime Organization has responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine and atmospheric pollution by ships. Its International Cable Protection Committee provides a forum for exchanging technical, legal, and environmental information to improve the security of undersea cables.

While fragmentation in policy making for marine life is a challenge (see figure 1) and the BBNJ instrument was envisaged to address implementation and other gaps, countries have yet to sort out how BBNJ will function and relate with existing instruments. All are agreed that

the BBNJ process and its result should not undermine existing relevant legal instruments, frameworks, and global, regional, and sectoral bodies. But, as negotiations in 2019 showed, parties have differing interpretations of the concept of “not undermining.”

This has repercussions at the implementation level, but also reveals a divergence in opinions on the role of the new BBNJ instrument that was laid bare in 2019. While some countries call for a high-level universal body that will allow effective protection of the marine environment, others view the new agreement as merely complementary to already existing multilateral or regional agreements.

This divergence raises questions that need to be answered. Would the identification of a marine area for an area-based management tool, which has already been identified as an ecologically or biologically significant area under the CBD, conflict with the “not undermining” principle? Should no marine protected areas be established under the BBNJ instrument in cases where other relevant global, regional, and sectoral bodies already exist and operate?

While the jury is still out on the relationship between the different multilateral and regional instruments that operate in the marine environment, many participants stress the need to look at the links synergistically rather than antagonistically. But, in 2019, we saw organizations seem protective of their respective mandates, and countries of their national interests. In 2020, there are hopes that the BBNJ negotiations could offer a communication space that could foster mutual understanding toward a holistic system of ocean governance.

Climate and Biodiversity

Two of the major MEAs, climate and biodiversity, became more intertwined in 2019. Again, science proved a catalyst. The IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land, which was released earlier in the year, stresses the interdependence of the issues. It notes

the need for coherence and complementarity with other recent reports, including the thematic assessment of the IPBES on Land Degradation and Restoration, and the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Still, 2019 showed that such cooperation can be difficult to achieve.

During the [seventh meeting of IPBES](#), parties agreed, following lengthy discussions, to request the IPBES Secretariat to explore possible joint activities with the IPCC Secretariat. One idea was a technical paper on biodiversity and climate change. The aim would be supporting and enabling a post-2020 global biodiversity framework to fully incorporate these linkages.

The IPCC considered this request throughout 2019. At both its [49th](#) and [50th](#) sessions, the IPCC expressed interest in collaboration with IPBES, but concluded that preparing a joint technical report would be difficult at present because of the IPCC's heavy workload. Following interest in overcoming "bureaucratic compartmentalization" to allow for synergies between IPCC and IPBES, the Secretariats will prepare a background note including mandates and highlighting different options for presentation at IPCC-52, to be held in February 2020.

Beyond the Environment

Apart from growing interlinkages among MEAs, environmental issues are increasingly linked to non-environmental issues. In 2019, connections were once again forged between environmental issues and human rights and trade.

On trade, there were growing calls to use border tax adjustments as a measure to address competitiveness concerns that may arise if not all countries stay in the Paris Agreement. Discussions of trade measures to advance climate action have long been conceptual, but the decision by the United States to exit the Paris Agreement led to new proposals to implement border tax adjustments. Trade-related discussions also surfaced during the discussion on the development of

the post-2020 global biodiversity framework under the CBD. Some parties have been particularly cautious regarding the potential establishment of non-tariff barriers, noting that the CBD is not the right forum for such discussions.

Human rights concerns became more prominent in environmental discussions in 2019. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate towards securing the right to live and work in a safe environment. Human rights were also debated in [climate change negotiations at COP 25](#), particularly in discussions on Article 6 aimed at finalizing the rules for carbon markets under the Paris Agreement, and on gender. A rights-based approach is also under consideration in the context of the [post-2020 global biodiversity framework](#).

The chemicals and wastes cluster of agreements increasingly drew attention to environmental rights. In 2019, these efforts were complemented by the Human Rights Council's resolution to protect the rights of workers exposed to hazardous substances and wastes and the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on "human rights & toxics" to the General Assembly that proposed 15 Principles to help states, businesses, and others protect workers from unsafe toxic exposures and provide remedies for violations and abuses of workers' rights.

Governing Linkages

It's perhaps predictable that science would identify the interconnections of the natural world while political responses would struggle to keep pace. As the past year showed, drawing the (scientific) connections was not entirely sufficient for political progress. However, recognition of these connections, as well as progress to address them, constitutes at least small steps toward improving the system as a whole.



3
GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4
QUALITY EDUCATION




5
GENDER EQUALITY



6
CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7
AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



8
ECONOMIC GROWTH



9
INDUSTRIALIZATION, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10
REDUCED INEQUALITIES



11
SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



12
CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



MEA-SDG Linkages

The SDGs hold the promise of integration: bringing environmental aspirations together with the social and economic aspects of development. A unified framework for monitoring and reporting accompanies this vision of sustainability.

As the five-year anniversary of the SDGs' adoption in 2015 approaches, this chapter looks at the extent to which the targets are being met, and how the SDGs have advanced action on the MEAs more broadly. In 2019, it became evident that the SDGs are beginning to serve as a rallying point for emerging global issues.

Achieving existing MEA targets

In 2019, the [UN HLPF](#) reviewed the SDGs on education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), climate action (SDG 13), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16), and global partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17). While some countries have reported greater progress than others, as a global community, it seems that almost no targets are on track for achievement by 2030 (see table 1).

As we noted among our “Misses” of 2019, it was a difficult year for climate action. Based on estimates by the Overseas Development Institute, SDG 13 on climate action is one of the least achieved set of targets. This finding aligns with messages from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2019, showing that current action is insufficient to limit global average temperature increase to below 2°C.

Global achievements toward the other SDGs reviewed this year also lagged: the world faces “a global learning crisis” (SDG 4); corruption, tax evasion and violence remain significant problems (SDG 16); and large inequalities persist, especially in relation to access to health and education services (SDG 10).

For the goal to create decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), the picture is less bleak. There was evident progress on improving market access for exports from the least developed countries (LDCs). Real GDP grew by 4.8% annually in the LDCs from 2010–2017, still shy of the intended 7% target by 2030, but a positive trend nonetheless.

Just five years on, it is too early to tell if the SDGs are promoting action under the MEAs. The SDGs are nonetheless proving to be a useful framework to reveal the linkages among environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Such awareness reveals the need to address MEA targets in a way that also consider economic and social realities.

SDG targets with no single institutional ‘home’

Some SDG targets relate to multiple MEAs, or to no MEA specifically. In these cases, the SDGs have served to focus and coordinate action.

In 2019, this coordination role was evident for water and sanitation. SDG 6 has provided a structure for monitoring and reporting by UN and other

Table 1. SDG score card

Year	SDGs reviewed	ODI score*	UN SDGs report 2019
2017	SDG 1 on ending poverty	B	'Not on track' - 6% of world population will still live in extreme poverty in 2030, a decrease from 10% in 2015
	SDG 2 on ending hunger	D	Number of malnourished people are increasing, to reach an additional 2 billion by 2050
	SDG 3 on health and wellbeing	C	'Significant strides' in reducing infant and maternal mortality rates
	SDG 5 on gender equality	E	Some previous progress under MDGs
	SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure	E	Industrialization in LDCs is too slow to meet 2030 target
	SDG 14 on aquatic ecosystems	F	Ocean acidity has risen greatly. But many countries have improved coastal water quality, and marine protected areas under national jurisdictions more than doubled in coverage between 2010 and 2017
2018	SDG 6 on water and sanitation SDG 7 on energy	D	3 in 10 people lack access to safely managed drinking water services and 6 in 10 people lack access to safely managed sanitation facilities
	SDG 7 on energy	D	Some progress on use of renewables, but 3 billion people rely on wood, coal, charcoal or animal waste for cooking and heating
	SDG 11 on sustainable cities	F	Air pollution, waste disposal, public transport and adequate housing remain enormous challenges.

year	SDGs reviewed	ODI score*	UN SDGs report 2019
	SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production (SCP)	F	'The global material footprint is rapidly growing, outpacing population growth and economic growth'
	SDG 15 on terrestrial ecosystems	B	Biodiversity loss and species extinction risk has accelerated. Protected areas of land, mountains and freshwater increased by more than one-third
2019	SDG 4 on education	C	22% of primary school age children are out of school. There is a global learning crisis.
	SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth	B	Real GDP grew by 4.8% annually in LDCs from 2010-2017, short of 7% target. Labor productivity grew by 2.1% from 2017.- 2018. Global unemployment rate was 5% in 2018. Overall progress is slow and uneven.
	SDG 10 on reducing inequality	F	'Significant strides...but large disparities remain regarding access to health and education services and other assets.' Some progress on favorable access conditions for exports from LDCs. Income inequality is on the rise.
	SDG 13 on climate action	F	'Investment in fossil fuels continues to be higher than investment in climate activities.'
	SDG 16 on peace, justice, and institutions	C	Corruption, tax evasion and violence remain significant problems. There is no substantial progress.
	SDG 17 on partnerships	C	Net ODA fell by 2.7% in real terms from 2017, largely due to reduced aid for hosting refugees. Humanitarian aid fell by 8 per cent in real terms. Less aid went to African countries and LDCs in 2018, than in the past.

*based on monitoring of a single, representative target under each SDG

multilateral agencies, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the FAO, extending the scope of monitoring that took place under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Among these efforts:

- [UN-Water](#) published the results of a six-month public dialogue on its first SDG 6 Synthesis Report, which reviewed global progress toward SDG 6;
- UNEP, Google Earth, and the European Commission launched an open data platform on water-related ecosystems around the world, responding to UNEP’s previous finding that only 20% of UN Member States had the basic information needed to adequately monitor changes in water-related ecosystems (SDG target 6.6);
- The triennial Budapest Water Summit identified priority actions to promote global water security and speakers at the summit argued for SDG 6 to have an institutional home in the UN system; and
- UN-Water launched an SDG 6 Data Portal, which provides data visualizations and ‘snapshots’ of performance trends in relation to SDG 6 indicators.

Issues with no agreed international targets

The SDGs have also served as a rallying point for issues that have neither agreed MEA targets nor an institutional home in the multilateral system. Two examples of such issues are antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and groundwater.

AMR emerged on the global agenda in 2019. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation published a report highlighting the relevance of AMR to achieving the SDGs and calling for action in the context of countries’ steps to achieve the SDGs. [Researchers from the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health argued](#) that “if antibiotics fail, we will assuredly fall short of attaining SDG 3.” They also noted that the UN Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDG) has considered integrating an AMR-related indicator proposed by the WHO within the global SDG indicator framework—a way to integrate newer issues into existing SDG-related commitments.

As the year drew to a close, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) led a call for global action on groundwater, supported by more than 1,000 scientists, managers and development actors. The call urged action to match the 2030 Agenda deadline and argued that groundwater management is critical to ensure achievement of several SDG targets including those on drinking water, food security, and energy generation.

Despite the discouraging note on which 2019 completed its agenda, HLPF sessions and the IAEG-SDGs structure have served successfully as a kind of trellis to support emerging issues, providing visibility and some stability to campaign efforts around global problems that are less well-known, and that as yet are not reflected in internationally-agreed targets.

The SDGs turn five

Each of the 17 SDGs has now gone through a full review at the HLPF. The overall message is that progress on all SDGs must accelerate if we are to achieve the 2030 targets. The year 2020 is not only the five-year mark since the adoption of the SDGs: the UN has declared the 2020s as the Decade of Action for SDG implementation. It is also the year when the Paris Agreement on climate change begins operation, and when the world agrees on the post-2020 biodiversity framework.

While the SDGs remain an important and critical framework that can complement the global constellation of MEAs, the best goals, targets and indicators are ineffective without real action on the ground. It remains to be seen if this enormous exercise in setting common aspirations, norms, and standards will begin to show greater indications of success.



Forecasting 2020

2020 could be a landmark year: the 75th anniversary of the UN General Assembly and 5th anniversary of the SDGs. It holds significant potential for transformative change in global environmental governance. It is uncertain, however, whether countries will harness this opportunity to its full potential. For some processes, the potential lies in implementation and raising ambition; for others, notably biodiversity, there is a chance to create entirely new frameworks.

Developments in 2019 indicated that significant challenges remain, particularly regarding the need to overcome a growing mistrust of multilateralism from an increasing number of governments. On the other hand, increased public awareness and the escalation of civil society and grassroots movements provide rays of hope.

To 2020 and Beyond

2020 could be a year of renewal – replacing old processes with newer, more ambitious ones. This is particularly true for biodiversity and chemicals management issues. The Aichi targets for biodiversity and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) conclude in 2020; negotiations are already underway to replace these frameworks.

“Super Year” for Biodiversity

2020 will be a particularly crucial year for biodiversity governance. At the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the CBD, in Kunming, China, in October, parties are expected to adopt a

new framework to guide global action for biodiversity to 2050. Before this “[Paris moment](#)” for biodiversity, the UN General Assembly will convene a Biodiversity Summit in an attempt to gather political momentum for the post-2020 goals. The eventual outcome will be important not just for the biodiversity regime itself, but will also have implications for the SDGs, since the SDGs incorporate the Aichi Targets and their 2020 target date.

This past year underlined the scale of the challenge. Parties failed to meet most of the Aichi Targets of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020. As highlighted in a [series of major global assessments](#) launched in 2019, unless reversed, biodiversity loss will jeopardize achievement of the SDGs and ultimately the planet’s life-support systems.

Politically, the obstacles similarly loom large. Negotiators will need to disentangle fundamental issues at the heart of biodiversity governance and decide upon a [series of issues](#) concerning both the general nature and the details of the post-2020 framework, ranging from the structure of the document to its outcome-oriented elements, and including implementation means and mechanisms, and cross-cutting issues such as partnerships and mainstreaming.

At the same time, they need to ensure the Convention and its Protocols maintain their relevance in view of scientific developments and new technologies in the overall context of sustainable development, and catalyse a broad societal consensus that biodiversity matters. A broad range of questions will be on the table, from target-setting to means of implementation,

from voluntary commitments to enhancing accountability and review mechanisms, from tackling the root causes of biodiversity loss to promoting fairness and equity in biodiversity governance.

End of a Mandate: BBNJ

One outstanding question concerns the linkages between biodiversity-related processes. For instance, in the negotiations on biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), 2020 will see the talks' current mandate come to a close. Will the expected momentum under the CBD affect the BBNJ negotiations positively? Will the change in mandate correlate with a “change of gear”? On the other hand, what will be the impact on the CBD negotiations of the failure to revise the Multilateral System of access and benefit-sharing of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)? In this crucial year for biodiversity talks, will this failing promote mistrust, or will it increase the urgency to achieve global solutions?

Most participants stress that agreeing upon the character of the new international legally binding instrument and its relationship to other relevant instruments, frameworks, and bodies will be critical for its development. Will it be another piece in the complex jigsaw of ocean governance or will it be able to provide coordination of an overarching nature? Reaching common ground on the characteristics of the new instrument is even more important due to forthcoming developments in the world's ocean, including the finalization of exploitation regulations for deep-sea mining under the International Seabed Authority.

Drawing Attention to Chemicals Management

Chemicals and wastes issues are, too often, ignored among the more high-profile issues of climate change and biodiversity. Yet, these smaller conventions delivered several of the most meaningful “hits” of 2019. Chemicals are everywhere, from cosmetics to computers, and fire-fighting foams to food.

The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) was created as an umbrella initiative, meant to identify and address a range of issues. It is due to expire in 2020, unless negotiations this year are successful. A [zero draft is in hand](#), but some delegates were unsure if the outcome would be ambitious enough to close the gap between developed and developing countries' capacity to safely manage chemicals.

A Turning Point for Climate Governance?

In 2020, the Paris Agreement will take over from the Kyoto Protocol to become the central treaty governing climate change. Amid the deepening climate emergency and rising climate movements demanding action, the Agreement will already be put to the test. In the aftermath of COP 25, which many considered a “[disappointment](#),” all eyes will turn to 2020 and COP 26, to be held in Glasgow, United Kingdom.

The central question for many is whether the intergovernmental process is capable of generating the necessary ambition. Countries are set to communicate new or updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs) in 2020: the first test of the Paris Agreement's bottom-up architecture and its ability to catalyze ambition. Although 79 countries have so far announced their intention to enhance ambition or

action via their NDCs, these countries only represent 10.5% of global emissions. The question going forward is whether the NDC process will send a signal to the world that the Paris Agreement can deliver; any significant increase of ambition will bode well for the Agreement's long-term goals.

Some parts of the Paris Agreement's "rulebook" are still incomplete. In 2020, parties will continue to try to finalize agreement on Article 6, which addresses market and non-market mechanisms for the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, after no outcome was reached at COP 24 or COP 25. Setting up the final details of the transparency framework, and common time frames for NDCs, will also be up for discussion. Throughout negotiations, equity considerations will likely continue to loom large. 2020 is the year by which developed countries collectively committed to jointly mobilize US\$100 billion per year in finance to developing countries—a so far unfulfilled promise which may continue to hang over negotiations going forward.

The Year to Come

Overall, the shape of the year will likely be affected by domestic political developments, the burgeoning public awareness of environmental issues in many countries, and a likely continuation and escalation of civil society and grassroots movements. In the light of a perceived "mismatch" between public expectations and delivery, and questions about whether global environmental governance is achieving outcomes for the environment, 2020 is a year where the system could yet prove itself.



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