

Evolution of environmental policies and agreements 1971- 2011



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The energy use (EN) and its integration property vary under the influence of different factors. Among various elements such as abundance of energy resources and energy intensity, the environmental policy is the factor that has had increasing effects on the EN. The energy sector and environmental concerns are inherently interdependent and policies in one sector have direct impact on the other. This appendix very briefly reviews the evolution of world environmental agreements and policies during the period of our study.[1]

The world environmental system has undergone a significant development in the course of past four decades. It has especially improved by the public recognition of the environment as a vital concern of humankind and adoption of numerous Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). The seminal step was the first United Nation conference on the environment, which was held in Stockholm in 1972. It created a momentum in drawing the public attention to the environmental issues and commitment for taking action.

During the last forty years, the MEAs and policies on the environmental issues have evolved in several dimensions while there has almost been continuity in terms of principles. First, there has been a gradual development of the MEAs on environmental protection, with adoption of a large number of conventions and treaties. Nevertheless, after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit the attention shifted more from institution building to implementation, consolidation, and compliance. Yet, majority of conventions, especially at the early stage, have theme, sector, or territory approach, which resulting in treaties overlap or clash. Besides the treaty congestion caused by separate negotiation fora, secretariats and funding mechanism, most of conventions

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fail to effectively integrate environment standards into other policy areas. It remains one of the most pressing challenges of policy makers' to design policies that may reconcile interdependencies of pursuing competitive economic growth, social concerns, sustainability, and environmental protection.

The second dimension is characterized by recognition of the environment as public global goods. As it is manifested in the Stockholm Declaration, protection of the environment is beyond the interest of the individual countries or specific reciprocal relations and should be respected as part of the public interest of world community. However, there are important differences in understanding of countries on some fundamental concepts like sustainable use of natural resources and sustainable development. The industrialized countries in one hand and the developing countries on the other hand have different views on the policies and measures to adopt, type of commitments to take, and how to share responsibilities. More interestingly, even approaches and policies of industrialized countries, *e. g.* US and EU members, are significantly different. While the US is traditionally inclined to rely on market mechanism and private sector, the EU, as a leading global player that has some of the world's highest environmental standards, tends to act more actively and initiate progressive policy responds.

The third trend that can be distinguished is the increasing role of civil society and private sector in MEAs and environmental policy making at national and international levels. In the recent decades there have been significant moves in the societies to call for more transparency, more social conscience and <https://assignbuster.com/evolution-of-environmental-policies-and-agreements-1971-2011/>

more compliance with the environmental agreements. The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as the representatives of civil society, have been increasingly active at national and international levels. Their participation has influenced negotiating, implementing, monitoring and enforcing MEAs. At the same time, there have been pressures from governments, NGOs, and business community leaders to ensure that private sector takes greater accountability and responsibility for its actions. Therefore, in the recent decades, the public policy process has been moving toward more interactive models, where public entities seek to develop partnership with the private sector to manage complex policy challenges. A famous example of this partnership is the “green economy”, which is deemed as one of important tools available for achieving sustainable development.

Forth, it is generally accepted that science is the best way to evaluate the environmental risks and examine the adverse impacts of human activities. Thus, science and scientific evidence have been increasingly becoming more important in the process of environmental policy making. However, there is no consensus on how to apply the scientific evidence into environmental standards. The integration of science into environmental policies and governance even become more controversial when countries choose contradictory approaches in interpreting the scientific evidence according to their own interest. The different approaches in interpretation of scientific evidence shows science cannot be a good substitute for a liable policy response. Science is only expected to present unbiased and transparent evidence and ensure that policy makers are fully aware of all potential risks.

Although MEAs has been significantly developed with adoption of a large number of conventions and treaties, the current international governance system cannot guarantee that all states at the global level will be willing and able to comply and respect the agreed international environmental standards. It urges to improve the quality and effectiveness of global environmental governance. Undoubtedly, it is a challenging and contentious task since there are areas that directly touch the sovereignty of states in managing their natural resources and pursuing their development strategies. To circumvent these concerns, there should be a new move to devise and develop the concept of “responsible sovereignty”. The concept of “environmentally responsible sovereignty” can urge states to use their powers in a way that are more aligned with the general interest of the international community and help to protect the global environment.

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[1]This part is heavily adapted from Bakker and Francioni (2014).