

Free research paper on the united nations: environmental protection and sustainab...

[Law](#), [Security](#)



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In the course of the last twenty five years, The United Nations has intensified its focus on the crucial issue of environmental protection. Today, apart from international bodies such as the Global Environment Facility, the UN Environment Program, a large number of conventions, treaties and institutions also exist to ensure a healthy global environment. However, the environment has continued to worsen and the attempts at its resurrection have been inefficient, many times ending up duplicating past attempts. There is a strong need to streamline the environmental programs and strengthen the related processes in order to stop decline and change the trend.

The History of Environmental Protection

The birth of the United Nations had more to do with international conflict and poverty as opposed to the health of the environment. Accordingly, the UN Charter did not contain the word “ environment”. This was also because of the fact that the decay of the environment was considered as a global hazard.

Over the years, however, concepts such as triple bottom line and sustainability have brought the focus on the environment, on equal terms with economy and security. Among the reasons for this change is the very nature of the problem itself. The grave event of resource depletion has ensured that countries spend almost one tenth of their income on preserving the nature, according to World Bank. Further, many of the environmental hazards are spread beyond the national borders, thus making them an international problem. Depletion of the ozone, reduction in the number of forests and trees, global warming, pesticides becoming a part of the food chain, etc. are problems that are not restricted to one single nation or continent. They pose a danger to the Earth as a whole.

Given the problem is a common one; the nations have repeatedly looked up at the UN to energize solutions - more so, because the UN is one authority that can impose common deadlines and sanctions in order to meet the challenge posed by the environmental problems. This trend started as early as the mid-late 1800's when many countries started to look at a common entity to solve issues such as migratory birds.

One event in particular is important for having drawn the environmental issue to the UN's line of sight - The 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. In this conference was born the UN Environment Program, currently based out of Nairobi. Many other conventions also found a starting point in this conference which includes important ones such as London, 1972 and the CITES convention on Endangered Species IN 1973 . Also notable is the role played by the " Earth Summit". In 1992 most of the heads of the state of countries across the world got together to discuss the

environmental and sustainability issue. It was established here that these issues have a global consequence and were not restricted to a local level . The idea that environmental protection was an issue independent of social and economic growth was also dismissed during this meet. It was made clear that without giving the Earth its due, one wouldn't be able to carry on with regular business. This conference at Rio also spoke of sustaining the resources for the generations to come - an important step in recognizing sustainability as crucial. Among other documents, Agenda 21, - an action plan - was generated .

Such important events have however not been able to stop the degradation of environment. The ' green' concept is still seen mostly from a charity and responsibility point of view and has hardly become the part of life that it was supposed to be. Meanwhile, the resources keep disappearing even as the Earth heads towards massive warming. Water, air and land - all three key resources continue to be polluted and the reverse action towards environmental health shows no sign of becoming a reality.

The Plunge from Treaty to Action

The problem perhaps is the fact that treaties remain treaties and do not materialize into action. More than two hundred treaties exist today but the number of them that are followed up in the right spirit is unknown. Some of the points these treaties cover include hazardous waste trade and electricity saving which have hardly moved beyond the science text book. The agreements are not international but only bilateral and always are a part of the last few pages of agreements which otherwise feature crucial data based

on security and trade. The issues covered include atmospheric pollution, endangered animals and birds, ocean appropriation among others. However they are yet to hit the forefront of the discussion agenda .

Never the less, some of these treaties have in fact gone on to produce great results. Some of these include the drop in the chlorofluorocarbon levels, reduction in air pollution in Europe, Decrease in killing of elephants in Africa and a ban on animal leather and ivory trade along with fur and animal skin. A lot of work has also been done in Antarctica with regards to whaling and mining

Genuine as these results might be, the overall health of the environment refuses to get better. The incessant increase in population is only one of the many reasons for this state. Mass extinctions are being projected. Many documentaries on a world without water are being released and this seems to be a realistic possibility. The pace of the international work on these areas has drawn criticism from scientists and activists alike. The human urge to save the Earth has yet not been drilled down to every person living and it is hardly a culture today.

The Road Ahead

Reaching agreements is only one part of the entire process. There is the important parameter of the money being allocated to the environment. Due to many hostilities that have developed across the world, the developed countries spend more on defense than on the Earth. The developing countries on the other hand, find themselves short of funds to sustain a rising population and thus are unable to keep aside money for improving the

atmosphere and protecting the environment.

A lot of work needs to be done on creating systems that will be updated frequently and will monitor the work on sustainability with a serious follow up mechanism. Priority needs to be thrown on creating strong environmental bodies with far reaching powers in order to drill some seriousness into the entire issue . A lot of change has to come from the citizens too and the United Nations, among other entities, must give full support to campaigns that highlight the state of Earth today and communicate the urgency of the situation to the masses.

Information is another area where a lot of work needs to be done. Today data with regards to various environmental issues are not updated. These need to be recorded and shared widely. There needs to be a central source of data from where all involved parties can draw their respective inferences. Only with a solid information platform can change be intensified and streamlined. Without it there will only be duplication of efforts which reduces the effectiveness of the entire struggle.

An equal number of local bodies must also be setup in order to take the message to those who matter the most - the people. Without communication systems, the campaign to save the planet from the hands of decay will fall flat. These local bodies need to be widespread and well connected, thereby providing the campaign a realistic chance of success. Like the information centers, these too need to be centralized at the core of a body as important as the UN from where the work needs to flow.

Last but not the least, the legal status of various environmentally harmful activities needs to be revoked and also standardized into one international

code. Today the countries are at choice to exercise their own set of environmental laws. Unlike security and economy, this is not a national matter and hence the ultimate power must rest with an autonomous international body. Clearly, the role of the UN is cut out and only an urgent disposition of its responsibilities will help saving the planet from destruction, deterioration and eventual doom.

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