

# NETWORK 2015

*Building Partnerships for Sustainable Development*

## MOMENTUM BUILDS BEHIND IDEAS FOR REFORM OF INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

STAKEHOLDER FORUM



*By Felix Dodds and Jennifer Peer*

Reform of the international structures of environmental governance has been debated at the margins of the international agenda for a number of years. While some progress has been made in the area of strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme, lack of political will has meant that more substantial proposals have had little traction. Over the past six months, with events such as the World Summit in September and the UNEP Special Session of the Governing Council last month, recognition of the need to reform international environmental governance (IEG) has quietly taken hold. In the past two months, several processes have been initiated to harness the momentum and translate this support into more formalised mechanisms for exploring options to reform IEG. These options are:

- In February, the establishment of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on UN System Wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and Environment;
- In January, the announcement of an upcoming General Assembly informal consultation on the reform of international environmental governance;
- In January, the convening of a high level forum of the members of the United Nations Environment Management Group to explore how the group can promote a more coordinated response in the United Nations to environmental challenges.

It is argued that reform of international environmental governance (IEG) is needed because the current system is fragmented and complex, with a multitude of agencies, structures, and bodies mandated to work in the field of sustainable development. This patchwork of environmental governance includes the United Nations Environment Programme (the so-called 'environmental conscience of the United Nations system'), the Commission on Sustainable Development (established as the highest level panel on sustainable development), and the United Nations Development Programme (which has been increasingly working in the field of sustainable development), to name a few. As we well know, environmental problems require coherent and unified solutions that are universally supported. The current structure makes it difficult for such solutions to emerge. It also leads to an ineffective and inefficient multiplication of efforts. The multiple negotiating fora also results in an overwhelming agenda for those involved in environmental negotiations, reducing the capacity and resources for implementation.

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## C&C - PUTTING THE RATIONAL INTO ASPIRATIONAL

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The human economy emits vast amounts of greenhouse gas by burning oil, coal and gas. The sharply increasing volume of these emissions is accumulating in the atmosphere, accelerating the rise in their atmospheric concentration. This traps more heat-energy from the sun and dangerous rates of climate change with devastating damages are in prospect. As Jim Lovelock suggested, failing to stem this trend means civilization may be completely overwhelmed during the decades ahead.

To avoid this we have to solve the problem faster than we create it. Globally, we have to achieve the goal of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed in 1992, by drastically cutting greenhouse emissions. The agreed objective of the UNFCCC is the stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentration in the global atmosphere at a level that is 'safe'. These cuts – or the international emissions “Contraction and Convergence” (C&C) [see below] – are required by definition. C&C is like turning off the taps to a bath that is about to overflow. Merely hoping to do this, or as bureaucrats say, being ‘aspirational’ about this, is deluded. In the analogy the atmosphere is the bath, the emissions are the taps and the impending overflow is what will wash civilization away unless we replace hope with C&C.

After fifteen years of aspirational politics, the taps are open wider than ever and the bath is nearly full. The global quarrel about who should turn off a tap first continues. The Kyoto Protocol mediates this by restricting some emissions measured in millions of tonnes, while ongoing global emissions accumulate in the atmosphere in billions of tonnes. The result is that concentrations, temperature and damages are now rising faster than ever. Worse, the atmosphere now appears to be retaining a larger fraction of each year's emissions than the historic average of 50% and this, due to failure of the natural sinks for the gases, seems set to increase. As we continue to accelerate the problem much faster than we act to resolve it, Kyoto is kerb-crawling and Jim's pessimism is justified.

Some fatalists suggest we ‘adapt’ to the looming disaster. Others, who previously said there wasn't a problem, now say actually there is a problem, but not one we can do anything about.

Is there any comfort? Since the Second World Climate Conference in 1990, the US government has correctly said

that the warming is a global problem and it requires a global solution. The only questions were, “how much warming how soon?” Some have vilified the US for requiring this ‘globality’ even though they were obviously right. When the US Senate supported this globality with equity in the Byrd Hagel Resolution in 1997, the Kyoto lobby wanted the US scalp and denounced them. This resolution argued that international emissions control would be shared equitably. But the Kyoto lobby insisted that the Protocol would gradually tie everyone in to the reconciliation with each other and the rational objective of the UNFCCC in time to avoid Jim's grim prognosis. This was nonsense.

It is not rational or even ‘aspirational’. It is irrational and delusional. The rate at which the global ‘we’ are causing the problem now actually accelerates against the rate at which Kyoto responds to avoid it and ‘Kyoto-2’ already projects this deepening failure.



The 11th Conference of the Parties to the [COP-11] UNFCCC took place last December in Montreal to operationalise Kyoto and start exploring its second phase. But in mid November Tony Blair told the London Lord Mayor's dinner, “We urgently need a framework, with the necessary targets intelligently applied of the right time-frame that takes us beyond 2012. It can only happen if the US, China and India join with Europe and Japan and others to create such a framework”. On the eve of COP-11 he asked, “will it be another round of division or the sound, rational, science-based unity, which ensures the right legally-binding framework to incentivise sustainable development.”

He didn't get what he called for. At the end of two weeks defending the remnants of Kyoto, shameless statements were made claiming COP-11 as a ‘triumph’ because the US had given permission for Kyoto signatories to keep talking to each other while all the world's major polluters resisted any inclusion in this process.

This was like giving permission for apples to fall to the ground, wolves to howl at the moon and God to give up the Holy Ghost. Government and non-government organisations who issued these statements should look at their record. It was forgivable ten years ago, not now. If COP-11 was Kyoto's 'natural selection' in defence of the species against potential extinction by climate change, what was not shown was that we are collectively fit to – or going to -survive. What shows that we are fit to survive, is the framework of a rational science-based unity called for by the Prime Minister. This means a concentration-target-based which – as the UNFCCC Secretariat, the US Senate and numerous others have recognized - is "Contraction and Convergence" (C&C) as a matter of science and rationality: - [1] on the science side and subject to revision, future greenhouse gas emissions from human sources must be budgeted for the full-term at an overall rate that contracts globally, consistent with stabilising the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gas at a safe value and [2] the tradable shares in, or entitlements to, this obviously valuable global equity are agreed on the principle of starting where nations are at and deliberately converging these shares to per capita equality globally by a date to be agreed well inside the contraction schedule.

The faster convergence is relative to contraction, the more this pre-distribution can settle the historic environmental debt to, and eradicate poverty in, poorer nations with low emissions. Unlike the Developed Countries, they have had no detectable impact on the atmosphere but climate change does have a very detectable impact on them. Then within nations, and regions of nations [like the EU] and the global family of nations, we will all have share and the benefit of a rational and constitutional arrangement that is predicated on the same goal where the means to it, and the detail of it, are just that – a predictable outcome because what we get out is the result of what we put in.

Next to this framework Kyoto is and unpredictable and irrational patchwork. You can't mediate anything – especially including nuclear-versus-windmills 'energy policy' - as we don't know what we are planning for. Do you defend Holland or Bangladesh against sea-level-rise? How high do you build the Thames Barrier – a metre a decade?

23 Corporate Executives complained about this to the leaders of the G-8 last July. In a joint letter they told the governments to replace the Kyoto patchwork with a global concentration-target specific framework so the commercial sector could play its part. Institutions of the UK building industry specified that this was C&C and joined with numerous civil society organisations and eminent persons worldwide, the Churches, most UK political parties, several foreign governments and many local government councillors and MPs of all parties who want the C&C bill already before the House of Commons to be passed into law.

## THE 4TH WORLD WATER FORUM

"*Agua*" will be the word on the lips of thousands of participants at the fourth tri-annual World Water Forum, which will be held this month in Mexico City, from 16-22 March. The theme for this World Water Forum, an initiative of the World Water Council, is "Local Actions for a Global Challenge." The theme reflects the beliefs of organisers that regardless of their root causes, water-related problems have the greatest impact at the local level. Local responses are therefore essential to ensure that international commitments on water are met. The fourth World Water Forum will serve to promote and empower local solutions worldwide.

The World Water Forum will be an eclectic event, using a variety of approaches. There will be a Thematic Forum, consisting of 190 sessions which will focus on 5 main themes: Water for Growth and Development; Implementing Integrated Water Resource Management; Water Supply and Sanitation; Water for Food and Environment; and Risk Management. There will also be a World Water Expo, a Water Fair, a Learning Centre and an Exhibition of Local Actions, as well as a Ministerial Conference on 21 and 22 March.

Like past World Water Forums, the fourth is not without controversy. There is a feeling amongst some members of the NGO community that the event is dominated by the interests of private corporations. Furthermore, high registration costs have actually discouraged local stakeholders, whose actions the forum is aiming to highlight, from participating.

In response to these criticisms, numerous independent stakeholder events will take place before and during the World Water Forum. For example, the Coalition of Mexican Organisations for the Right to Water will host the International Forum in the Defence of Water from 17 to 19 March. This and other alternative events, the first held parallel to the Kyoto World Water Forum, is a worrying sign that the World Water Forum is not working properly.

Controversy aside, the World Water Forum and alternative water events will both serve to highlight the crucial role of water in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The conclusion of the World Water Forum will coincide with World Water Day, on 22 March, a day that will focus on the theme of Water and Culture.

For further information about the Fourth World Water Forum, please visit [www.worldwaterforum4.org.mx](http://www.worldwaterforum4.org.mx)