

Global Environmental Governance: the Case for a New Paradigm

W.DiliniMadurangi & ChamindaPadmakumara
Department of International Relations, University of Colombo
dilini.withanage@googlemail.com
padmakumarasc@gmail.com

Abstract

Almost simultaneously with the change of environmental problems, the politico–institutional conditions for environmental policy making are also experiencing a major transformation. In this regard Global Environmental Governance acts as a mechanism that uses organizations, policy instruments, procedure, norms and rules to regulate the process of global environmental protection.

However, it is evident that while the system of Global Environmental Governance has expanded immensely in size and scope, it has not been entirely effective in achieving sustainable development or reversing the major trends of environmental degradation. Therefore, it is considered that, Environmental Governance has departed from the traditional state-centered system in accepting a host of non-state entities. Further, due to this multi-actor system, most of the traditional principles of Environmental Governance have become obsolete. In this study we focus our attention on the micro mechanisms of Environmental Governance to the rise of state and non-state actors that create institutional arrangements that perform Environmental Governance functions.

This study will investigate three main aspects in recent debate.

1. Reforms of the institutional framework for environmental governance at the global level.
2. Proliferation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements.
3. Increased involvement in Global Civil Society in shaping Global Governance.

Furthermore, this study would incorporate models of Global Environmental Governance, aspects of environmental law, theories of development and human security approach for analysis. Research methodology adopted is qualitative and primarily based on archival research.

Keywords: Global Environmental Governance, Environmental policymaking, Non-state actors

Introduction

Concurrent with the rapid increase in environmental problems, the politico-institutional framework for environmental policymaking and governance is experiencing a major transformation. When defining Global Environment Governance, clarification is advisable in its current context. Governance is about how decisions and policies are made, who is responsible, how they carry out their mandates, and how they are accountable, (El-Ashry, 2005). Environmental Governance in a global, regional or national context emphasizes the necessity of accumulating policy instruments, organizations, rules, procedures and norms to regulate the process of global environmental protection (Najam, Papa, & Taiyab, 2006). Within this context of global environmental politics and policy, the end goal of Global Environmental Governance is to improve the state of the environment and to eventually lead to the broader goal of achieving sustainable development. However, global environmental trends continue to be negative and the resources and competency to address these issues have not been properly utilized. Hence, the challenge before us in the contemporary developments of environment protection is to resolve the paradox of achieving high development goals with low environmental degradation through a proper environmental governance mechanism.

Rachel Carson through her seminal work in 1962, *Silent Spring*, launched environmentalism as a political ideology. Carson ushered in the environmental movement and presented a critical question for generations to come: How can the practices and needs of modern society be managed in a manner that prevents damaging pollution, biodiversity loss, and other environmental harm? Or, in contemporary vernacular, how can global development proceed in a manner that is environmentally sustainable? (Fulton & Benjamin, 2011). Ever since Carson's prescient work, particularly during the past few decades, many states around the world have undertaken responsible measures to answer these questions and considerable progress has been made. Many nations have drafted, signed and/or ratified numerous multilateral environmental agreements ("MEAs") to protect the air, water, land and biodiversity. Despite these efforts to confront environmental problems, the public concern over sufficient clean water resources, climate change, desertification, endangered species protection, ocean oil spills, ozone depletion and other similar matters seems to have increased rather than decreased (Malone & Pasternack, 2006).

A key reason for this result is the failure of many countries and their leaders to implement adequately and effectively the standards set forth in these MEAs. Moreover, these defensive mechanisms are constantly threatened by the actions of economic and political actors and fueled by the growing inequalities of globalization. Hence, unceasing efforts by the stakeholders and parties interested are necessary to strengthen the effectiveness of new forms of environmental governance. This study will investigate

three main aspects in recent debate of Environmental Governance: transformation of power relations; current developments; environmental threats to human security and the need for policy direction.

Transformation of Power Relations

The past decade has witnessed a change in the world order of environmental policy making. The traditional way to see policy making in general as a top-down system which draws from the international level to the local level, with nation-states as dominating actors is being considered outdated among many academics (Eckerberg & Joas, 2004). In several theoretical studies the centralized power structure of the nation state has been questioned. One such instance derives from an international political economy point of view, where Susan Strange argues that some of the non-state authorities, from mafias to the Big Six accounting firms and international bureaucrats, whose power over who gets what in the world encroaches on that of national governments (Strange, 1996). Hence, it is vital to reconsider certain conventional assumptions of the state-centric power structure when formulating policy mechanisms and institutional framework for environmental governance. Alternatively, multi-level governance, which implies a horizontal shift of responsibilities from governmental actors/authorities towards non-governmental actors and all other societal levels- local, regional, national and international could be taken as an effective approach in this regard (Eckerberg & Joas, 2004). This process clearly demonstrates a transformation of power relations among national entities and supra-national entities in the context of Global Environmental Governance.

Environmental Threat to Human Security

Mostly, security is defined as the integrity of the state and its national interests from the use of force by an adversary, (Parkin, 1997). In this context, the concept of security has been interpreted narrowly: simply as security of territory from external aggression or as a protection of national interests in foreign policy. As viewed by many scholars, this definition is inadequate to provide a broader picture of security as it requires including non -military aspects of security. Therefore, maintaining a predominantly military approach to security has become obsolete as it has to look at the other non-traditional dimensions of security.

In this regard, human security can be considered as a new approach to look at the concept of security, replacing the traditional approach to security which is defined mostly in the military sense. Human security as a people-centered model of security looks at various dimensions where insecurity can arise with chronic threats and sudden hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life. On the other hand, the concept of human security is another profound transition in the process of shifting from traditional security to non-traditional security. In this scenario, environmental security has been recognized as a key factor for social security, economic growth, and prosperity. In other

words, human security has a great impact on environmental preservation focusing on the major elements of the ecosystem.

Moreover, the co-relation between human security and the environment is close as well as it is complicated, (Khagram et al, 2003). More recently, it has become increasingly clear that this relationship is closely associated with non- conventional notions of security. Therefore, environmental security is interconnected with the contemporary environmental changes. This increasing scope of security includes environmental degradation, global warming, climate change and other considerable environmental issues, which are directly seen as threats to human security.

On the other hand, the environment has become a source of conflict, creating numerous civil wars based on environmental related issues. The past decades have witnessed the environment as the major player in human security issues. Therefore, environmental security has created new room for policy making at the global level, going beyond the national level, focusing on numerous environmental issues. However, today's international community has realized that the environment is an "issue-originated entity" (Ganoulis, 2007). Also, it is correct to say that the international community has acknowledged the importance of the environment in achieving human security. Therefore, many attempts have been made by the nation-states through various means of multi-national co-operation to address the environmental issues in order to secure human security. Moreover, a set of institutions has been created for this purpose, integrating many national units into supra national units. This proves that maintaining traditional political borders of nation-states is worthless when tackling environmental issues, (Eckerberg & Joas, 2004: 409).

As most of the environmental problems are trans-boundary in character, environmental security can be considered as the widest component of human security that has led to global-level Environmental Governance. Considering the attention given to the environmental impact on human security by states, it can be said that environmental security is crucial to determine human security as it gives rise to various issues at national as well as international level.

As pointed out by the World Bank Report, eighty countries, with 40% of the world's population, already suffer from shortage of fresh water, (Parkin, 1997). Not only that, changes in climate patterns brought global attention on possible threats to human security, unearthing many issues. Further, global warming, green gas effect and deforestation are some of the salient environmental issues that directly threaten human security. Air pollution has become another contentious issue being common to developed and developing nations. Although the character of environmental damage differs between industrial and developing countries, the effects are similar almost everywhere.

In general, many environmental threats are chronic and long-lasting, while others take on a more sudden and violent character. For example, Bhopal and Chernobyl incidents are the most obvious sudden environmental catastrophes, (*Human Development Report*, 1994: 29). Many chronic natural disasters in recent years have also been provoked by human beings. Deforestation has led to more intense droughts and floods. And population growth has made people prone to natural disasters such as, cyclones, quakes or earth floods (ibid).

During 1967-91, disasters hit three billion people: 80% of them in Asia. More than seven million people died, and two million were injured. Specifically, Sri Lanka also should be taken into consideration as it is experiencing a large number of environmental issues. As viewed by the CIA World Factbook, deforestation, soil erosion, air pollution in urban cities and industrial wastage are some of prominent environmental issues in the country (2012). Therefore, Sri Lanka is also placed in a vulnerable position regarding environmental issues. These are some ground realities that prove environment is a threat to human security.

Current Developments

Since the past few decades, the response of the international community to the challenges of environment and sustainable development included four international summits, four ministerial conferences, three international conventions, two protocols and a new financial entity – the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (El-Ashry, 2005).

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established in 1991, to address the need of funds for developing countries to achieve goals of sustainable development and to facilitate the environmental projects. GEF projects are principally carried out by UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank assisting to conserve and sustainable use of biological diversity. On the other hand, GEF helps to reverse the degradation of international waters, combat land degradation and drought.

Regarding more current developments in Environmental Governance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the most significant landmark in the emergence of Global Environmental Governance, and also the world's leading environmental agency protecting human security. The major objective of UNEP is to coordinate United Nations environmental activities, and assist developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices. It was founded as a result of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in June 1972. Further, UNEP promotes Environmental Science and it develops international conventions with the collaboration of many state and non-state entities.

The next initiative can be identified as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) which was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It can be considered as a transformation of attitudes and the behavior of the participating nations to make the principal theme Environment and Sustainable Development a reality. The significance of this summit was to draw the attention of the nation-states to rethink their economic development and find ways to halt the destruction of irreplaceable natural resources and the pollution of the planet. Therefore, this summit can be considered as a major transformation of Global Environmental Governance, which made a considerable change on the thinking patterns of the nation-states.

The next step was the “Earth Summit + 5”, which was held by the General Assembly in 1997, to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21. The major purpose of the summit was to make recommendations for its further fulfillment. The final session recommended the adoption of legally binding targets to reduce emission of greenhouse gases leading to climate change; moving more forcefully towards sustainable patterns of energy production, distribution and use; and focusing on poverty eradication as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

The Millennium Summit which was held in 2000 was another remarkable milestone of Global Environmental Governance, which motivates nation-states to achieve certain goals towards sustainable development by 2015. Goal 7 in particular, seeks to ensure environmental sustainability.

Another global event was the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002. This was another attempt to address the issues arising from the 1992 Earth Summit and it was in the character of an implementation summit: Millennium Summit, 2000.

It is obvious that many attempts have been made at various levels to address the environmental issues. On the face of it, these are remarkable achievements, but in spite of the high-powered gatherings, agreements and commitments, little progress has been made in improving the environment and in pursuing sustainable development at ground level.

Conclusions and Need for New Policy Directions

The study suggests that in an increasingly globalized, interconnected economy there can be no enduring development without environmental care. Hence, the development of strong environmental laws and policies to preserve the environment must better reflect a balance between underlying economic and social issues. Much of the current context of Global Environmental Governance, for which policy advice is needed, is one of uncertainty. Under such circumstances, decision makers need information about the nature of threats, how each will be affected, as well as the types of arrangements that can be collectively developed to address trans-boundary and global risks. Accordingly, many attempts have been made to tackle the issues with the aid of implementing environmental related meetings, conferences, agreements and forums in the past decades. Yet, this study points-out that still there is space lingering for further development and protection of the environment through well-coordinated global environmental mechanisms.

To address these needs possibilities of a more coherent institutional framework need to be explored while seeking means to upgrade the existing international institutional framework to respond effectively to the emerging threats of environmental degradation and complexities associated with it. Without confining the workload to a single global environmentally linked institution, mainstreaming the environment agenda to other international institutions such as the World Bank, regional development banks, WHO, UNESCO and other non-environment related agencies and institutions would enhance the capacity to deliver the internationally agreed goals and commitments. Also, the UNEP which is the UN's principal environmental organization should be strengthened with a new mandate to coordinate world-wide environmental activities and to manage Global Environmental Governance efficiently. As stated in the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence 2006 (A/61/583) "To improve effectiveness and targeted environmental activities, the system of environmental governance should be strengthened and more coherent, featuring an upgraded UNEP with real authority as the United Nations environment policy pillar".

Apart from the governing institutional bodies, multilateral environmental agreements should be implemented efficiently reducing the administrative inefficiencies connected to it. Furthermore, substantive coordination should be pursued by diverse treaty bodies to support effective implementation of major MEAs. Such coordination is being pursued by the Basel Rotterdam and Stockholm convention secretariats (El-Ashry, 2005: 07).

Deviating from the mainstream governance structure associated with institutions, agreements and high panel discussions, this paper suggests that the transformational stage of Global Environmental Governance requires a more people-centered, simple and transparent approach to form a basis for effective environmental governance. In this sense environmental laws should be clear, equitable and shared with the public. According to the recommendations made by UNEP, preparatory meeting of the World Congress on Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability (2011), affected stakeholders should be given the opportunity to participate in environmental decision making, and they should have access to fair and responsive dispute resolution procedures (Fulton & Benjamin, 2011). The collective efforts mentioned above aimed at the process of transforming Global Environmental Governance coupled with improved international coordination and systematic collaboration will enable to create a path towards achieving global sustainable development.

References

Carson, Rachel (1962). *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Eckerberg, K. & Joas, M. (2004). Multi-level Environmental Governance: A concept under Stress? *Local Government*, Vol. 9, No. 5, pp. 405-412, October 2004.

El-Ashry, M. (2005). Hi-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence. Human Development Report, 1994.

Fulton, S. & Benjamin, J.A.H. (2011). Foundations of Sustainability, 9th International Conference on Environmental Compliance and Enforcement, British Columbia, Canada.

Ganoulis, Jacques (2007). *Environmental and Human Security in the Mediterranean: New threats and policy for reducing vulnerability*. NATO: Security through Science Series.

Human Development Report (1994). New York: Oxford University Press.

Khagram Sanjeev, Clark, W. & D.F. Read (2003). From the Environment and Human Security to Sustainable Security and Development. *Journal of Human Development*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 289-313.

Malone, L.A. & Pasternack, S. (2006). *Defending the Environment: Civil Society Strategies to Enforce International Law*. Washington: Island Press.

Najam, A., Papa, M. & N. Taiyab (2006). *Global Environmental Governance. A Reform Agenda*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: International Institute for Sustainable Development.

Parkin, S. (1997). Environmental security: Issues and agenda for an incoming government. *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 142, Issue 3, pp. 24-28.

Strange, S. (1996). *The Retreat of the State*. London: Cambridge University Press.