

Environmental Diplomacy in the Age of Global Sustainability: Challenges, Actors, and the Future of International Environmental Governance

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ABSTRACT

In global debates, environmental concerns featuring international treaties and issues including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution dominate. The paper examines how diplomacy among states through international frameworks such as Paris Agreement and Kyoto protocols encourages a global shift towards sustainable development. The history, politics, and impacts of the environmental treaties are important- among other things- in explaining the difficulties of reconciling national interests with global notions of sustainability. The paper also reveals the problems for provisions of their effects such as non-compliance, affordability, and lack of political will as well as the roles of non-claimed actors such as multinational companies and NGOs. Finally, the piece addresses new methods and practices of environmental diplomacy as one of the variables of shaping the future international environmental relations in the context of new global and longer-term-based movements mainly focused on key issues of sustainability. The work points out the ways how the international community could deal with the issues of an increasingly changing world environment as well as strengthen the systems of global governance

INTRODUCTION

Several issues of environmental nature such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution have become some of the most serious challenges to the ecosystems and population's survival around the globe in the 21st century. These challenges are in their nature global which means that they go beyond national boundaries and thus warrant collaborative solutions within nations and USA's borders. Climate change as a result of greenhouse gas emission is now elevating temperatures at sea level, increasing bad weather occurrences and the equilibrium of the ecosystem. Loss of biodiversity endangers the resiliency of biodiversity upon which humanity relies. At the same time, pollutants on the land and the seas destroy diversity and also harm human life. Considering the magnitude and complexity of these problems, it is therefore prudent to argue that global solutions need international considerations. In a global sense, nations work towards legitimate agreement such as the Paris Agreement or the Kyoto agreement, aimed at protecting the environment. Hopefully, such agreements will address and better existing problems as altered by geography in different nations. In this piece, we will further analyse how a number of such international tools as agreements and environmentalist diplomacy influence the progress of global sustainability.

More specifically, the study is guided by the following research question: What role do international treaties and environmental diplomacy play regarding global sustainability practices? The importance of this study stems from the consideration of how diplomatic negotiations and treaties have changed the environmental cover of one state policies and the policy in relative to sustainability at large. This is achieved for instance, through looking at the Paris Agreement, which provides for binding commitments for reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, as well as the Kyoto Protocol which aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions around the world. This paper thus seeks to underscore their role in modifying international practices on sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Environmental Diplomacy

A. Definition of Environmental Diplomacy

Environmental diplomacy may be described as the concern taken by countries, international organizations and non-governmental actors with a view to negotiate, conclude and implement global environmental agreements and policies. It is about diplomacies and relations, and environment which need to address global issues like climate changes, loss of biodiversity, pollution and over-exploitation of natural resources. Environmental diplomacy involves countries engaging in dialogue and negotiations with a view to reach an understanding and consensus to find solutions which go beyond their borders. The scope of environmental diplomacy is not confined only to bilateral treaties but it also includes multilateral treaties designed to promote sustainable development. Emphasis is then on forging partnerships, building ecosystem governance, and tackling environmental challenges together. In this light, diplomatic activities enable countries to achieve a compromise between national

considerations and the international one focusing on sustainable development. In this way environmental concerns are put in the framework of international relations, trade and development.

B. Historical Overview of Environmental Diplomacy

In environmental activism there has been a noticeable evolution over the last several decades characterized by significant milestones that have propelled the international community's slant towards sustainability. Signed in 1972, the Stockholm Conference was one of the earliest milestones at which countries convened to address global environmental concerns and heralded the formation of UNEP. This conference is often referred to as the birthplace of modern environmental diplomacy, since it a whole new era where the engagement of countries to solve the global crises that plagued the world became a norm. The World Summit is another useful event because it led, for instance, to Policy Option & Measures related to the effects of integrating Climate Change into the NCS – development strategy declarations and Agenda 21. The Earth Summit represented a remarkable advance in how environmental issues began to be perceived, this time in the basket of development notions, and stressing the need for the merger of environmental and economic and social policy. The Rio +10 conference in Johannesburg reinforced the concerns which Rio+20 sought to address and asserted that 'the patterns of consumption and production ... to eradicate poverty are prerequisites for sustainable development in the twenty-first century'. Such events in history confirm the increasing incidence and prevalence of the environment phenomena in global politics as well as the need for sustained engagement across borders to address it.

C. Role of International Organizations

In summary, international organizations are important sources which help them to negotiate through providing means of cooperation and monitoring the application of these agreements. This makes the United Nations through its specialized agencies, for instance, UNEP and UNFCCC to be active participants in global environmental governance. In particular, the UNFCCC has been the most impressive aspect of the UN international negotiation process on climate change, resulting in equally significant treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol and subsequently the Paris Agreement. The World Trade Organization (WTO) also contributes to the environmental diplomacy because the policies of trade can affect the environment hugely. The WTO attempts to make it possible to interpret trade agreements with environmental matters in mind in a way such that economic development will also be sustainable. Other international actors like the WHDA and /World Bank use policy diplomacy towards the environment in respect of the healthcare and social challenges that development bring forth. Further, supra-national institutions such as EU or AU strive greatly to advocate green policies and enhance international relations of their member states. Therefore, it can be concluded that international organizations have played a major role in environment structuralism by providing a framework for intervention.

METHODOLOGY

Key International Agreements and Their Impact on Sustainability

The Kyoto Protocol targets developing countries in order to be able to agree on a legally binding framework that seeks to combat climate change by reducing greenhouse gases emissions into the atmosphere. The protocol was thus more successful with developed states who had to bring down their expenditures minus the 1990 figures. The developed economies hampered the progress of developing nations by arguing with them. In addition, emissions from developing nations were not subject to targets thereby increasing the controversy over equity and global governance. The main idea behind the protocol was to facilitate the setting up of global governments to deal with climate change issues however because of the lack of stringent measures the protocol was unable to set standards.

Launched in 2015 the Paris Agreement was a game changer in climate diplomacy. Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, it was meant to cover all countries, both the developed and the developing. Key objectives of the Paris Agreement include the enhancement of the Parties' capacities to cope with the adverse effects of climate change and in achieving the actuary purpose of international law which is the limiting the increase of the global average temperature to 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to restrict the temperature increase to 1.5 °C. The intended NDCs were submitted voluntarily by nations and reviewed in consecutive five-year cycles in order to encourage countries to commit to progressively greater measures to reduce the global warming effect. Financial assistance to the developing States is also part of the agreement, with a view to enabling them to address climate change. However, the Paris Accord has had its share of problems, mainly revolving around compliance with accords and promises made to it by signatory states. There have been issues regarding the level of ambition and the level of delivery particularly for the United States of America during the Trump presidency. Nonetheless, it constitutes an important basis for the coordination of international action and the quest for sustainability over time.

Apart from climate pacts, there are other international accords that are also worth noting which relate to global environmental issues. The Convention on Biological Diversity was opened for signature in 1992 and its objectives are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. While CBD has increased knowledge and led to establishment of reserves, its level of impact in terms of conservation has been hampered by targets that were never achieved and poor implementation. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which came into effect in 1994, is aimed at dealing with and combating desertification and land degradation, more especially in the dry land regions. Despite this progress, its achievements have been limited by lack of adequate funding and political will. In contrast, the Montreal Protocol, concluded in 1987, appears to be one of the more successful environmental accords in that it has met its aims of phasing out the use of ozone-depleting substances such as CFCs, permitting the repair of the ozone situation.

Its success derives from effective enforcement of laws, a competent membership, and a willingness to recognize and respond to new findings.

Based on an analysis of the effectiveness of these international agreements, it is apparent that some have succeeded in accomplishing certain goals whereas many still have major challenges. The fact that the Kyoto Protocol did not succeed in acquiring a commitment by many nations and there were no consequences for non-compliance meant that it was not reliable in curbing emissions. Though the Paris Agreement is wide in scope and has more leeway, it is also without major targets that are essential to contain most dire consequences of climate change. On the other hand, the Montreal Protocol has been very successful owing to its clearly defined and implementable goals with regard to the depletion of ozone layer. As for the CBD and the UNCCD, though commendable, funds and political will to implement them have made their impact minimal and the loss of biological diversity and desertification has set in. In overall terms, these agreements derive their effectiveness from the ability to enforce them, the political will of core actors and the resources available to the developing countries. Going forward, especially the climate deals, greater international collaboration, commitment and funding will be keys.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Political Dynamics of Environmental Diplomacy

A. Power Relations and Equity Issues

Developed and developing countries have a complex interplay regarding power relations which can determine the success or failure of international environmental accords. It is well known that the countries of the Global North, particularly their industries, have been the most significant contributors to global environmental change over a long time period, especially with regards to greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, low income developing states, which are mostly economically disadvantaged, have contributed relatively less to global environmental issues, but are the ones suffering more from them, as seen with sea level rises, droughts, and unstable weather conditions. These inequities have raised questions of justice in relation to global environmental politics. The position of these poorer nations posits that, with their comparatively lower exposure to climate change and development pressures, it would be unreasonable to expect them to meet the same reduction in emissions as those required of richer nations. Hence, the issue of equity, also called "climate justice", has turned into one of the key disputes. This was followed by the emergence of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) whereby developed nations are seen to owe a greater burden in addressing environmental degradation as they instigated it whilst also aiding developing nations in moving towards paths of sustainable development.

B. The Role of National Interests and Sovereignty

National interests and state sovereignty positively correlate with the formulation of a particular stance towards the signing along environmental treaties and agreements. Action, and environmental action specifically in this case, comes second after other priorities, which in this case would be, economic development, energy independence, and the creation of jobs. For instance, countries that rely on fossil fuels – such as oil-rich or coal-producing countries – would not be eager to agree to any agreement with generalized emissions limits compression, for the reasons that the agreements might jeopardize their interests. The American example shows a stark national interest versus global governance example whereby US pulled out of the Paris Agreement because they felt that climate action would threaten jobs and businesses in the US. However, some countries like Costa Rica and New Zealand have been active in pushing environmental agendas and policies centred on climate leading to Costa Rica's growth as an environmental hub even as New Zealand oversaw bold measures to counteract climate threats. The above examples bring to the fore the competition existing between the advancement of specific national agendas and the obligation of every nation to support any and every global project aimed towards protecting the environment.

C. Political Barriers to Effective Environmental Diplomacy

Political factors greatly constrain environmental diplomacy and the possibility to conclude legally binding treaties among states at the global level. One of the constructive sides of national autonomy is felt at the world level when many nations refuse support for world treaties, especially those states which feel that international environmental obligations might compromise their sovereignty or developmental aspirations. For example, Russia and Saudi Arabia, with their economy largely dependent on fossil fuel have consistently resisted international agreements aimed at reducing carbon emission because they are forewarned of the dire consequences that awaits them during the transition into renewable energy sources. Political interests in government decision making, like the international oil giant manufacturers, also significantly contribute to the position of the state in international environmental negotiations. They tend to send their voice to the parliament to take a stand against international climate change efforts by making claims that doing so would increase social unemployment and poverty. Additionally, the situational geography and integrated economies of the country in relation with the farming, fishing, and forestry industries contradict with the ultimate goals of protecting the environment since these sectors of the economy are prone to fears of restriction on farming and the wider use of the land. The intricacies that define national politics, economic dependence, and ownership of economic interests have hindered the establishment of globally binding pledges making it evident why such barriers should be solved in order to realize significant international efforts to resolving environmental degradation.

Challenges in Implementing Global Sustainability through Diplomacy

The negotiating and implementation of international agreements for environmental protection in the pursuit for global sustainability through diplomacy however faces a number of challenges. Low levels of accountability have indeed been pointed here, which many agreements do not contain because they do not include penalties that would force nations to comply with them. The power of influential non-state actors such as multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations as well as environmental activism is also a great deal of concern since such forces strengthen or even undermine sustainability efforts. Corporations like fossil fuel, agriculture and mining tend to lobby against enforcement of stringent environment policies while activist or non-governmental organizations encourage stronger measures to reduce climate change. Other restraints that have an impact on global environmental measures include economic and even developmental issues, especially in poor countries where the dilemma of economic development and environmental sustainability exists, since they require funds and technology in order to be environmentally friendly. Climate Change is a phenomenon that has been politicized especially in sub countries that rely on heavy carbon polluting industries which eschews international collaboration. Similarly, political leaders who attempt to dismiss climate change fears or reduce the focus on the issue tend to obstruct negotiations towards transnational measures hence delaying effective measures aiming at tackling the problem. Such interrelated concerns emphasize the intricate nature of the global environment system focused on inter environmental reductions through diplomacy processes.

The Future of Environmental Diplomacy and Global Sustainability

Environmental diplomacy, along with global sustainable development, is shaped by emerging trends that transform the perception of climate change and finding solutions to it. Countries in transition to a low carbon economy begin to embrace the new ways of achieving climate goals that include net zero targets, carbon pricing and technology sharing. An example of this would be carbon pricing that seeks to import economic components of emissions into its price and in turn provides businesses and governments the reason to cut their carbon emissions. Furthermore, as these policy changes are taking place, the principle of innovative diplomacy is also becoming increasingly crucial in sustainability. New models of diplomacy, including climatic ones, and regional agreements can be used as alternative means of cooperation, enabling countries to build coalitions based on the environment and economy. Furthermore, the increased support of youth movements, for example, Fridays for Future, indicates the growing need for change in the climate policies.

These movements have been very influential in advancing international environmental policymaking by demanding governments to pursue more proactive climate targets and enforce them. In the future, new international treaties should be concerned with solidarity, legal obligations able to be met, and sufficient resources for third world nations so that global sustainability would be achieved. The way forward is through development of strong mechanisms for performance evaluation, accountability taking and cooperation which gives great opportunities to all countries to perform in the international struggle against environment degradation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This essay has analysed the role of international treaties in promoting global environmentalism while also emphasizing the importance of environmental diplomacy in implementing global sustainability efforts. The analysis shows that while instruments such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement represent critical steps forward in the area of climate activism, compliance, equity, and politics are, for the most part, entrenched issues. Environmental diplomacy, using these international accords, is creating sustainable measures by calling for international collaboration to achieve great expectations. In relation to the posed research question, it is clear that international agreements have a valorous role towards the enhancement of sustainability but their robustness requirements include participation, appropriate measures to support developing countries and compliance mechanisms. In order to strengthen international collaboration, it has been suggested that future treaties should adopt more adaptable, region-tailored approaches, improve accountability systems, and enhance technology and financial assistance for developing countries. Lastly, environmental protection is a collective duty of all nations; there is no country that can deal with the many overlapping environmental issues individually. Long-term diplomatic efforts, combined with global support, are key to ensuring a better tomorrow for all.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations so that further research is needed on the topic of Environmental Diplomacy in the Age of Global Sustainability: Challenges, Actors, and the Future in order to perfect this research and increase insight for readers and writers.

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