

MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Gateway to Diplomacy

BACKGROUND MATERIALS

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United Nations Environmental Assembly

Committee Mandate of the United Nations Environmental Assembly

Introduction

At the 2012 United Nations Conference for Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, the international community called for a strengthening and upgrading of the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) such that it could better execute on its mandate.¹ UN Environment was created in 1972 at the UN Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, with leadership provided by the Governing Council of Environmental Programmes at the direction of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). This council led UN Environment until 2013, when the Governing Council of Environmental Programmes adopted a resolution expanding the composition of the council to universal membership and requesting the General Assembly to change its designation to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA).² The name change was made official in *A/RES/67/251* the same year.³

UNEA is the governing body of UN Environment and is the international community's highest-level decision-making body on environmental matters.⁴ With the sessions held in its headquarters in Nairobi Kenya, UNEA governs and sets policy for UN Environment, which works to develop environmentally friendly practices and policies both within the United Nations (UN) system and throughout the international community.⁵ UN Environment has played a significant role in coordinating environmental policy and is the official body concerned with environmental issues in the UN.⁶ UNEA, UN Environment, and their predecessors played a major role in the drafting and implementation of major environmental documents such as the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, *Agenda 21*, the *Convention on Biological Diversity*, the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*, and the *Convention to Combat Desertification*.⁷

Membership

In 2013, UNEA replaced the former Governing Council of UN Environment, which was

¹ United Nations General Assembly. "The Future We Want." *A/RES/66/288*. 2012.

² United Nations Environment Programme. "About the UN Environment Assembly.": United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. "Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment." *A/CONF.48/14/Rev.1*. 1972.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ United Nations Environment Programme. "UN Environment Assembly and Governing Council."

⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. "About UN Environment."

⁶ United Nations General Assembly. "Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental co-operation." *A/RES/2997(XXVII)*. 1972; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. "United Nations Handbook 2017-18." 2017.

⁷ Johnson. "The First 40 Years." 2012; Convention on Biological Diversity. "The Rio Conventions."

comprised of 58 members.⁸ UNEA's membership includes all UN Member States and the UN's permanent observers are welcomed to its sessions.⁹ UNEA's universal membership helps to strengthen the role of UN Environment in international affairs and increase the responsiveness of Member States in developing environmental policy.¹⁰ UN Environment has a Secretariat that is responsible for supporting UNEA and consists of a rotating President, three Vice-Presidents, and a Rapporteur.¹¹ There is also a Committee of Permanent Representatives, which is a permanent subsidiary body of UNEA that prepares for meetings, monitors the implementation of its decisions, and provides advice to UN Environment between the sessions of the Assembly.¹² The UNEA, with a universal membership, is now composed of 193 Member States.

Reporting

UN Environment reports both to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹³ UN Environment is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya and has six offices dispersed globally that undertake projects on regional and local levels.¹⁴ Each office holds yearly Regional Consultation Meetings with various civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders in order to engage in an environmental policy dialogue.¹⁵ The offices then bring any concerns or ideas from these meetings to the next UNEA session for wider discussion.¹⁶

Current Meetings

The fifth session of the UNEA took place online and in Nairobi Kenya earlier this year. Following that most recent meeting, the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly was followed by a special session, called UNEP@50, held in March of 2022, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of UNEP. The theme for the special session was "Strengthening UNEP for the implementation of the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".¹⁷

⁸ United Nations General Assembly. "Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental co-operation." A/RES/2997(XXVII). 1972

⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. "Directory: Committee of Permanent Representatives to the UN Environment." 2019

¹⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. "About the UN Environment Assembly."

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly. "Change of the designation of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme." A/67/784. 2013.

¹² United Nations Environment Programme. "Committee of Permanent Representatives: Overview."

¹³ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. "United Nations Handbook 2017-18." 2017.

¹⁴ United Nations Environment Programme. "Civil society engagement."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Home: UNEP@50." Home | UNEP@50. Accessed September 4, 2022.

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https://www.unenvironment.org/about-unenvironment?_ga=2.109303429.1255774256.1533999760-864816293.1533999760.

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<https://www.unenvironment.org/civil-society-engagement>.

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<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/29217/CPR%20directorynew.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

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[http://undocs.org/A/RES/2997\(XXVII\)](http://undocs.org/A/RES/2997(XXVII)).

United Nations General Assembly. "The Future We Want." A/RES/66/288. 2012.
<http://undocs.org/A/RES/66/288>.

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<http://undocs.org/A/RES/67/251>.



United Nations Environmental Assembly

Topic I: Mobilizing Civil Society for the Achievement of SDG 13

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) has long been working together with its Member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With less than a decade to successfully complete the 17 goals set by the UN, there is a call for global, local, and people action to take place through the Decade of Action Initiative¹. The Earth is 1.1 degrees C warmer than it was in the 1800s, and this temperature rise is a cause of climate change². The anthropogenic cause is the increased emission of Green House Gases (GHG). Greenhouse gases are gases that, while in the atmosphere, absorb infrared radiation. This absorption creates an effect like a greenhouse would, trapping this energy in the atmosphere and heating the planet. Some of the GHGs are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and water vapor.³ Earth is a connected system, so climate change will affect all member states, whether it be through sea-level rise, an increasing number of severe weather events, or displacement of people. SDG 13 is Climate Action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact. Under SDG 13 there are 5 targets, which are to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related disasters, integrate climate change measures into policies and planning, build knowledge and capacity to meet climate change, implement the UN framework convention on climate change, and promote mechanisms to raise capacity for planning and management.⁴

Background

On March 21st, 1994, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) came into existence, and today, 197 countries, being called Parties of the Convention, have ratified it.⁵ The goal of the UNFCCC is to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions as to prevent human-caused disruption to our climate system. Wanting to further the response to climate change, in December 1997, the *Kyoto Protocol* was adopted⁶. The protocol focuses on developed countries and those with developing economies, and it binds them to their emissions targets, as it had described them as being larger contributors to the increased GHG emissions. Thirty-seven industrialized countries, economies in transition, and the European Union are bound to emission

¹ United Nations. Decade of Action.n.d.

² United Nations. "Climate Action Fast Facts."

³ United Nations News. "5 Things you should know about the greenhouse gasses warming the planet. 2022.

⁴ United Nations. "17 Goals to Transform Our World."n.d.

⁵ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. "What is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?". n.d.

⁶ Ibid.

reduction targets as stated in Annex B of the document⁷. Later, in December 2021, the *Doha Amendment* was adopted to the protocol.⁸ New commitments, an updated list of greenhouse gases, and several articles of the Kyoto Protocol were part of the Doha amendment. National measures are the main passageway for these countries to meet their targets, and there are also three market-based mechanisms that can be used. There are currently 192 parties signed to the protocol.

Adopted in 2015, at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21), the Paris Agreement is a five-year cycle of climate action taken by the member states⁹. As of 2022, the international treaty has been adopted by 193 Parties and has the goal to decrease global rising temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius as well as limit greenhouse gas emissions to realize climate neutral world by 2050¹⁰. The Paris Climate Agreement is unique because of its binding multilateral and international nature to unite nations across the globe in the common fight against climate change. The treaty seeks to implement such change through aiding countries with economic and social transformation, financial support, as well as technical and capacity building. Every five years, countries are supposed to submit climate action plans. These plans are known as Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), and countries are asked to also focus on long-term strategies.¹¹The Katowice Climate Package was later agreed upon at the 2018 UN Climate Change Conference (COP24). This package states how the Paris Agreement is/would be implemented.¹²

General Assembly resolution 70/1¹³ was adopted in 2015, and it was a pathway for Sustainable Development for all member states. This resolution produced the Sustainable Development Goals that we know today. There are 17 goals that identify issues of poverty, education, health, social protection, etc.¹⁴. Goal 13 calls for action to combat climate change and its impacts. There are 5 targets under SDG 13, which are to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related disasters, integrate climate change measures into policies and planning, build knowledge and capacity to meet climate change, implement the UN framework convention on climate change, and promote mechanisms to raise capacity for planning and management.¹⁵However, these frameworks recognize that the issues presented in the goals go together with one another and that they all impact climate change.¹⁶

⁷ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. "What is the Kyoto Protocol." United Nations n.d.

⁸ United Nations. "DOHA AMENDMENT TO THE KYOTO PROTOCOL." 1/CMP.8. 2012.

⁹ United Nations Climate Action. "The Paris Agreement." 2015.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly. The Paris Climate Agreement. 2015

¹² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. "Report of the Conference of the Parties on its twenty-fourth session held in Katowice from 2 to 15 December 2018." FCCC/CP/2018/10/Add.1. 2019

¹³ United Nations General Assembly. "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." A/RES/70/1. 2015

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¹⁵ United Nations. "Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts". United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. N.d.

¹⁶ Ibid.

In 2021, COP26 was held in Glasgow¹⁷. Almost 200 countries attended the convention, and the end product of the negotiations was the *Glasgow Climate Pact*. The agreement provides the building blocks for the advancement of the Paris Climate Agreement. In the document, member states agreed upon recognizing the emergency, accelerating action, moving away from fossil fuels, delivering on climate finance, completing the Paris Rulebook, and focusing on loss and damage.¹⁸ The Paris Rulebook is the finished version of the Katowice Climate Package¹⁹.

Current Situation

Currently, the timeline to complete the goals of SDG 13 is behind schedule. One reason for this delay is the COVID 19 pandemic.²⁰ During the pandemic, greenhouse emissions did decrease, but the carbon dioxide accumulation from the past decade still exists in the atmosphere. Furthermore, by September 2020, carbon dioxide emissions were back to pre-pandemic (2019) levels.²¹ There were also significant economic losses around the globe, from the people (job loss) to industries (bankruptcies). To combat this loss, the UN has prompted nations to "recover better," where the economic recovery after the pandemic is intertwined with a plan for a healthier and greener planet.²² The UN secretary-general set six initiatives to help forward the recovery. These are investing in green jobs, not bailing out polluting industries, ending fossil fuel subsidies, including climate in all decisions, working together, and leaving no one behind as the world advances.²³ Other UN bodies such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are helping bring these initiatives forward.²⁴

As the UN and its Member states are continuously working towards decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and recovering from the pandemic, there is still the concern of the effects of climate change that are happening today.²⁵ Stated previously, the Earth has warmed by 1.1C since the last century, and this warming is already having severe effects in several areas such as weather, food security, and economics²⁶. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) prepares assessment, special, and

¹⁷ United Nations. "Glasgow Climate Pact." Decision-/CMA.3. 2021.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. "The Katowice climate package: Making The Paris Agreement Work For All." United Nations. n.d.

²⁰ United Nations. "Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts". United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. n.d.

²¹ Ibid.

²² United Nations COVID-19 Response. "Climate Change and COVID-19: UN urges nations to 'recover better.'" 2022.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaption and Vulnerability (Summary for Policymakers)." 2022.

²⁶ United Nations. "Climate Action Fast Facts." n.d.

methodology reports and looks at the state of knowledge of Climate change²⁷. Their most recent report, the sixth assessment report, was published in 2022.²⁸

Severe Weather Events and Adaptation

One effect of climate change that Member States are experiencing today is an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. These events include flooding, droughts, wildfires, heatwaves, and hurricanes and have impacts on ecosystems, people, cities, and infrastructure.²⁹

Food production has become of notable concern due to these events. Droughts have occurred in 75% of global harvested areas and have caused smaller crop yields. Crops such as maize, soybeans, and wheat are experiencing a decrease in yields.³⁰ For example, in 2010, floods in Pakistan cost 4.5 billion USD due to the damage done to crops.³¹ The IPCC addresses these events, stating that the consequences of such events can cause food scarcity to increase.³²

Furthermore, when temperatures rise, more water evaporates, causing more rainfall, flooding, and more destructive storms³³. As the ocean warms, the warmer water provides energy for stronger and more frequent cyclones, hurricanes, and typhoons to be created. While the number of these storms has decreased, their destructiveness has increased, for there have been increased wind speeds and rainfall percentages.³⁴ For example, the five costliest hurricanes have happened since 2005, with hurricane Katrina costing \$180.0 billion in damages.³⁵ Low-lying megacities, islands, coasts, and deltas are considered vulnerable to these severe weather events.³⁶

SDG 13 has "strengthened resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries" as Target 13.1, and there is evidence that there is global progress to adapting to hazards like those mentioned above³⁷. A factor in this conclusion is that there are national-level adaptation plans in a lot of the member states, but there is still room for improvement if adaptation financing.³⁸ An example of adaption can be seen in many countries, such as Ghana, which is improving its management of fish hatcheries, and in Albania, which is restoring on the Kune-Vain Lagoon³⁹. These

²⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaption and Vulnerability (Summary for Policymakers)." 2022.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "Chapter 5: Food, Fibre, and other Ecosystem Products." IPCC. 2021.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ United Nations. "Causes and Effects of Climate Change." n.d.

³⁴ Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory. "Global Warming and Hurricanes." 2022.

³⁵ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaption and Vulnerability (Summary for Policymakers)." 2022.

³⁶ National Oceanic Atmosphere Administration. "Costliest US Tropical Cyclones." n.d.

³⁷ United Nations. "Climate Adaption" United Nations: Climate Action. n.d.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

are a few examples of what strengthening resilience and adaptation to climate change hazards can be.

Education

Education is an important factor in combating climate change, and education is the responsibility of the Parties of the Convention of the UNFCCC⁴⁰. There are 1.8 million young people on the globe, ranging in ages from 10 to 24; There are several programs set out to help inform the youth about climate change.⁴¹ The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO,) through the climate change initiative, has created the Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development program (CCESD). The program aims to increase climate literacy among young people.⁴² There are four programs in the initiative:

1. Climate Science and Knowledge,
2. Climate Change Education (CCE) in the context of Education for Sustainability Development ESD),
3. Climate Change, Cultural and Biological Diversity, and Cultural Heritage
4. Climate Change, Ethics, Social and Human Dimensions⁴³

The Objects of the CCESD focus on strengthening the capacity of Member States to teach climate change education and raising awareness and is implementing article 6 of UNFCCC.⁴⁴

An obstacle of climate change education is misinformation. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) summarizes every six to seven years of research data on climate change. In recent years the IPCC has established that the human factor in contribution to global warming not only can no longer be ignored but is, in fact, the dominant factor in climate change. Education about climate change is spreading across the globe, and scientific information errors, such as misleading statistics or other misinformation leads, to a larger percentage of disregard and discredit of the science community, as well as lower the acceptance of climate change within populations.⁴⁵ Polarization and political dispute about the acceptance and legitimacy of scientific research further challenge the implementation of climate change efforts.⁴⁶ In the

⁴⁰ United Nations. "Education is Key to Addressing Climate Change." United Nations: Climate Action. n.d. r

⁴¹ United Nations. "Youth." United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. n.d.

⁴² The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. "Climate change education for sustainable development: the UNESCO climate change initiative." The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. ED.2010/WS/41. 2010.

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. "Climate change education for sustainable development: the UNESCO climate change initiative." The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. ED.2010/WS/41. 2010.

⁴⁵ Cook, J. "Understanding and countering misinformation about climate change." Handbook of Research on Deception, Fake News, and Misinformation Online. (pp. 281-306). 2019.

⁴⁶ Ibid

common Agenda, as discussed by the UN Secretary-General, there is an "Infodemic" going on in the world at the moment and is needed to be addressed and tracked.⁴⁷

Future Outlook

Member States have different needs and situations that affect how they combat climate change at a people, local, and global level. If more action isn't taken to mobilize those around the globe, then there is a chance that SDG 13 will not be fulfilled, and if temperatures rise more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, then there are additional severe risks and impacts that can occur to people and their environment⁴⁸. As everything on Earth is connected, all member states will face risks associated with climate change. These risks can include, not having enough food, increased health risk, increased severe weather events, and increased occurrences of the displacement of people.⁴⁹

Focus Questions

1. What is your Member State's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)?
2. What is hindering your Member State from reaching that contribution?
3. How are severe weather events affecting your Member States? How might these events affect them in the future?
4. How can people be motivated to take action for the completion of SDG 13 at a local level?
5. In what ways has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your Member State's ability to take action?

⁴⁷ United Nations. "Our Common Agenda." 2021

⁴⁸ United Nations. "Climate Action Fast Facts." n.d.

⁴⁹ United Nations. "Causes and Effects of Climate Change." n.d.

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<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/17-goals-to-transform-our-world>



United Nations Environmental Assembly

Topic II: 50 Years On: The 1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

Introduction

2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Entering into force in 1975, the CITES treaty continues to be known as the oldest and largest international environmental agreements and laid the foundation for the rise in global environmental governance. In the mid-20th century, many governments, international organizations, and environmental experts became increasingly concerned about the impact of overexploitation of vulnerable resources and species via international trade. In response, the international community sought to regulate this trade through the CITES treaty with the primary objective of protecting at-risk wildlife species and prevent their extinction. The Conference of Parties (CoP) have met every three years to discuss the progress of implementation, the necessary revisions to the list of protected wildlife, and ways in which to further compliance with the treaty, though the core text of the Convention has remained unchanged since it was adopted.

As the international community reflects on 50 years of CITES, discussion can be focused on both the successes and shortcomings of the treaty. CITES represents the primary international framework for addressing the international illegal wildlife trade and has resulted in several major successes with over 38,000 species of animals and plants now under some form of international trade regulation. However, despite measurable efforts in combatting illegal wildlife trade and promoting conservation efforts globally, CITES has also been criticized for inconsistent implementation. CITES has also been criticized by some members of the international community for not accounting for cultural traditions and development concerns. Furthermore, one of the most important criticisms of CITES is that it does not do enough to curb market demand illicitly trafficked wildlife. As the global economy has changed and the population has grown, so has the demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products for food, medicine, furniture, and status.

Background

Collaborative, internationally focused discussion on the environment started soon after the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 when Member States created the UN Scientific Conference. This extension of the UN was tasked with developing strategies to bolster socioeconomic development and provide guidelines on the utilization of natural resources.¹ This focus evolved into preservation and the

¹ Peter Jackson. "From Stockholm to Kyoto: A Brief History of Climate Change." 2007.

enhancement of the human environment, which led to the first major UN forum on worldwide environmental issues in 1972: the UN Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Conference). The Conference is considered a watershed moment in the field's evolution as Member States committed to the regulation of trade regarding endangered species through the adoption of CITES.² The treaty, which was originally drafted in 1963, was presented to Member States by an UN-accredited non-governmental organization, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). After significant negotiations regarding language, regulation requirements, and structure, Member States eventually adopted the CITES treaty as amended. The legally binding Convention entered into force in 1975 with over 80 signatures. Today, CITES enjoys near universal membership and “regulates the trade of approximately 30,000 species of plants and 5,600 species of animals.”³

Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties, it does not take the place of national law. The treaty provides a framework, and each Party must adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level. CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls. All import, export, re-export, and introduction from the sea of species covered by the convention must be authorized through a licensing system. This is managed by the CoP through the CITES Appendices. Appendix I is regarded as the most crucial, as it lists the 38,000+ endangered species that are strictly banned from international trade. In special cases, such as for scientific research, permits are granted through the CITES treaty but are closely watched by the CoP and its related entities to ensure that there is no room for overexploitation of the permit. Appendix II defines species that are at risk of endangerment and are therefore monitored closely by the CoP and conservation groups. Aside from changes to the list of species in the Appendices, the CoP have met every three years to discuss the progress of implementation and ways in which to further compliance with the treaty, though the core text of the Convention has remained unchanged since it was adopted.

While regulation of wildlife trade for conservation purposes was a relatively new concept when CITES was conceived, the treaty has since played an invaluable role in international environmental governance. Along with jumpstarting international discussion and action on sustainable resource management and wildlife preservation, CITES has influenced the creation of new international agreements that further its original goals. Such examples include the Convention on Biological Diversity and Sustainable Development Goals 13, 14, and 15. CITES Strategic Vision 2021-2030 was adopted by the CoP to “ensure that CITES policy developments are mutually supportive of international environmental priorities and take into account new international initiatives,” particularly in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁴

²United Nations. Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. 1972.

³United Nations. “What is CITES?” N.d.

⁴CITES. “CITES Strategic Vision.” N.d.

Current Situation

International cooperation relating to conservation and environmental governance began to rise in the early 1970s along with the creation of the CITES treaty. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP), founded in 1972, often provides resources, such as legal and technical support, to governments and non-state actors to further CITES implementation strategies. Most recently, UNEP organized an expert workshop that focused specifically the implementation of CITES through fisheries legislation with the goal of further strengthening the “capacity of developing countries to ensure the sustainability, legality, and traceability of international trade” of Appendix-listed species.⁵

In 2010, CITES helped spearhead a collaborative effort to address a significant rise in illegal wildlife trade through the establishment of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC).⁶ Along with the CITES Secretariat, partner agencies of the ICWC include INTERPOL, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank, and the World Customs Organization (WCO). These partners work directly with national authorities tasked with wildlife law and enforcement to combat wildlife and forest crime, including the illegal trade of Appendix-listed species.⁷ Over the past decade, ICWC has expanded its country and regional offices to provide “operational support, technical assistance, and comprehensive training and capacity building to law enforcement, prosecutorial, and judicial authorities.”⁸

The 74th meeting of CITES’ Standing Committee reached a close in March of 2022 where delegates and international observers convened to create resolutions and decisions that will be left to the approval of the CITES CoP in mid-November. Attendees discussed potentially adding more species to the Appendices, strategies for increased compliance and implementation of CITES in areas of high wildlife tracking, as well as recommendations regarding regulation of specimens produced through biotechnology and more research on the impact of CITES on reducing zoonotic disease emergence.

Capacity-building for Enforcement

Implementation efforts for CITES are decentralized, meaning it was left up to each State Party to adhere to the treaty through domestic policy. This has generated a significant gap in compliance among Member States. Some critics have noted that CITES was written in the 1960s by environmental experts and discussed among mainly industrialized countries which led to a high threshold of requirements to fully ratify the treaty. This left several countries who signed on to CITES after it was created without the same level of capacity to implement. The CoP, along with other international capacity-building organizations, have made efforts to assist these States through various means.

⁵UNEP. “Implementing CITES through fisheries legislative frameworks.” 2019.

⁶SDG Knowledge Platform. “CITES: A contribution to the global follow-up and review in the 2017 High Level Political Forum on the work of CITES.” N.d.

⁷CITES. “The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime.” N.d.

⁸Ibid.

The CITES Secretariat works to provide the resources necessary for Member States to further implement the treaty. This includes workshops for specified info pertaining to animal welfare, databases for Member States to find appropriate placement for wildlife, and assistance in the transport of specimens and disposal of confiscated specimens and even leads discussions about best practices and inclusion.

Workshops

Members to CITES have many important parameters to maintain in order to ensure the safety and welfare of the plants and animals they work to protect. As the situation for any particular species may rapidly change, CITES works to inform Member States workshops. These workshops can have a wide range of focuses but primarily fall under two categories. The legal questions around animal welfare and the information specific to regional welfare efforts. Workshops have included topics such as the legal acquisition of wildlife in 2018⁹ and the S. African M.I.K.E (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants) workshop in 2000¹⁰

Trade Database and Tradeview

CITES also operates the incredibly useful databases that connect experts with the animals and plants they can help sustain. With so many Member States and so many “National Authorities, not to mention the complex system each county uses to administer the protocols of the CITES treaty, it is important to have a centralized location for data. Unlike many other UN databases, CITES Trade database and Tradeview deal with living plants and animals, many of which are in danger of extinction. This means the data must be factual and up to date in order to ensure the mission of protecting any critically endangered species and ensuring the welfare of every species.

Transport and Disposal

The CITES Database and Tradeview are key to finding the correct placement for flora and fauna in need. The next hurdle for member states is to transport those at-risk species to their placements. CITES provides guidelines for transport of live specimens.¹¹ These guidelines are key to ensuring that human interactions help the specimens to survive. Guidelines for live animal transport, perishable cargo transport and non-air transport are just a few examples of the standards created by the CITES secretariat to ensure safe transport for endangered species.

In some cases, member state authorities find specimens that need disposal. Whether it is a specimen that has been illegally traded and needs to be sent to the country of origin or a specimen that needs to be disposed of, CITES provides standards to ensure that

⁹CITES Secretariate. “CITES holds first workshop on the legal acquisition of wildlife.” CITES. N.d.

¹⁰CITES Secretariate. “S. Africa Mike workshop Sept. 2000.” CITES. N.d.

¹¹CITES Secretariate. “Transport of live specimens.” CITES. N.d.

member states do not perpetuate illegal activity through incomplete disposal. These guidelines include instructions on building sustainable sanctuaries and rehabilitation centers, guidelines for euthanasia (if necessary) and standards specific to certain species.

Best Practices

Finally, along with the more specific assistance, CITES provides conferences concerned with the best practices of member states. This can be anything from regional efforts on specific species to announcing and combating specific threats. Moreover, these conferences can focus on way to better the overall protection of endangered species by educating member states on inclusion.¹²

Combating the Illegal Wildlife Trade

Although notoriously difficult to monitor, the UN Development Programme estimates the annual value of the illegal wildlife trade at over \$23 billion USD, with rising prices of illegal products such as ivory and rhino horns reaching up to \$100,000 USD for a single specimen.¹³ Failure to properly implement the CITES treaty or regulate wildlife trade has significant consequences, not only for the environment and the protection of endangered species, but also for socioeconomic and political stability.¹⁴ CITES was created solely to regulate the trade of at-risk species, but actors in global environmental governance, such as the UNEP, have called on the CITES CoP to focus more on the broader set of externalities caused by the illegal trade. If the illegal trade of wildlife continues to grow, the depletion or extinction of species can result in a significant loss of biodiversity, unpredictable ecosystem changes, and raise undue burden on the human population.¹⁵ The main issue of the illegal wildlife trade is that it contributes to the loss of biodiversity. Reducing or removing a species from a particular ecosystem can generate many unintended consequences.

Focus Questions

1. What has your country done at the local and national level to implement CITES?
2. How has the legal and illegal trade of wildlife impacted your country/region?
3. What/if any capacity building measures is your country lacking to implement CITES, and what solutions is it advocating for at the UN?
4. Are there any regional organizations or mechanisms that exist alongside, or work to implement CITES?

¹² <https://cites.org/eng/news/international-day-of-the-worlds-indigenous-peoples>

¹³ UNDP. "Combating Poaching and Wildlife Trafficking." 2015.

¹⁴ UNODC. "Impacts of Wildlife Trafficking." N.d.

¹⁵ UNEP. "There are no winners in the illegal trade in wildlife." 2020.

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