

Global Environmental Governance

- **What Is Global Environmental Governance?**

- *Global environmental governance* has become a key term in environmental and resource politics.
- This reflects the high popularity of the governance concept today: Whereas the Internet in 1997 had only 3418 references to global governance, in January 2008, over 589,000 sites mentioned the term.
- Almost any process or structure of environmental politics that goes beyond national boundaries has been described as part of global environmental governance.
- Whether it is the influence of nongovernmental organizations on environmental policy making, the role of expert networks or the increased relevance of transnational environmental institutions, global environmental governance generally serves as overarching conceptual orientation.
- Yet what global environmental governance eventually means, and what the key elements of this recent concept are, often remains ill defined

- Despite the rather recent origin of the concept of global environmental governance, much of what is framed today under this term has predecessors, dating back to studies of international environmental cooperation around the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm.
- The most relevant precursor of the current debate is the research programme on international environmental regimes of the 1980s and 1990s.
- The important questions then were the creation of environmental regimes, their maintenance, and their eventual effectiveness.
- Other earlier research addressed intergovernmental environmental organizations and nonstate environmental organizations, both of which have received fresh attention in the current global governance discourse.

- *Global environmental governance describes world politics that is no longer confined to nation states but are characterized by increasing participation of actors that have so far been largely active at the subnational level.*
- This multi-actor governance includes: private actors, such as networks of experts, environmentalists, and multinational corporations, but also new agencies set up by governments, including intergovernmental organizations and international courts.
- What is novel is not simply the increase in numbers, but also the ability of non-state actors to take part in steering the political system.

- Many vital institutions of global environmental governance are today inclusive of, or even driven by, non-state actors.
- Nongovernmental organizations have joined governments to put international norms into practice, for example, as quasi-implementing agencies for development assistance programs administered by the World Bank or other multilateral and bilateral agencies.

- Private actors, both for-profit and nonprofit, also participate in global institutions to address environmental problems without being forced, persuaded, or funded by states and other public agencies, for example, in the area of forest and fisheries governance.
- This “agency beyond the state” sets global environmental governance apart from more traditional international environmental politics.

- There are three elements to this new development.
- First, the number of actors and the degree of their participation in global environmental governance have increased substantially over the past decades.
- *Second*, the variety of types of organizations has increased too.
- Next to governments, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and business actors, novel forms of organizations have emerged, such as private rule-making organizations (such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), one of the best-known private institutions in global environmental politics) and public-private partnerships in issue areas ranging from forest management to biodiversity conservation.

- *Third*, established organizations have adopted new roles and responsibilities.
- For example, many intergovernmental organizations have acquired a higher degree of autonomy from their principals (i.e., the governments that have established them), and many nongovernmental organizations today engage in agenda setting, policy formulation, and the establishment of rules and regulations.

- Private rule-making organizations, such as the FSC, performs three additional functions that shape the contours of global governance:
 - ✓ 1) facilitating a solution to complex multi-interest problems;
 - ✓ 2) brokering knowledge and norms among a wide range of stakeholders; and,
 - ✓ 3) constituting a learning network in environmental governance.

- **Characteristics of Global Environmental Governance**
- *i) Growing role of nongovernmental lobbying organizations*
- Activist groups, business associations, and policy research institutes now provide research and policy advice, monitor the commitments of states, inform governments and the public about the actions of their own diplomats and those of negotiation partners, and give diplomats at international meetings direct feedback.
- Carefully orchestrated campaigns of environmentalists have proved able to change foreign policy of powerful nation states.

- *ii) Increasing Relevance of Network of Scientists*
- Networks of scientists have assumed a new role in providing complex technical information that is indispensable for policy making on issues marked by analytic and normative uncertainty.
- Although the new role of experts in world politics is evident in many policy areas, it is particularly prevalent in the field of global environmental policy.
- New transnational networks of scientists and experts have emerged, in a mix of self-organization and state sponsorship, to provide scientific information on both the kind of environmental problem at stake and the options for decision makers.
- Such scientific advice for political decision making is not new in world politics; negotiations on fishing quotas, for example, have long been assisted by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea.

- *iii) Direct Role of Business in Environmental Decision-making*
- Business has taken a more prominent direct role in international environmental decision making.
- The influence of major companies on international affairs is not new. However, in the past, the corporate sector usually influenced decisions indirectly through national governments.
- Today, many corporations take a more visible, direct role in international negotiations as immediate partners of governments, for example, in the framework of the United Nations and of the Global Compact, which major corporations have concluded with the world organization.

- *iv) Increasing Influence of Intergovernmental Organizations*
- The global environmental governance is marked by an increasing influence of intergovernmental organizations.
- In the field of environmental policy, more than 200 international organizations have been set up in the form of secretariats to the many international environmental treaties concluded in the past two decades.
- Recent scholarship has highlighted the autonomous role of many of these international organizations in creating and disseminating knowledge, shaping powerful discourses on environmental problems and adequate solutions to them, influencing negotiations through ideas and expertise, and implementing solutions on the ground.

- *v) Increasing Relevance of Public Actors at the Subnational Level*
- Global environmental governance is characterized by the increasing relevance of public actors at the subnational level.
- Cities, for example, have gained prominence in global environmental governance, in particular through their collaboration on climate change mitigation.
- In the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign (CCP), more than 650 local governments work together with a view to adopting policies and implementing quantifiable measures to reduce local greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and enhance urban quality of life .
- More than 650 local governments participate in the CCP, integrating climate change mitigation into their decision-making processes.
- The International Council for Local Environment Initiatives (ICLEI) runs this highly successful and widely recognized campaign either regionally or nationally in Australia, Canada, Europe, Japan, Latin America, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the United States.

- *vi) The Increasing Role of Nonstate Actors*
- Nonstate actors have become the center of major political reform debates.
- Developing countries, in particular, often object to increases in the influence of nongovernmental organizations in international forums because they view these groups as being more favorable to Northern agendas, perspectives, and interests.
- Developing countries argue that most nongovernmental organizations are headquartered in industrialized countries, that most public and private funds donated to their cause come from the North, and that this situation influences the agenda of these groups to be more accountable to Northern audiences.