

The Leadership Role of UNEP in Environmental Diplomacy in East Africa

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Abstract

There is no country or group of countries which can solve environmental problems by themselves, including the powerful developed nations of the North. This therefore calls for an international body dealing with environmental issues in providing leadership, negotiation, implementation of policies and accountability in solving environmental issues. This study aims to determine whether the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) plays a leadership role in environmental diplomacy in the East African region. This study was guided by the Diplomatic Theory of International Relations. The study adopted a case study research design. Data was collected from secondary sources and analyzed thematically by constructing themes that helped discuss the roles of UNEP in environmental diplomacy in East Africa. Data was presented in a narrative form which was derived from evidence secondary sources that were used to support and illustrate themes.

Index Terms: Environmental issues, UNEP, leadership role, environmental diplomacy, East Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of environmental diplomacy is old. The major concerns of the environment that have existed for a long time include shedding the peace dividend, dealing with global dynamics like the population growth, economic development of the south, the looming global environmental crisis and the spread of democracy and human rights (Benedick, 1998). The United Nations Programme (UNEP) dates back to 1972 when it was established following the United Nations (Stockholm) Conference on the Human Environment (Churchill & Ulfstein, 2000). Through environmental diplomacy, UNEP aims at promoting shared use of common environmental threats and natural resources as a method for confidence-building, dialogue and cooperation among divided countries and communities. UNEP usually acts as a trusted third party in the international community and is involved in the resolution of potential and existing conflicts which arise from natural resources and the environment.

There are continuous scientific warnings on the impacts of enormous economic expansion as well prosperity of the last half-century on the environment (Benedick, 1998). These impacts are starting to deplete the fragile and important natural cycles upon which all plants and animals depend on for survival. Uncontrolled population growth, use of land and other natural resources and over-consumption are seen to lead to intense effects on the future new generations with far different environmental problems as opposed to the problems of the past. This study was driven by a desire to find out the role of UNEP in enhancing environmental diplomacy in East Africa, due to the emerging trans-boundary problems in the field of environment. The important roles that should be played in enhancing environmental diplomacy include leadership roles, negotiation roles, implementation of the policies drafted and transparency at all levels. UNEP therefore must play these roles in ensuring effective international environment harmony.

Over the last two decades, there were mainly localized issues of the environment such as urban air pollution, waste disposal and unsafe water supplies. These problems still exist mainly in developing countries which are now industrializing. Nevertheless, new environmental challenges have emerged having different scopes. Thinning of the stratospheric ozone layer, climate change, pollution of oceans and depletion of fish stocks, spread of dry lands and soil erosion, widespread extinction of animal and plant species, massive destruction of forests and persistent organic pollutants are spreading their impacts all over the world (El-Kholy, 2012). This therefore implies a new form of threat to human well-being. The linkages among these incongruous issues are in form of harmonized biological, physical and chemical feedbacks and causal factors. The risks these problems can bring to the world have given rise to calls for in-depth solutions, and this can only be achieved through new levels of international cooperation.

It is evident that there is no country or group of countries, which can solve these planetary problems by themselves, including the powerful developed nations of the North (Petsonk, 1989). This therefore calls for an international body dealing with environmental issues in providing leadership, negotiation, implementation of policies made as well as accountability in solving these environmental issues. This study therefore aimed to determine whether UNEP plays a leadership role in environmental diplomacy in the East African region.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the Diplomatic Theory of International Relations. The theory was developed by Sharp (2009). The theory argues that diplomacy occurs wherever people live in different groups as opposed to it taking place simply between states. Sharp (1999) earlier demanded on the need for the insights on diplomatic theory and the demand for diplomacy are on the rise. Unlike the conventional application of international relations theory in making sense of the role of diplomats, this study will contribute to insights in environmental issues by the diplomats. According to Sharp (2009), the lessons obtained from diplomacy should not be judged fast but we should be ready to appease them and also be alert on claims obtained on partial grounds. This theory was important to this study in determining international relations between states and in determining the role of diplomats, in this case, UNEP, in provision of insights in environmental issues.

RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

Over the last few years, the world has experienced rising numbers of international multilateral negotiations which have an objective of solving the emerging environmental issues. Some of these international agreements include the Montreal Protocol; Vienna Convention; Basel Convention; the UNCED, the Global Environment Facility; the Commission on Sustainable Development and Agenda 21; the Convention on Biological Diversity; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States of 1994; the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks of 1993; the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification of 1994; the International Conference on Population and Development of 1994; the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change of 1997 among other agreements aimed at promoting environmental sustainability.

The environment is considered as a dimension, and not a separate discipline, which bears a wide range of activities impinging upon the biological, physical, cultural and social aspects of the human environment. By its given mandate, UNEP promotes environmental coordination across international and local organizations. It also motivates them in emphasizing the environment in their examinations and discussions in promoting quality and healthier lives and environment which result from effective management of the environment. Member states of UNEP benefit from this organization by receiving technical expertise which helps the countries in transforming their local and trans-boundary conflicts on environment and natural resources into cooperation, confidence building and joint benefit opportunities (UNEP, 2016).

The UNCED (also referred to as the Earth Summit) of 1992 in Rio de Janeiro truly defined diplomatic actions in the environment and its relationship with development (Benedick, 1998). One of the successes of this convention is that it attracted the largest number of participants in the international relations history. In addition, with the environmental sector capturing the headlines globally over sustainable development for the first time, the environment could no longer be left to the environmentalists alone but to the entire sectors of the economy. According to Benedick (1998) the environmental issues were increasingly taken over by foreign ministries and governmental parts such as agriculture, economics, finance, science, development cooperation, and energy sectors.

These sectors also became increasingly supportive in ensuring environmental competence. There was commissioning of special ambassadors who were given duties to oversee and coordinate the complicated environmental negotiations, with their expertise in the areas such as technology, finance, economics and traditional ecological subjects proving vital (Brown, 2015). It was clear therefore that it was everyone's responsibility in catering for the environmental conditions. Currently, countries are establishing councils working on sustainable development in order to combine the relevant local governments, ministries and citizens' groups in environmental welfare.

Another environmental agreement, ozone protocol, became the first environmental agreement explaining how preventative actions could be applied before the state of the environment could be harmed. Human health would therefore be protected as well as the environment from future threats which have now become a reality. The provisions contained in this agreement could influence the nature of environmental negotiations in the future and this represented a significant change in international diplomacy (El-Kholy, 2012).

Sustainable development should be agreed upon a goal by national representatives who play primary actors (Susskind & Ali, 2014). International legal instruments, such as protocols, binding conventions and nonbinding guidelines, play key roles in achieving bilateral and multilateral environmental cooperation. Since there exists no global organization with power to ensure such instruments are put in place, voluntary compliance may be used to determine their effectiveness (Petsonk, 1989). The current environmental awareness resurgence at both national and international levels has contributed to compliance to these instruments.

Since 1972 when the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was incepted, this organization has played a significant role in environmental diplomacy. It has held negotiations and achieved adoption of nearly thirty binding multilateral agreements, such as the very important Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer of 1987 and up to 10 non-binding guidelines and principles in the environment sector.

Based on the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol, UNEP is coming up with a framework convention on global climate change. UNEP played a significant role in the drafting, negotiating and obtaining the adoption of the Basel Convention and it is working towards obtaining the entry into force of this convention. UNEP also is the secretariat the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Susskind & Ali, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a case study research design. Inspection of the cases was done in depth and were based on historical materials to explore theoretical ideas and answer the research question for the study. Data was collected from secondary sources. This involved reviewing material sources in the form of journals, books and reports. According to De Vos and Marchetti (2002) collecting data related to qualitative approach is less structured and that various data collection methods can be applied. As O'Leary (2004) observed, research can be done alone, but cannot be done in isolation. Coming up with new knowledge is essentially dependent on past knowledge. The collected data was analyzed thematically by constructing themes that helped discuss the roles of UNEP in environmental diplomacy in East Africa. Where possible, qualitative data was analyzed using both the deductive and inductive approaches, as suggested by Spencer et al. (2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For international institutions to become indispensable, individual countries must face transboundary problems facing them regardless of military or economic might they have. However, international environmental institutions which are in existence have become failures in curbing environmental problems being faced in the globe (Ivanova, 2010). Recently, UNEP has become a key player in the achievement of synergies and coherence in multilateral environmental agreements body in the global perspective. It has also proven vital in provision of leadership strategies between these agreements and other bodies which have potential to affect environmental treaties including the WTO rules (UNEP, 2016). In achieving coherence, there exists annual Global Ministerial Environment Forum that forms part of the governing council proceedings of UNEP. There also exists the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group which comprises of Ministers who work on International Environmental Governance.

UNEP has adopted a resolution known as "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution" (Assembly, 2011). Here, the focus is on developing guidance for effective mediation by drawing on lessons learned. In addition, UNEP and the UN Department for Political Affairs (UN DPA) came up with collaborative research project to document lessons learned in the mediation of resource disputes at the local and trans-boundary levels, as well as within broader peace agreements. This was in response to the resolution document adopted by UNEP. This work covered extractive resources, land and water (Brown, 2015).

Environmental diplomacy and mediation is often applied at the regional level, the national level and the local levels where cooperation over natural resources can be brokered between divided groups. Apart from policy issues, UNEP has been involved in field work activities which include undertaking field-level research and pilot testing different approaches to determine how the policy work on environmental diplomacy and mediation best translates into practical action on the ground. UNEP has shone its leadership role in scientific authority, procedural foundation, expert leader, political broker and facilitator of successful international regimes.

UNEP as an Expert Leader in Environmental Diplomacy

Since the inception of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1972, this organization has played a significant role in environmental leadership. It has held negotiations as a leader and achieved adoption of nearly thirty binding multilateral agreements, such as the very important Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer of 1987 and up to 10 non-binding guidelines and principles in the environment sector. UNEP played significant leadership roles in the drafting and formation of important international environmental agreements, such as the CBD, ozone layer protection, Persistent Organic compounds (POPs) and desertification agreements.

UNEP is coming up with a framework convention on global climate change. This is based on the Montreal Protocol and Vienna Convention. It is noted that UNEP played a significant role in the drafting, negotiating and obtaining the adoption of the Basel Convention and it is working towards obtaining the entry into force of this convention. UNEP also is the secretariat the

Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. In addition, UNEP was involved in the drafting of the Nairobi Convention which extends from Somalia to South Africa. In recognizing environmental roles and uniqueness of the marine and coastal environment of East Africa as well as the necessity for action to curb the threats, UNEP was contacted to create a seas programme which covers the entire region (UNEP, 1982). This organization can therefore be seen as been successful in the provision of leadership as an expert leader in the diplomatic actions of the environment.

UNEP as a Scientific Leader in Environmental Diplomacy

UNEP has shone its leadership role in scientific authority. UNEP's first major identified success as a scientific leader can be seen in their role in the implementation of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer. This convention became UNEP's model for the following negotiations in all other fields. The process of coming up with the Vienna Convention sharpened the organization's ability to build, scientific, political as well legal support for its activities. This convention resulted to a protocol that gave economic incentives for standards, compliance and methods for readjustment and re-assessment.

UNEP usually starts by looking for scientific evidence on any environmental problem that comes up. After gathering the information required, the organization then develops a strategy for controlling the activities which give rise to the problem, and this is usually done by consolidating political support for its control measures. In developing scientific consensus, UNEP's executive management team which is composed by scientists carries out detailed consultations and obtains diverse viewpoints within and outside the United

Nations system. By undertaking this, the organization identifies stakeholders whom it may need to involve when consolidating its support for the matter (Petsonk, 1989).

UNEP has shown great scientific leadership in environmental agreements. For instance, in the framework for controlling CFCs, there was no scientific evidence. UNEP therefore sought to obtain simultaneous adoption of a framework convention and a protocol controlling CFCs. Because there existed no scientific consensus on the extent of CFC-catalyzed ozone layer depletion, a number of countries which were contributing to the emission of the gases questioned the need for a CFC protocol. However, by the year 1985, the organization had achieved an agreement on only the framework convention.

Slightly after the adoption of the convention, UNEP started intensive negotiations concerning the protocol. Reports from Britain had shown that of a hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica had been increasing. Other evidence obtained scientifically also began to show that other substances other than CFCs were also evident. This therefore led to the Governing Council to recommend that the protocol negotiations consider the full range of ozone-depleting substances in 1987. It is through these efforts that after three months UNEP-convened a diplomatic conference and thereafter adopted the Montreal Protocol (UNEP, 2016).

In the context of global climate change, UNEP together with other agencies are working to develop sound strategies and scientific targets for consideration in the context of a framework convention. The Montreal Protocol did however not direct UNEP to develop control protocols for particular greenhouse gases. So far, halons and CFCs do not deplete the ozone layer only, but also contribute to the greenhouse effect the Montreal Protocol functions as a climate protection measure (Petsonk, 1989).

UNEP as a Political Broker and Facilitator in Environmental Diplomacy

The first convention that UNEP acted as a political broker was the Barcelona Convention. This Convention provided UNEP with a successful and significant model for the further development of international environmental law. In this convention, UNEP invited various representatives in the coastal Mediterranean Sea governments to Barcelona in 1975 with an aim of negotiating and thereafter adopting the nonbinding Mediterranean Plan of Action. This adopted Action Plan provided both the political and scientific basis for the negotiations and this led to the adoption of the Barcelona Convention in 1976 (Pavasovic, 1996).

The organization has always been instrumental in creating of a body of international environmental law and has drawn political attention to a number of issues, ranging from ozone depletion to desertification. Its role is serving as the only international partner of regularly marginalized environment ministries and providing a critical forum where these ministries can meet their counterparts. However, this organization has undergone challenges in serving as interagency coordinator (Brown, 2012). UNEP has failed to establish itself as the organizational home for the international environmental conventions and this has led to other organizations coming in up to bridge this gap.

If its legal and technical positions have collapsed, the United Nations Environment Programme begins consolidating its political support. It starts by identifying key clients such as the developing nations, industrial associations, newly industrialized countries and environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). UNEP gathers its views by the use of formal meetings and consultations which are informal.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has been able to review the leadership role of UNEP in various environmental agreements geared towards enhancing environmental diplomacy, the achievements UNEP has obtained as well the challenges it faces in provision of leadership. UNEP has shown its leadership role in scientific authority, procedural foundation, expert leader, political broker and facilitator of successful international regimes. UNEP has a role in contributing to policy advice, facilitating international collaborative action and providing early warning on environmental threats. UNEP has always been successful in achieving these goals and fostering nations to cope with environmental problems. This is done through the use of publications and services. Those centres working in close collaboration with UNEP have reported that their inclusion in the process has increased satisfaction among center stakeholders, increased the quality of products and services offered and enhanced their reputation and credibility. Overall, UNEP has been of great success in offering the leadership role in environmental diplomacy.

UNEP is an important institution in the achievement of synergies and coherence in multilateral environmental agreements body in the global, regional and national perspectives. Environmental mediation as well diplomacy is often applied at all levels (global, regional, national and local levels) where cooperation between divided groups over natural resources can be brokered. UNEP is involved a number of activities aimed at promoting diplomacy in the field of environment which include field work activities such as undertaking field-level research and pilot testing different approaches to determine how the policy work on environmental diplomacy and mediation best translates into practical action on the ground. UNEP has been involved in providing the leadership role in scientific authority, procedural foundation, expert leader, political broker and facilitator of successful international regimes.

On the global level, UNEP has held negotiations as a leader and achieved adoption of almost thirty multilateral agreements, such as the very important Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer of 1987 and up to 10 non-binding guidelines and principles in the environment sector. UNEP showed its significant leadership roles in the drafting and formation of important international environmental agreements, such as the CBD, ozone layer protection, Persistent Organic compounds (POPs) and desertification agreements. UNEP is drafting a framework convention on global climate change based on the Montreal Protocol and Vienna Convention. It is noted that UNEP played a significant role in the drafting, negotiating and obtaining the adoption of the Basel Convention and it is working towards obtaining the entry into force of this convention. UNEP also is the secretariat the

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In East Africa, UNEP was involved in the drafting of the Nairobi Convention which extends from South Africa to Somalia. In recognizing environmental roles and uniqueness of the marine and coastal environment of East Africa as well as the necessity for action to curb the threats, UNEP was contacted to create a seas programme which covers the entire region. This organization can therefore be seen as been successful in the provision of leadership as an expert leader in the diplomatic actions of the environment. Since UNEP is an important institution in the achievement of synergies and coherence in multilateral environmental agreements body in the global, regional and national perspectives, the institution should be given chance by countries to ensure it assists them with the achievement of environmental coherence and synergies at national levels.

UNEP should continue being at the frontline in offering of the leadership role in the achievement of adoption of multilateral agreements as well as other non-binding agreements that promote international environmental agreements. This is turn will be useful in reducing conflicts that may arise from the trans-boundary nature of resources. UNEP should also do more in drafting framework conventions on areas such as global climate change, food insecurity and ozone layer depletion. This will help in recognizing environmental roles and uniqueness of various environmental resources as well as the necessity for action to curb the threats that may face resources. The scientific leadership of UNEP should be further enhanced. This will enable the organization to be successful in the provision of leadership as a scientific leader in the diplomatic actions of the environment. In addition, the organization should be given more powers to serve as an international partner of regularly marginalized environment ministries so as to provide a critical forum where these ministries can meet their counterparts within countries.

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