

Environmental Diplomacy in Transition: Contemporary Impediments and Policy Countermeasures

Wanting Shao^{1,a,*}

¹*Beijing City University, Muyan Road, Yangzhen, Shunyi District, Beijing, China*

a. juliannashaw.js@gmail.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: In today's interconnected world, environmental issues such as rising temperatures, water scarcity, and deforestation have taken center stage, demanding immediate and comprehensive responses. As a vital component of global governance, international environmental diplomacy is facing a transformative phase. The urgency of addressing climate change, underscored by its increasingly tangible impacts, necessitates the swift development and implementation of effective environmental policies on the international stage. Thus, a nuanced understanding of and active participation in international environmental diplomacy is paramount. This research delves into the contemporary impediments that have surfaced within international environmental diplomacy. These include the complex dynamics between developed and developing nations, the challenges of reconciling economic growth with environmental protection, and the evolving landscape of global environmental management. Moreover, the study examines the role of international agreements like the Paris Agreement in shaping the course of environmental diplomacy. Against this backdrop, the paper underscores the importance of seeking policy countermeasures to overcome these impediments. It emphasizes the need for diplomatic strategies that bridge the gap between developed and developing countries, ensuring equitable access to resources and technology transfer. Additionally, it highlights the significance of aligning economic growth with environmental sustainability, advocating for environmentally friendly technologies and practices. Moreover, the research explores the potential of innovative governance mechanisms to enhance global environmental management.

Keywords: environmental diplomacy, international relations, public policy

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, globalization has magnified the urgency of environmental issues. Giddens likened humanity's current environmental crises to gradual self-destruction [1]. Climate change has led to phenomena like melting Arctic ice and rising sea levels while regions in the Middle East and Africa grapple with acute water shortages. The world also confronts air and water pollution, waste accumulation, deforestation, land desertification, biodiversity loss, and resource constraints. Hence, international diplomacy, epitomized by the Paris Agreement's aim to manage global temperature rise and boost climate resilience, is paramount. Since the 1960s, the rise of environmental

consciousness and the idea of sustainable development have amplified the significance of global ecological diplomacy.

Despite progress, challenges in international environmental diplomacy persist, such as reconciling economic growth with ecological preservation, addressing disparities between developed and developing nations, and refining the global environmental governance structure. To truly grasp the depth of international environmental diplomacy's impact, a thorough exploration of its challenges and potential solutions is indispensable.

2. The Dilemma of Environmental Diplomacy and Its Causes

2.1. Conflicts Between Developed Countries and Developing Countries

Pervasive disparities and disagreements between developed and developing nations on environmental issues have long been influenced by their economic status, historical contexts, and development stages. Economic inequality is pronounced, with developing nations trailing due to historical influences.

For example, some African states, despite globalization, remain constrained by their colonial histories. Determining who is at fault for the current environmental crisis also generates considerable debate. Developed nations historically contributed significantly to environmental degradation, as exemplified by Britain during the early Industrial Revolution. However, in modern environmental crises, these nations often demand equal responsibility from developing countries, a tension evident during the Paris Agreement negotiations.

In conclusion, commitments from developed countries to support developing nations environmentally have often been under-delivered. Obstacles in technological transfer persist, with intellectual property rights frequently cited as barriers, exemplified by India's vaccine production challenges. Such barriers not only weaken the environmental efforts of developing nations but also strain trust between the Global North and South, undermining international environmental cooperation.

2.2. Imperfect International Cooperation Mechanisms

2.2.1. Insufficient Legal Force

Since the inception of global ecological forums, significant ecological agreements have been established, but many lack enforceability. Developed nations often fall short in fulfilling promises to support developing regions. A glaring example is the deforestation of Brazil's Amazon, with global concerns remaining largely unaddressed due to insufficient international legal measures [2]. International regulations must take precedence over parochial national interests, as prioritizing local short term gains will only undermine global environmental cooperation.

2.2.2. Limitations of the United Nations

The United Nations (UN) has actively engaged in environmental protection yet faces several challenges. Financial constraints, often due to member states' defaults, limit their governance capabilities. Its vast structure causes fragmented initiatives, occasionally overshadowed by entities like the World Bank. Western powers influence decision-making, sidelining developing nations. These biases, weak enforcement mechanisms, and procedural hurdles like the "one-nation veto" impede effective action. Furthermore, prioritizing traditional threats over environmental concerns and coordinating difficulties with entities like the G20 and ASEAN complicate the UN's environmental diplomacy.

2.3. The Impact on National Sovereignty

Historical disparities between developed and developing nations affect environmental discussions. While developed countries, like Britain during the Industrial Revolution, contributed heavily to past environmental damage, they often now expect developing nations to accept equal responsibility. Furthermore, promises from developed countries to assist developing nations often fall short, with issues like intellectual property rights, as seen in India's vaccine production, hindering cooperation. This strains trust in international environmental collaborations.

2.4. Population Growth and Global Environmental Deterioration

The exponential global population growth, with rates surpassing 1.8% annually since the 1950s and environmental degradation have intensified international environmental disputes. By 2013, the world population reached over 7 billion and is expected to exceed 9.5 billion by 2050. This growth continues to strain already limited resources, thereby promoting further deforestation, water scarcity, pollution, and increased poverty, worsening environmental conditions. Recent deforestation in the Amazon, driven by land exploitation and population pressure, highlights the challenges, as does persistent industrial pollution seen in regions like India.

Given these challenges, there is a heightened demand for international environmental governance. While progress has been made through global collaboration, persistent issues, including terrorism, complicate matters. Comprehensive solutions to pollution require a combination of diverse techniques. Moreover, priorities are often divergent between developed and developing nations. The former may be hesitant in technology transfer or financial support, while the latter might be more flexible towards environmental standards. Such disparities pose significant challenges to global environmental governance.

3. Analysis of Favorable Conditions for Environmental Diplomacy in the International Community

3.1. Growing Global Focus on Environmental Issues

The international community is becoming more aware of the urgent need to protect the environment as global environmental issues become more pressing. Earth, the sole habitat for humanity, confronts severe repercussions due to continuous degradation, which has catalyzed global dedication to environmental protection. This has spawned both global and local organizations that advocate for environmental protection.

In 2007, organizations such as the "International Association for Environmental Protection" and the "International Association for Energy Conservation and Environmental Protection" were founded, highlighting the growing global cooperation and technology transfer in conservation. Local initiatives like China's "Nature Conservancy Center" and Japan's "Green Earth Network" further underscore the borderless nature of environmental advocacy.

Prominent figures, including U.S. Treasury Secretary Paulson, and entrepreneurs like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, have donated significantly to environmental causes. Concurrently, governments globally have increased investments in green technologies.

3.2. The Increasing Improvement of International Environmental Law

The field of international environmental law, a new and quickly growing area of international law, has developed quickly to create legal protection for global environmental issues. Originating from the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, this framework was further

bolstered by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Responding to urgent global environmental issues, this has created a new more comprehensive legal system which includes both specific environmental treaties as well as older provisions that have been appropriated from other legal entities incorporated from other legal areas, creating a comprehensive legal system. While facing developmental challenges, international environmental law is instrumental in advancing global environmental protection and cooperation.

Nations across the globe are intensifying their adherence to this legal structure, as demonstrated by the Paris Climate Agreement's attention to carbon emissions and the Convention on Biological Diversity's focus on preserving biodiversity [3]. Many countries have taken further steps to protect the environment, such as introducing laws to reduce plastic use and setting higher carbon emission limits, thus affirming their commitment to following international standards on environmental preservation.

3.3. Current Achievements and New Practices in Environmental Diplomacy

Environmental diplomacy has progressed from critical events such as the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development [4]. Despite this evolution, mounting challenges like extreme climate events and biodiversity loss necessitate more robust international cooperation. Recent catastrophes, including the Western European floods and Asian heatwaves, underscore the urgency. Nations are responding by revising the Paris Climate Agreement and adopting initiatives like the 2023 "Green Belt," emphasizing collaborative solutions to environmental threats. NGOs and corporations are pivotal in this shift, advocating for collective conservation efforts and carbon neutrality. Today, environmental diplomacy is central to global security and prosperity, requiring the unified commitment of all global players.

4. Discussion on Effective Countermeasures for Environmental Diplomacy

4.1. Reimagining the Role of State Sovereignty

Redefining sovereignty to balance environmental priorities and national interests is crucial in global environmental diplomacy. As global environmental governance advances, the sovereignty of nations, especially developing ones, faces inevitable constraints. To navigate this, countries should recalibrate their understanding of sovereignty, embracing global ecological responsibilities while making informed concessions within the international system. This ensures that their actions benefit both the nation and the planet. Some interventions, labeled as "violations of sovereignty," may stem from genuine ecological concerns or, at times, personal gains of intervening nations. Achieving the appropriate balance between these two often competing narratives requires a careful and thoughtful consideration of all relevant factors.

Developing nations can protect their interests and sovereignty by forging regional environmental policies through frameworks like ASEAN or the African Union. For instance, the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in the Paris Agreement allows countries to customize contributions based on their unique situations.

Taking counsel from global environmental entities is constructive, but nations should introduce mechanisms to ascertain the true intent behind recommendations. For instance, urging a developing country to adopt expensive environmental technology without financial or technological support might signal self-serving motives [5].

Ultimately nations must distinguish genuine environmental initiatives from those with hidden agendas. Strengthening inter-nation dialogue and cooperation is paramount to respecting sovereignty within environmental diplomacy.

4.2. Give Full Play to the Role of Non-governmental Organizations

Environmental NGOs have been pivotal in advancing global conservation since the 1970s. Through significant participation in UN summits, they have fostered ecological diplomacy, public awareness, and international aid while maintaining corporate and policy oversight. Giants like Greenpeace and WWF have challenged corporate malpractices, amplified environmental consciousness, monitored policy, and provided invaluable support to developing nations. As Greenpeace's campaign against Shell showcased, they can steer companies towards eco-friendly alternatives. Moreover, initiatives like WWF's "Debt-for-Nature" swaps illustrate the innovative ways NGOs support global conservation. Given the urgency of climate change, NGOs must intensify collaborations with governments, businesses, and communities, championing sustainable solutions and fostering deeper community engagements for a holistic environmental impact.

4.3. Strengthening the Construction of the International Legal Framework

The Earth serves as a collective home for humanity, and environmental degradation threatens both human existence and advancement. The "Global Environmental Collective Security Mechanism" has been established to protect the collective ecological interests of nations. Leveraging the United Nations' collective security framework for environmental challenges is essential.

The 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, resulting from a leak at a factory owned by an American multinational, killed thousands and injured many, underscoring the severe consequences of transboundary pollution. At present developing countries are too often subjected to environmental pollution due to commercial transfers from the developed world. Some industrialized nations transfer their pollution, directly or indirectly, to these regions, perpetuating significant environmental concerns. Addressing these challenges requires greater oversight that emphasizes stopping international transboundary pollution and preventing disasters reminiscent of Bhopal.

Environmental protection is a shared responsibility. A global environmental security mechanism incorporated into multilateral frameworks seeks to curtail transboundary pollution and other detrimental environmental behaviors [6]. Collaborative actions should adhere to the Israeli abstention unanimity principle to circumvent potential vetoes by self-interested permanent members.

The United Nations must reassess and refine its negotiation mechanisms to address these global environmental challenges, developing more effective deliberation methods.

4.4. Control Population Growth and Resource Waste

The global population surge, particularly in developing regions, puts enormous strain on the environment and resources. By 2020, the UN reported 7.7 billion people worldwide, with marked fertility rates in Asia and Africa [7]. Addressing this necessitates curbing population growth through international efforts. Rwanda, for instance, has employed the "Umuganda" initiative, integrating sexual health and family planning education.

However, population control is just one facet; addressing resource wastage is equally vital. Data shows an annual global food waste of 130 million tons [8]. Despite many developing countries eyeing economic growth, some persist with a resource-intensive approach.

Transitioning to sustainability is paramount. Denmark, for instance, sources over 40% of its electricity from wind energy. Adopting conservation practices and recycling, exemplified by Japan's "Mottainai" principle, is crucial—Meanwhile, the European Union champions stringent circular economy policies. Governments can promote eco-friendliness through policies and incentives, including endorsing green technology, advocating for resource recycling, and considering green taxes [9]. A sustainable future demands global collaboration and commitment [10].

5. Conclusion

Significant progress has been achieved in international environmental diplomacy through persistent efforts, but challenges remain. Balancing economic growth with environmental preservation is a paramount global concern, emphasizing the need for collaboration between developing and developed nations. Environmental governance is a shared global challenge. A more thorough study and expansion of international environmental diplomacy is essential for promoting its universal acceptance and practical implementation. Comprehending its intricacies and devising effective strategies can pave the way for global prosperity and development.

References

- [1] Giddens, A. (2009). *The politics of climate change*. Polity Press.
- [2] IPCC. (2014). *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. IPCC.
- [3] United Nations. (2015). *The Paris Agreement. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*.
- [4] WCED. (1987). *Our Common Future. World Commission on Environment and Development*.
- [5] Sand, P.H. (2017). *Lessons learned in global environmental governance*. World Scientific Publishing Co.
- [6] Guzman, A.T. (2004). *The design of international agreements*. *European Journal of International Law*, 16(4), 579-612.
- [7] Davis, L.W., & Caldeira, K. (2010). *Consumption-based accounting of CO2 emissions*. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107(12), 5687-5692.
- [8] Greenpeace. (2016). *Airpocalypse: Assessment of Air Pollution in Indian Cities*.
- [9] Sands, P., & Peel, J. (2012). *Principles of International Environmental Law*. Cambridge University Press.
- [10] Ivanova, M., & Roy, J. (2007). *The architecture of global environmental governance: Pros and cons of multiplicity*. In *Global Environmental Governance*. Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy.