

The Role of Multilateral Environmental Agreements in Advancing SDGs 13, 14, and 15

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This article by **Martina Sammut** was previously submitted as part of ERL3001 and is being published with the author's permission. This paper examines how Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) contribute to achieving selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). While the SDGs under the 2030 Agenda are non-binding, MEAs provide legally binding frameworks that translate these global goals into concrete obligations, cooperation mechanisms, and enforcement structures.

TAGS: International Law, Environmental Law, International Environmental Law, Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Sustainable Development Goals

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1. Introduction

Sustainable development is balancing current needs with future needs, ensuring economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection.¹ United Nations (UN) Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda, outlining a shared blueprint for peace, prosperity, and planetary protection.² The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lie at the core of this Agenda and represent a universal roadmap for all states to end global issues of poverty, protect the planet, and tackle inequalities.³ The SDGs build on decades of UN-led initiatives, beginning with Agenda 21 (1992), followed by the Millennium Development Goals (2000) and reinforced by subsequent global summits.⁴

Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) help achieve multiple SDGs. These legally binding treaties address transboundary environmental challenges,⁵ set common guidelines, define responsibilities for global cooperation, and establish frameworks for coordinated action and compliance.⁶ While the SDGs themselves are non-binding, MEAs provide binding commitments and practical mechanisms that directly contribute to achieving specific SDG targets.⁷

This article focuses on SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land), each supported, at least in part, by MEAs and associated protocols.

2. Sustainable Development Goal 13: Climate Action

SDG 13 promotes urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.⁸ It aims to strengthen global climate action by improving resilience and adaptation to climate-related risks, and integrating climate measures into national policies.⁹ Key MEAs that directly support SDG 13 targets are the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

¹ European Commission, 'Sustainable Development' (*Trade and Economic Security*) <https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/development-and-sustainability/sustainable-development_en> accessed December 15 2025.

² United Nations, 'THE 17 GOALS' (*Sustainable Development*) <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>> accessed December 15 2025.

³ United Nations, 'The Sustainable Development Goals' (*United Nations Sustainable Development*, 17 May 2018) <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-goals/>> accessed 15 December 2025.

⁴ UN (n 2).

⁵ Philippe Sands, Jacqueline Peel, Adriana Fabra and Ruth MacKenzie, *Principles of International Environmental Law* (4th edn, Cambridge University Press 2018) 12–14.

⁶ Malgosia Fitzmaurice, David Ong and Panos Merkouris (eds), *Research Handbook on International Environmental Law* (Edward Elgar 2010) 36–38.

⁷ United Nations General Assembly, *The Future We Want* (GA Res 66/288, 27 July 2012) para 88.

⁸ United Nations, 'Goal 13: Climate Change' (*United Nations Sustainable Development*, 7 January 2015) <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change/>> accessed 18 December 2025.

⁹ *ibid.*

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The UNFCCC serves as the foundational MEA for addressing the objectives now encapsulated in SDG 13, despite being established in 1992. Although it does not explicitly name SDG 13, being established in 2015, the treaty's primary objective is the 'stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system'.¹⁰

This Convention is the primary international forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.¹¹ The Parties are guided by the Convention to protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind¹² by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to climate impacts, and financing required adjustments. It obliges all Parties to formulate, implement, and regularly update national programmes containing measures to mitigate climate change,¹³ in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities. Developed countries are tasked with taking the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof by modifying longer-term emission trends while developing countries focus on specific mitigation programmes and projects.¹⁴

Recognising that climate change is already occurring, the UNFCCC mandates cooperation in preparing for adaptation to its impacts. Countries and communities need to develop adaptation solutions and implement actions to respond to current and future climate change impacts.¹⁵ The Convention supports adaptation through knowledge-sharing and capacity-building initiatives, including the Adaptation Knowledge Portal, which assists countries in identifying adaptation gaps and translating knowledge into action.¹⁶

Kyoto Protocol

Before the establishment of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the world's only legally binding instrument for cutting greenhouse gas emissions was the 1997 Kyoto Protocol under the UNFCCC.¹⁷

¹⁰ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (adopted 9 May 1992, entered into force 21 March 1994) 1771 UNTS 107, art 2.

¹¹ UN (n 8).

¹² UNFCCC (n 10) art 3.

¹³ *ibid* art 4(1)(b).

¹⁴ *ibid* art 4(2)(a).

¹⁵ United Nations 'The Big Picture' (*United Nations Climate Change*) <<https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/the-big-picture/introduction>> accessed 29 December 2025.

¹⁶ United Nations, 'Adaptation Knowledge Portal' (*United Nations Climate Change*) <<https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/workstreams/adaptation-knowledge-portal>> accessed 29 December 2025.

¹⁷ European Commission, 'The Kyoto Protocol' (*Climate Action*) <<https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu->

However, because many major emitters were not signatories, the Kyoto Protocol only covered about 18% of global emissions.¹⁸

The Kyoto Protocol operationalises SDG 13 by imposing binding emission reduction commitments on developed States,¹⁹ and promoting sustainable mitigation measures. It also supports long-term climate resilience²⁰ and provides financial and technological support for developing countries,²¹ allocating adaptation funding through the Clean Development Mechanism.²²

As the first document to convert the goals of the UNFCCC into legally binding carbon reduction pledges for industrialised States, the Kyoto Protocol is a significant advancement in international climate legislation. It has created crucial institutional, financial, and compliance frameworks that influenced later climate governance and established the groundwork for the more dynamic and inclusive strategy ultimately embraced under the Paris Agreement, ensuring its lasting significance in the development of international climate action.

The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty adopted under the UNFCCC that represents a historic milestone in efforts to combat climate change. It is built upon the broader goals of the Convention but introduces more specific and ambitious objectives that require broad participation by all States. Its central purpose is to strengthen the global response to the climate crisis by limiting the rise in the global average temperature to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C, reflecting the urgent need to avert the worst impact of climate change.²³

Unlike earlier climate instruments such as the Kyoto Protocol, which imposed binding emission reduction obligations only on developed countries, the Paris Agreement applies to all Parties, developed and developing alike. Each Party is required to prepare, communicate, and maintain successive Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that outline their climate mitigation and adaptation actions, updated every five years to reflect progressively higher ambition.²⁴

action/international-action-climate-change/kyoto-protocol_en> accessed 22 December 2025.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (adopted 11 December 1997, entered into force 16 February 2005) 2303 UNTS 162, art 3.

²⁰ *ibid* art 3(3).

²¹ *ibid* art 2(3); 11.

²² *ibid* art 12(8).

²³ Paris Agreement (adopted 12 December 2015, entered into force 4 November 2016) UN Doc FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, art 2(1)(a).

²⁴ United Nations, 'The Paris Agreement' (*United Nations Climate Change*) <<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>> accessed 2 January 2026.

While widely regarded as a landmark achievement in global climate cooperation, current NDCs remain insufficient to meet the Agreement's temperature goals, highlighting the need for strengthened implementation.²⁵

3. Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water

Covering approximately three-quarters of the Earth's surface, the oceans play a fundamental role in sustaining life on the planet.²⁶ SDG 14 is dedicated to the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources,²⁷ recognising their vital ecological, economic, and climate-regulating functions.²⁸

As marine pollution has reached unprecedented levels, a range of MEAs has been developed to advance SDG 14. Core MEAs include the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the MARPOL Convention, and the Basel Convention, the latter being complemented by newer agreements like the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement and measures against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Together, they demonstrate a global commitment to SDG 14.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

UNCLOS is the foundational treaty for all ocean activity, establishing maritime zones, rights and responsibilities in order to:

*facilitate international communication [and] promote the peaceful uses of the seas and oceans, the equitable and efficient utilization of their resources, the conservation of their living resources, and the study, protection, and preservation of the marine environment.*²⁹

States are obligated by UNCLOS to cooperate with other States in adopting and implementing

²⁵ Audrey Garric, 'Ten Years after It Was Signed, What Has the Paris Agreement on Climate Change Achieved?' (*Le Monde*, 12 December 2025) <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/environment/article/2025/12/12/ten-years-after-it-was-signed-what-has-the-paris-agreement-on-climate-change-achieved_6747162_115.html> accessed 2 January 2026.

²⁶ United Nations, 'Goal 14: Oceans' (*United Nations Sustainable Development*, 7 January 2015) <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/oceans/>> accessed 4 January 2026.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Kim Jense, 'Climate Benefits of Coastal Wetlands and Coral Reefs Show Why They Merit Protection Now' (*The Pew Charitable Trusts*, 6 July 2022) <<https://www.pew.org/it/research-and-analysis/articles/2022/07/06/climate-benefits-of-coastal-wetlands-and-coral-reefs-show-why-they-merit-protection-now>> accessed 4 January 2026; *ibid.*

²⁹ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (adopted 10 December 1982, entered into force 16 November 1994) 1833 UNTS 3, preamble.

measures for the management and conservation of living resources.³⁰ Furthermore, States bear the general responsibility to protect the marine environment and must enact legislation to prevent, reduce, and control marine pollution.³¹

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction

The BBNJ agreement, which is the third implementing agreement to UNCLOS,³² aims ‘to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction...through effective implementation of the relevant provisions of [UNCLOS] and further international cooperation and coordination’.³³

The BBNJ Agreement is built around four central issues: fair and equitable use of marine genetic resources, conservation through area-based management and marine protected areas, environmental impact assessments, and capacity-building with marine technology transfer.³⁴ It also includes cross-cutting provisions to support effective implementation.³⁵

The agreement represents a landmark step toward reversing these destructive trends and restoring ocean health, directly supporting SDG 14. As the first comprehensive, cross-sectoral ocean treaty in decades, it promotes international cooperation, inclusive management, and science-based conservation. By addressing gaps in governance and strengthening resilience to climate change, pollution, and other stressors, the BBNJ Agreement provides a transformative framework for sustainable and equitable stewardship of the global ocean.

International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)

MARPOL’s core objective — to preserve the marine environment by eliminating intentional pollution and minimising accidental discharges — is a foundational pillar for achieving SDG 14. It is the primary international convention addressing the prevention of maritime pollution caused by

³⁰ *ibid* art 117.

³¹ *ibid* art 192, arts 207-212.

³² Clara Barnosky, Farzaneh Shakeri, Jingyi Liu, Maria Vizeu-Pinheiro, Philip Kariam, and Remi Moncel, ‘Ocean Governance Summaries’ (February 2024), 39

<<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/b326c129c955020139ab018b7bfb3dff-0090062025/original/Ocean-Governance-Summaries-Booklet-English.pdf>> accessed 4 January 2026.

³³ Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (adopted 19 June 2023) UN Doc A/CONF.232/2023/4, art 2.

³⁴ United Nations, ‘Agreement Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction: Overview’ (2024)

<https://www.un.org/Depts/los/reference_files/BBNJ/bbnjagreementoverviewfactsheet.pdf> accessed 4 January 2026.

³⁵ *ibid* 2.

ships, whether operational or unintentional.³⁶ The Convention addresses various sources of ship-based pollution that threaten life below water through its six Annexes.

Annex I prohibits the discharge of oil or oily mixtures into the sea except under strict conditions, such as being a specific distance from 'nearest land' and utilising oil discharge monitoring systems.³⁷ Annex IV governs sewage discharge to prevent the introduction of pathogens and excessive nutrients into marine ecosystems.³⁸ Annex V addresses garbage disposal, forbidding most waste including plastics and cooking oils but also synthetic ropes, fishing nets and plastic garbage bags from being dumped into the sea since they are known to be lethal to marine fauna.³⁹

To move beyond mere prohibitions, MARPOL establishes a framework of technical requirements and supporting infrastructure designed to enable environmentally sustainable maritime operations. The Convention requires certain categories of oil tankers to be equipped with segregated ballast tanks and oily water separating equipment, thereby reducing the risk of oil entering the marine environment during routine shipping activities.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Parties to the Convention must ensure that ports and terminals provide facilities for the reception of residues and oily mixtures, ensuring ships do not have to discharge waste at sea.⁴¹

Compliance with MARPOL is further secured through robust enforcement mechanisms, including mandatory surveys and certification regimes such as the International Oil Pollution Prevention Certificate.⁴² The Convention is also complemented by protocols addressing intervention and emergency response. The Protocol Relating to Intervention on the High Seas empowers States to take necessary measures to 'prevent, mitigate, or eliminate grave and imminent danger' to their coastlines or related interests, including living marine resources, following maritime casualties involving hazardous substances.⁴³

Port State Measures Agreement

The Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) is the first legally binding international agreement specifically designed to target IUU fishing.⁴⁴ This MEA is a primary tool for achieving SDG 14,

³⁶ International Maritime Organisation, 'International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)' (International Maritime Organisation) <<https://www.imo.org/en/about/conventions/pages/international-convention-for-the-prevention-of-pollution-from-ships-%28marpol%29.aspx>> accessed 4 January 2026.

³⁷ International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, Annex I, ch 3 reg 9(1) and reg 9(1)(b)(ii).

³⁸ *ibid* Annex IV, ch 3 reg 8.

³⁹ *ibid* Annex V, ch 3 reg 3(1)(a).

⁴⁰ *ibid* Annex I, ch 2 reg 12(3)(b) and reg 16(1).

⁴¹ *ibid* Annex 1, ch 2 reg 11(b).

⁴² *ibid* Annex 1, ch 1 reg 4.

⁴³ Protocol Relating to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Pollution by Substances Other Than Oil (adopted 2 November 1973, entered into force 30 March 1983) 1313 UNTS 3, art 1.

⁴⁴ Irina Popescu, 'Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing' (*European Parliament*, October 2022) <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614598/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)614598_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614598/EPRS_BRI(2017)614598_EN.pdf)> accessed 5 January 2026.

particularly Target 14.4, which explicitly calls for an end to IUU fishing to restore fish stocks.⁴⁵

By denying IUU vessels the use of ports for landing or transshipping their catch, the PSMA reduces the financial incentive for perpetrators to continue their operations.⁴⁶ Vessels suspected of illegal activity are also denied essential port services.⁴⁷ The PSMA mandates a minimum standard for inspections, including examining the catch to verify compliance with conservation measures.⁴⁸

IUU fishing is one of the greatest threats to marine ecosystems because it undermines sustainable management efforts and often involves prohibited harmful gear that damages marine habitats. By ensuring that catches are legally harvested and reported, the PSMA helps prevent the chronic over-exploitation of fish stocks.⁴⁹ The Agreement's focus on 'long-term conservation'⁵⁰ directly aids the recovery of vulnerable species and the protection of marine biodiversity, which is the core of Goal 14.

The PSMA emphasises that the fight against IUU fishing is a global effort requiring coordination between flag, coastal, and port states, utilising international databases and records, such as the Global Record of Fishing Vessels,⁵¹ to increase transparency across the global fishing fleet.⁵²

4. Sustainable Development Goal 15: Life on Land

Goal 15 is about preventing biodiversity loss, slowing and reversing land degradation, preventing desertification, protecting and recovering terrestrial ecosystems, and managing forests sustainably.⁵³ Its aims are strengthened by the GBF, the strategic plan adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora are complementary accords that support SDG 15 in preventing biodiversity loss and promoting sustainable land use.

⁴⁵ Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 'Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing' (2016) <<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/7c0a9022-47cf-46d6-9347-00369a0e86f8/content#:~:~>> accessed 5 January 2026.

⁴⁶ Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (adopted 22 November 2009, entered into force 5 June 2016) 55 ILM 1156, art 9(6).

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid* art 13.

⁴⁹ *ibid* abstract.

⁵⁰ *ibid* art 2.

⁵¹ FOA (n 45) 2.

⁵² PSMA (n 46) art 15.

⁵³ United Nations, 'Goal 15: Forests, Desertification and Biodiversity' (*United Nations Sustainable Development*, 7 January 2015) <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/>> accessed 2 January 2026.

The Convention on Biological Diversity

The CBD is the primary MEA for conserving biodiversity. It addresses biodiversity at all levels — ecosystems, species, and genetics. Through its objectives, the CBD promotes the ‘conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources’.⁵⁴ This directly supports SDG 15 targets such as halting species extinction, restoring degraded ecosystems, and maintaining genetic diversity within wild and domesticated species.

The CBD requires Parties to establish protected areas, restore degraded habitats, and promote the sustainable management of biological resources.⁵⁵ It also ensures that biodiversity considerations are integrated into development planning, agriculture, forestry, and urbanisation, reflecting key targets of SDG 15.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Convention emphasises that States have sovereign rights over their natural resources, and bear the responsibility to prevent environmental harm to other countries or areas beyond national jurisdiction,⁵⁷ highlighting the global interconnectedness of biodiversity protection and the shared responsibility for sustaining ecosystems worldwide.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)

The GBF, though not legally binding, functions like an MEA in establishing a comprehensive roadmap for global biodiversity action, structured around 23 actionable targets to be met by 2030 and four long-term, outcome-oriented goals beyond 2050.⁵⁸ Together, they address major drivers of biodiversity loss, including pollution, ecosystem degradation, unsustainable use of natural resources, and inequitable benefit-sharing.⁵⁹

Among the key 2030 targets, the framework commits Parties to restoring at least 30% of degraded ecosystems⁶⁰ and conserving and effectively managing 30% of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine areas.⁶¹ Additionally, it places responsibility on the private sector by requiring large companies and financial institutions to assess and disclose their biodiversity-related risks and impacts.⁶²

⁵⁴ Convention on Biological Diversity (adopted 5 June 1992, entered into force 29 December 1993) 1760 UNTS 79, art 1.

⁵⁵ *ibid* art 8.

⁵⁶ *ibid* art 9.

⁵⁷ *ibid* art 15.

⁵⁸ Unknown, ‘Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework’ (*Convention on Biological Diversity*, 1 October 2024) <<https://www.cbd.int/gbf>> accessed 4 January 2026.

⁵⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, ‘Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework’ (*Biodiversity*) <<https://www.fao.org/biodiversity/kunming-montreal-global-biodiversity-framework/en>> accessed 4 January 2026.

⁶⁰ Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15), 7 December 2022, Target 2.

⁶¹ *ibid* Target 3.

⁶² *ibid* Target 15.

Frequently referred to as the 'Paris Agreement for Nature',⁶³ the framework seeks to galvanise ambitious and coordinated global efforts to cease and reverse biodiversity loss. It directs Parties in converting global biodiversity commitments into national strategies and promotes transformative, cross-sectoral action to support long-term ecological recovery and sustainable development.⁶⁴

Protocols

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is complemented by three protocols that strengthen its implementation in specific areas of biodiversity governance.

Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety focuses on protecting biodiversity and human health from potential risks posed by living modified organisms created through modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on biodiversity and human health, especially in transboundary movements.⁶⁵ It introduces the Advance Informed Agreement procedure, allowing importing states to make informed decisions before accepting living modified organisms across borders.⁶⁶

The Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress, a supplementary protocol to the Cartagena Protocol, addresses damage resulting from the transboundary movement of living modified organisms. It sets international rules and procedures on response measures and liability, ensuring that environmental harm to biodiversity can be prevented, mitigated, or remedied.⁶⁷

Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing

The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing establishes a legal framework to ensure that benefits arising from the use of genetic resources are shared fairly and equitably.⁶⁸ By regulating access and recognising traditional knowledge held by indigenous and local communities, it promotes conservation and sustainable use while supporting equity and compliance.⁶⁹

⁶³ Charlotte Le Delliou, Rainer Sodtke, Typhaine Quinquis, 'Global Biodiversity Framework Action Plan How Biodiversa+ will support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework' (*Internationalisation of European R&I*, 20 October 2025) <https://www.biodiversa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/D8.12_Global-Biodiversity-Framework-Action-Plan.pdf> accessed 4 January 2026.

⁶⁴ GBF (n 60) Target 14.

⁶⁵ Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity (adopted 29 January 2000, entered into force 11 September 2003) 2226 UNTS 208, art 1.

⁶⁶ *ibid* art 7.

⁶⁷ Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (adopted 15 October 2010, entered into force 5 March 2023) UN Doc UNEP/CBD/BS/CP/LI/1, arts 1–2.

⁶⁸ Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity (adopted 29 October 2010, entered into force 12 October 2014) UN Doc UNEP/CBD/CP/ABS/1, art 5.

⁶⁹ *ibid* art 7.

5. Conclusion

MEAs play a crucial role in translating the aspirational objectives of the SDGs into concrete legal obligations and operational mechanisms. Their effectiveness, however, ultimately depends on political will, adequate financing, institutional capacity, and consistent national implementation. As environmental degradation and climate change continue to intensify, strengthening the coherence between the SDGs and MEAs remains essential to ensuring that global environmental governance delivers meaningful and lasting outcomes for both present and future generations.

International case law confirms that while MEAs and the SDGs are not always directly enforceable, courts and tribunals consistently rely on them to interpret State environmental obligations, thereby reinforcing their legal and normative force.



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