

Review of the Yearbook of International Co-operation on Environment and Development 2001-2002

Fridjof Nasen Institute

Philippe Barla

A growing number of environmental issues have transnational or even global consequences, which can only be addressed by engaging the cooperation of various sovereign states. Adopting and implementing such international agreements is a lengthy, highly complex process, as the Kyoto protocol clearly illustrates. In this context, the ninth edition of *The Yearbook of International Co-operation on Environment and Development 2001-2002* (hereinafter referred to as the *Yearbook*) is intended to provide a portrait of the "extent to which objectives of international agreements are attained." This "independent" publication is produced by the Fridjof Nasen Institute, a research center for international environmental and energy issues, which is funded by the Norwegian Government.

The *Yearbook* is divided into five sections. The first is comprised of six peer-reviewed articles contributed by political scientists and law practitioners. Together, these papers provide a concise overview of current issues (e.g.: assessment of ISO environmental standards, evaluation of World Bank environmental strategies). The second section examines 53 major international environmental agreements, in terms of their objectives, scope, status of participation, monitoring/implementation, etc. The two subsequent sections contain a summary presentation of selected major international organizations (Commission on Sustainable Development, World Health Organization), and international non-governmental organizations (WWF,

Earthwatch Institute). The final section presents a profile of all OECD countries and several non-OECD countries. The profiles include key socio-economic and environmental indicators as well as indicators of compliance with some international agreements.

Overall, the *Yearbook* is a useful reference tool for anyone interested in international environmental agreements. Its main strong point is the way in which the information is presented, i.e. concisely, well organized and in a very logical sequence, thereby facilitating comparison. The primary information sources for this volume are official documents and survey results based on a questionnaire sent to various international agreement secretariats. It may prove useful to compare this volume with previous editions, in order to track the progress of international cooperative efforts.

The *Yearbook* does have certain limitations, namely: (i) information pertaining to new or evolving agreements may very quickly become outdated (the Kyoto Protocol description is one example). Hopefully, the editors have developed a web site containing updated information; (ii) the book's title is slightly misleading in that it suggests environmental and development issues are given equal weight, whereas the focus of the volume is clearly on the environment, with development concerns as a secondary topic; (iii) given the lack of reliable and precise data, the *Yearbook* obviously falls somewhat short of attaining its very ambitious objective of assessing the compliance of international agreements. Only very crude indicators of compliance are reported thereby only providing a hazy picture. For instance, the *Yearbook* reports that Canada provides full or partial ecological protection for 9.9%. This indicator of Canada's biodiversity protection efforts does not take into account the fact that the ecological integrity of several national parks is threatened by human activities, such as tourism (see Panel on Ecological Integrity of Canada's Parks report, 2000).

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, I highly recommend this book. The considerable effort and energy required to produce the *Yearbook* are particularly worthy of praise. Environmental progress depends largely upon the production and dissemination of relevant information and this volume will provide valuable input to further this cause. Additional information regarding the *Yearbook*'s content can be obtained by visiting: <http://www.greenyearbook.org>