



BACKGROUND NOTE

What role should regional organisations have in the commitment implementation and monitoring?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is based on the implementation of commitments and a monitoring process aimed at ensuring these commitments are kept. In addition to reporting by the national authorities, it seems clear that a collective learning process needs to be established in order to identify requirements for supranational cooperation, and to thereby go “faster and stronger”. In this respect, the global level often appears to be too far removed from specific situations to be able to serve as a learning platform. Conversely, the regional level, based on the sharing of an ecosystem or the unity of an economic/social system, is an appropriate level, since it is based on similar, interdependent characteristics. Indeed, for several years the regional organisations have played a key role in the development of standards and policies aimed at biodiversity protection, the fight against climate change and, more broadly, the implementation of sustainable development. They nevertheless still face a number of challenges in terms of monitoring commitments, whether regional or global.

1. CONTEXT

The last few years have been marked by the adoption of a number of multilateral agreements in different fields of sustainable development (the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs], the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, etc.). The implementation of these commitments is first and foremost the responsibility of the national authorities; the states must thus transpose commitments into standards and policies, establish monitoring mechanisms and provide regular reporting on actions undertaken, according to the procedures set out in each of the agreements. In addition to this fundamental process conducted at the national level, the intergovernmental organisations may also contribute to supporting states in the implementation of their commitments. In this respect, recent developments in international environmental policy demonstrate the merits of certain regional organisations and the crucial role they play.

Many regional institutions have an explicit mandate for environmental issues or, more broadly, for sustainable development. This is the case, for example, for organisations specifically created to address ecological challenges, such as the UNEP Regional Seas Programme established in 18 marine areas. It is also the case for regional economic organisations whose mission extends to the preservation of natural resources, social development or equity issues, such as the European Union, the UN Regional Commissions or, more broadly, economic and trade integration systems that have a decisive influence on the different 2030 Agenda targets.

For environmental issues, this regional approach makes it possible to take into consideration the specific characteristics of territories (economic, political, ecosystemic, etc.), applying to them an appropriate legal regime and management system: in addition to the declaration of general principles, it thereby helps to address the economic, social and environmental challenges specific to the region. Secondly, the regime established by the regional systems sometimes exceeds the demands of global instruments; differentiation then makes it possible to increase the level of ambition. Finally, the flexibility of regional mechanisms (limited number of stakeholders, procedures that are often inclusive, etc.) often facilitates the integration of civil society stakeholders into decision-making processes and drives forward co-construction processes.

2. ISSUES/SOLUTIONS

Although the regional organisations are thus proving themselves to be innovative when it comes to developing standards, they still face a number of challenges in terms of monitoring their implementation. Aside from administrative reporting, there are currently few regional tools to ensure the coordinated application of instruments adopted. Moreover, discussions about the coherence of national mechanisms to monitor commitments are inadequate and the transfer of experience between national authorities is still incomplete; the contribution of civil society stakeholders therefore needs to be increased. Likewise, the articulation

between global and regional obligations is not currently given enough attention; the role of the regional organisations in monitoring the 2030 Agenda, for example, remains largely undeveloped. Finally, and more broadly, states often lack a roadmap enabling them to ensure that actions undertaken—on economic, social and environmental issues—converge towards the goal of sustainability.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION/QUESTIONS

- What type of mechanisms could be established in order to better assess the implementation of instruments adopted?
- What can be done to facilitate the transfer of experience between national authorities, while taking into account the numerous initiatives developed by non-state actors (private sector, NGOs, research)?

- Moreover, how could the regional organisations contribute to monitoring global commitments, such as the SDGs? What tools could be used to build on regional experience in order to assess compliance with global commitments?
- How can mechanisms for the monitoring of sectoral, global and regional commitments be connected in order to ensure that the trajectory followed by states strives towards the goal of sustainability?

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