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Global Green Governance: Embedding the Green Economy in a Global Green and Equitable Rule of Law Polity

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The global community is crossing planetary boundaries while it has not yet met the basic needs of at least one-third of the global population. Although governance systems are developing, they are still unable to adequately deal with current global environmental problems. This article assesses global green governance, inferring that it is reactive, incoherent and fragmented, lacks the tools to implement a systemic approach, is ad hoc rather than principled, is becoming politically charged, and may be unable to support the implementation of a green economy and cope with the societal changes expected by 2050. The article concludes that fragmentation of international environmental law and policy is inevitable, but that some degree of constitutionalization is necessary to provide a rule of law framework in an increasingly globalized, networked, multilevel world.

INTRODUCTION

This article assumes that law is not an isolated field, but that it must continuously and systematically respond to, and anticipate, social changes and new scientific knowledge without compromising on key legal values such as the rule of law. It addresses two closely linked problems. First, global environmental problems are crossing planetary boundaries, and stressing ecosystems. And yet, the minimum needs of the global population remain unmet and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) unreached. Environmental problems affect lives, ecosystems, as well as ecosystem services (supportive, regulatory, provisioning and aesthetic). If our ecosystems cannot provide these services, we may be unable to meet global minimum social standards and compromise future development. For example, if current environmental pollution trends are not reversed, the Human Development Index may be 8–15% lower than otherwise in 2050. Second, although global governance is evolving incrementally, it has not controlled the climate change problem, halted deforestation or protected our ecosystems.

These problems are critical issues at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio (Rio+20). The summit aims to secure political commitment to sustainable development, assess progress towards achieving past goals, including those in Agenda 21 and the MDGs, and deal with emerging challenges. It has two themes: a green economy; and the institutional framework for sustainable development. This article aims to contribute primarily to the second theme. More specifically, it examines existing patterns in international environmental governance, as well as expected trends until 2050, and argues that although the fragmentation of international environmental

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3 For example, while the percentage of undernourished people has reduced from 20% (1990) to 15% (2008), the absolute numbers have remained unchanged. Some 2.6 billion people still lack access to improved sanitation. The 2011 Millennium Development Goals Report states that the poverty reduction target has been met only by 45 of the 84 countries for which there is data (out of a total of 144 countries). Progress to Date and Remaining Gaps in the Implementation of the Outcomes of the Major Summits in the Area of Sustainable Development, as well as an Analysis of the Themes of the Conference, Report of the Secretary General, (A/CONF.216/PC/2, 1 April 2010), paragraph 15.
4 Provisioning services include food, water, energy; regulating services include carbon sequestration, climate regulation, waste decomposition and detoxification; supporting services include nutrient cycling and seed dispersal; and aesthetic/cultural services include the significance of these ecosystems to the societies that live in them. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, Ecosystems and Human Wellbeing: Synthesis (Island Press, 2005).
9 Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/ 64/236, 24 December 2009).
governance may be inevitable, constitutionalization for a multilevel legal system is necessary to provide support for new legal tools capable of dealing with a systems approach and promoting a green economy.

ASSESSING GLOBAL GREEN GOVERNANCE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GLOBAL GREEN GOVERNANCE

Environmental challenges first appeared on the global political agenda as ad hoc issues (e.g., the impact of DDT on bird’s eggs, threats to single species like pandas and whales, and deforestation). They were mainly tackled by issue-specific policy responses (e.g., the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and the Whaling Convention). As different environmental challenges became linked, this led to the identification of a comprehensive environmental problem, evoking policy responses on common environmental (e.g., the 1972 Stockholm Declaration) and water-related issues (e.g., the 1977 Mar Del Plata Action Plan). The next two decades experienced the interlocked relationship between environment and development (e.g., the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development), leading to global consensus and prioritization of the concept of ‘sustainable development’ at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, which was reiterated in the preparatory work for the 2012 summit in Rio. Environmental accidents (in Bhopal in 1984, and Chernobyl in 1985), disasters (like Hurricane Katrina in 2005) and creeping environmental problems (like drought, chemical pollution, depletion of fish stocks and climate change) disrupt development patterns and provide a new impetus to prioritize basic needs and the environment, although the global economic recession has cast a damper on current efforts.

The links between the environment and other aspects of development (e.g., energy), and security (from local to global) have made environmental problems very complex. This has led to discourses on environment policy integration, integrated water resource management (IWRM), mainstreaming environment into development and the green economy. However, implementing these discourses is not easy because of competitiveness, free-rider and leakage arguments, because we lack systemic instruments, and because countries continue to ‘treat poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation as stand-alone threats’. However, the interlocking nature may lead environmental issues to be framed as high-politics issues, which may either result in rapid responses in the context of an interdependent world or to intensive competition as each actor tries to maximize his or her own gains in a neoliberal world.

CHALLENGES IN SPECIFIC ISSUES IN GLOBAL GREEN GOVERNANCE

The aforementioned challenges will now be further explored for the specific issue areas of water, forest and climate governance.

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Global water governance has passed through transboundary institutionalization experiments (pre-1960), multiple UN water policy initiatives (1960–1992), hybridization of policies with the entry of non-state actors and hybrid coalitions in the governance arena (1992–2003), and an attempt at system-wide coherence with the establishment of UN Water since 2003. International water law has moved away from fluvial treaties to the codification of water law principles in 1966 and 2004, the entry into force of a regional water Convention and Protocol, the adoption of a global Watercourses Convention, the introduction of a human right to water and sanitation, and precepts in water adjudication. This may suggest a gradual consolidation of global water governance. However, since the Watercourses Convention is not yet in force, and water is dealt with by many bodies with only light coordination by UN Water, the field is diffuse and fragmented. Concepts like IWRM remain poorly defined, while trade and investment rules have helped make water into a private commodity subject to confidential contracts, international dispute settlement and arbitration rules. The hybrid (UN/non-UN) governance processes do not follow clear rules of procedure and are less than legitimate, and the meetings of the World Water Forums do not necessarily produce binding agreements. The governance vacuum has led to inconsistent policies and funding for strategies that are not necessarily relevant for recipient countries.

Unlike water, which is governed primarily in relation to its transboundary character, forests fall mostly within national jurisdiction. Yet forests are difficult to govern: not all States see forests as a global issue or as an environmental public good; forest definitions adopted in different fora are inconsistent; ownership rights to forests are heavily contested; the designation of land with tree cover as forests is politically sensitive with equity implications for the land owner; and the costs of maintaining forests are often higher than the direct financial returns. Direct global forest governance (focused specifically on forest management) can be traced back to the creation of the International Tropical Timber Organization, while indirect governance arrangements focusing on ancillary issues include the International Labour Organisation rules on indigenous peoples and treaties on endangered species, heritage, biodiversity and climate change as well as initiatives of both UN and non-UN agencies. In addition, system-wide coherence is pursued through the UN Forum on Forests (established in 2000) and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (established in 2001), which both bring together various of the forest-related organizations efforts. Although ongoing efforts in the area of reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) frame forests in relation to some of their ecosystem services, processes have been ad hoc
and incoherent—there is no guarantee that the REDD process will in fact lead to protection of ecosystem services.

Climate change is an unquestioned global issue. The regime developed in response to global scientific assessments and led to the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992 and the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. However, although the treaty regime moved rapidly (compared to global water and forest governance), the targets and timetables set out in the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol have lost momentum, and follow-up targets may divert attention away from the regime. The development of many other climate-related agreements may divert attention away from the binding targets approach needed to address the climate problem.

### CHALLENGES IN THE STRUCTURE OF GLOBAL GREEN GOVERNANCE

In general, environmental issues are addressed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) since the 1972 Stockholm Conference. However, climate change was explicitly not entrusted to UNEP but to the UN General Assembly, and most environmental issues fall under the purview of many other UN agencies, lightly coordinated by the UN Environment Management Group. The issue of reorganizing international environmental governance has been on the agenda since 1992.

There are many theoretical options for reorganization, each with its own pros and cons, of which at present six options are being considered in the discussions on the institutional framework for sustainable development in preparation for the Rio+20 Summit: strengthening UNEP; strengthening the Commission on Sustainable Development; creating a UN Environment Organization (UNEO); monitoring and enforcing multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs); clustering MEAs to achieve coherence and efficiency; and improving the context of international environmental arbitration. Some of these approaches are being supported by intellectual efforts at improving global environmental governance. There are a number of challenges that influence the process of deciding how to structure governance at the global level. These include the fact that there are existing bodies with their own legal mandates and contractual arrangements which cannot be phased out easily; the need to keep expenses down in designing a new body; the fear of countries that a strong centralized body with substantial powers may intervene in the sovereign powers of a country; and the very different perspectives of countries on how to compartmentalize issues and how much priority should be given to them.

### THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE: TOWARDS A GREEN ECONOMY

A key substantive challenge at the global level is how to reconcile environmental issues with the growth paradigm. The ideological stress between environmental and capitalist paradigms has given birth to the concept of the ‘green economy’. The UN Secretary General has identified four different interpretations: the internal-
ization of environmental externalities to reduce market imperfections; a broader systemic perspective to incorporate environmental challenges within the economic order; linking social goals (like job creation) to economic goals; and a new macroeconomic framework that designs a pathway towards sustainable development. This re-ordering of global society will be one of the two themes discussed at Rio+20.

Policy ideas to implement a green economy include re-inventing economies; getting the prices right (e.g., internalization of environmental externalities, green taxes, linking social goals with economic goals); investing in a sustainable infrastructure; promoting science-based sustainable product chains; the dematerialization and decarbonization of society; multiple land use and sustainable agriculture; better water use and the protection of ecosystem services; sustainable procurement policies for the State; and empowering people through education, research and dialogue to ensure that access to basic services becomes an enforceable right and that protecting the environment is a parallel responsibility. Although these elements are all critical and useful ideas, actually implementing them through instruments that can take their systemic character into account is very difficult. For example, decarbonization as part of the green economy is easier said than executed.

**THE DOMINANT CHALLENGE: ADOPTING AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE PROCESS**

While the major substantive challenge was reconciling environmental goals with growth goals, a major political challenge is reconciling conflicting North–South perspectives about the state of global governance. The Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) school argued in its first post-Second World War phase that international law was a hegemonic tool to ensure that access to basic services becomes an enforceable right and that protecting the environment is a parallel responsibility. Although these elements are all critical and useful ideas, actually implementing them through instruments that can take their systemic character into account is very difficult. For example, decarbonization as part of the green economy is easier said than executed.

**IMPLICATIONS**

On the basis of the above, we can point to a number of implications for international environmental governance. First, international environmental governance is ‘reactive’, not proactive. Second, it is incoherent across related sectors (e.g., environment and trade), as well as fragmented within sectors (e.g., water, energy, forests). Third, there is a substantive evolution from sectoral to systemic analysis (e.g., in water towards IWRM, in biodiversity towards an ecosystem approach, in climate change from a technocratic to a full; in its second phase that economic institutions were institutionalizing an unfair economic order, in the post 9/11 phase that international law and politics are becoming more intrusive; and in the wake of the American withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol that the climate regime is institutionalizing a new pragmatism in international environmental law that compromises equity. TWAIL scholars argue that treaties take a ‘West-centric’ approach and embody explicit and implicit norms that institutionalize inequities by prescribing standard solutions to an unequal world. They argue that international lawyers should also account for the interests of the developing countries, scrutinize universalist arguments, and unpack discourses that hide colonial and neo-colonial approaches.
development approach"). Fourth, although we have tools for sectoral management, we do not have the tools (and political willingness) for integrated and systemic management – such tools would have to be cross-cutting tools that apply across sectors and imply a fundamental reordering of society. Furthermore, at the global level there is a shift towards soft governance (e.g., the biodiversity regime is ‘going soft’, and the climate regime of targets and timetables is changing into a pledge and review regime). Fifth, the TWAIL school sees international law as continuously embodying patterns of exploitation.

Going beyond these initial inferences, we can argue that if environmental challenges enter the domain of ‘high politics’, the political stakes will increase. The politicization of environmental issues leads to the ad hoc use of principles in different Conventions (e.g., the CBD includes the limited sovereignty principle, whereas the UNFCCC does not; the UNFCCC only has a limited set of principles; and the principles in the Watercourses Convention are not reflected in, or reflective of, the Rio principles). The ad hoc incremental governance developments do not always meet good governance criteria: the shift to administrative law at the international level bypasses State consent; public–private mergers often transform public into economic goods subject to private ownership and confidential international level bypasses State consent; public–private relations which may not meet the standards of legitimacy, transparency and accountability. This reflects the gradual erosion of the global legal order, the
diminishing importance being given to the concept of the rule of law and the rise of alternative voluntary mechanisms for governance that will be unable to promote the green economy. All this calls for a trend break in governance patterns, especially in light of the fact that a large number of future studies predict accelerated changes in the structure of society in the coming years.

THE FUTURE WORLD: TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS

If current governance trends continue, such governance may remain reactive, fragmented, inequitable, unable to deal with systemic problems, ad hoc rather than principled, more spontaneous than predictable, and may protect current and new hegemonic interests at the cost of the rule of law and respect for global values. This could well imply that without a trend break, law will be unable to address the problems of the world in 2050. Future studies by academics,79 political bodies80 and the private sector81 show that society is changing in unrecognizable directions. These studies discuss social, economic, financial, technological, environmental and geopolitical trends.

Social trends indicate that in 2050, the global population will be nine billion, consuming at higher rates, living mostly (75%) in urban areas, migrating to other parts of the world, leading to the rise of new multiethnic societies with different value systems. These trends may be affected by climate change, natural disasters, wars or pandemics, as well as major social transitions.

Economic trends include the rise in global output by at least three times in 2050, and show that 19 of the top 30 economies will be from the current group of emerging economies and will be collectively bigger than...
the current group of developed countries. Another important trend is the changing face of poverty in that poverty and income inequality will occur also in the developed countries. Other trends include changing trading partners, increasing trade in services via cyber-space, outsourcing of employment to the changing cheapest economies and to home and office robots, and only very skilled and highly qualified people may still be eligible for work. Financial globalization may take only very skilled and highly qualified people may still be cheapest economies and to home and office robots, and trading partners, increasing trade in services via cyber-

poverty and income inequality will occur also in the important trend is the changing face of poverty in that by 90% in comparison to pre-industrial levels, and loading by two-thirds, reducing edible fish populations of global Gross Domestic Product by 3–6 times may may even influence the rise and fall of governments, while knowledge may no longer be filtered for its accuracy, secrets may leak, intellectual property rights may be disrespected, and cyber crime and espionage may affect industrial, social and national security. However, existing infrastructure, energy and transport may face institutional, technological and political lock-in.

Technological changes through eco-, nano-, bio- and info-technologies are expected to dramatically change the way we live. Technological opportunities may create extravagant lifestyles, including, for instance, space travel. The rapid penetration of gadgets (mobile devices) will transform the way we communicate and may even influence the rise and fall of governments, while knowledge may no longer be filtered for its accuracy, secrets may leak, intellectual property rights may be disrespected, and cyber crime and espionage may affect industrial, social and national security. However, existing infrastructure, energy and transport may face institutional, technological and political lock-in.

The above will affect the environment. The rising population, growing life expectancy, technological opportunities and increased income may result in a significant increase in energy use and multiplying mineral extraction (especially copper, aluminium, rare metals, platinum). Furthermore, this may lead to increasing water withdrawals from 20 to 85%, increasing local pollution, and global temperatures may rise by 1.5–2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2050. The growth of global Gross Domestic Product by 3–6 times may lead to another 10–20% of land being converted to agriculture, transforming habitats, increasing nutrient loading by two-thirds, reducing edible fish populations by 90% in comparison to pre-industrial levels, and reducing plant species by 10–15%.

In terms of geopolitics, almost all future studies indicate that economic power may shift to the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), and military power to China. These new countries may shape the principles of governance at the global level, and may question the vision of democracy – either by pushing for the current ad hoc approach or by uploading their own domestic visions to the global level. A change in value systems may occur as these newer countries take on a more dominant role in global politics. If international law continues to be reactive and not proactive, and if society changes exponentially in terms of resource consumption and waste and in terms of economic and political power, ethnicity and culture, it may not be able to deal with the problems of 2050. If the current way of dealing in an ad hoc manner is continued, these developments may not be in line with good governance, challenging the very raison d’être of law. If the current shifts in law from a hard to a soft character continue, this may undermine the future of international law. International treaties are different from political declarations in that they are legally binding; however, if their content becomes soft, there will be no need to use the treaty format. Furthermore, the new values of the new emerging economies may prefer ad hoc governance, which suits their own interests, over a more structured system of law. If these trends continue into the future, global problems may become even more exacerbated by the positive feedback effects between negative environmental and development trends. The lack of rule of law at the international level will be further intensified, and global action may be determined by the political and economic will of the changing hegemons.

WHAT KIND OF GOVERNANCE AND LAW WILL BE NEEDED IN THE FUTURE?

To achieve a sustainable development trend break calls for simultaneous demographic, developmental and decoupling (environment from the economy) transitions, which could possibly be supported by notions such as the green economy. Such transitions need to be supported by international governance processes. If law is to be able to keep up with the twenty-first century, it is important that the law not only develops rapidly and proactively, but also that it is predictable, principled, legitimate, accountable, transparent and equitable, especially in a world of changing geopolitics. Law needs to develop in order to counterbalance politics. This section argues that although fragmentation is inevitable, some degree of constitutionalization and rule of law is essential for coping with future problems.

THE INEVITABILITY OF FRAGMENTATION

The existing fragmentation in international environmental governance and law exists since it is not easy to

95 By 2020, it is estimated that 35% of all jobs will require high-level qualifications, combined with a capacity to adapt and innovate, compared to the 29% of today. This means 15 million more jobs requiring high-level qualification. See Commission Communication of 15 September 2010, 'Youth on the Move: An Initiative to Unleash the Potential of Young People to Achieve Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth in the European Union’, COM(2010)477.
96 See, e.g., Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, n. 4 above, at 14–15.
97 See UNDP, n. 5 above, at 2.
98 See Report of the Secretary General, n. 3 above, at paragraph 36.
differentiate and draw boundaries between problems because of their interlocking character. Hence, it is not entirely clear where the issue area of ‘forests’ ends and where ‘climate change’ begins, or where ‘climate change’ ends and ‘development’ begins. As such it will be necessary to compartmentalize issues pragmatically.

If we accept this conclusion, then the discussion about the fragmented nature of environmental governance and law (e.g., in the fields of forests, water and, to a lesser extent, climate change) becomes more an observation of what is happening than a driver for change. There will be fragmentation as: environmental problems do not lend themselves to easy compartmentalization, and are linked to trade and investment, if not development, development cooperation and human rights; States are unwilling to select one forum for a comprehensive approach with which to deal with all problems; and one comprehensive forum for global sustainable development governance uniting trade, investment, development and environment may not be feasible. However, this does not mean that policy entrepreneurs should not continue to strive to achieve coherence between treaties, adopt more stringent targets, fill regulatory gaps, develop tools to deal with systemic issues and strengthen national governance in order to enable States to contribute to and implement international agreements.

THE NEED FOR THE RULE OF LAW IN A MULTILEVEL LEGAL SYSTEM

The question then is: how can we make this fragmentation more palatable? This section argues in favour of promoting the rule of law through some degree of constitutionalization that takes into account the changing power of the State vis-à-vis the international and domestic context, and accounts for the observed multilevel governance systems.

At the global level, although there has been an intensive growth of rules since 1945, these are often applied arbitrarily within the anarchic global system. This is often described as the unfinished rule of law project at the international level. The ‘rule of law’ concept implies that rules must be applied to all without discrimination, be made public, should not be applied retroactively, should be clear and consistent and thus not arbitrary, should be equitable, and should be stable and provide a degree of predictability about the direction in which future rules will develop. The rule of law is an element of the concept of ‘good governance’, which also includes the right of social actors to participate in governance processes, the need for these processes to be transparent, the need to ensure that decision makers are held accountable, that policies are efficient, equitable, effective and responsive.

Those supporting the rule of law tend to be from Europe and the developing countries, while those opposing it tend to come from the United States. For instance, Madeleine Albright reportedly submitted that former President George W. Bush talked about promoting the rule of law in countries, but is ‘allergic to treaties designed to strengthen the rule of law in such areas as money-laundering, biological weapons, crimes against humanity and the environment’. Opponents of the concept argue that its substantive and procedural content is contested, that it is not politically feasible because of power politics since power implies rule by law and politics will become equal to the law, and that at the international level we are only talking of rules of international law. Furthermore, they argue that ‘[t]he

103 See M. Allen, n. 54 above.
104 See Earth System Governance Project, n. 58 above, at 3.
105 Cited in M. Allen, n. 54 above.
106 See Earth System Governance Project, n. 58 above, at 4.
107 Cited in M. Allen, n. 54 above.
109 This includes development issues in general, agencies that deal with development, such as the UN Development Group, and the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development (UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/41/128, 4 December 1986).
110 This includes bilateral and multilateral assistance by individual States, the development of aid policy within the OECD Development Assistance Committee, and the twenty-year-old discussions on ‘new and additional aid’ to deal with environmental problems. See J. Gupta, ‘Global Governance: Development Cooperation’, in J. Gupta and N. van de Grijp (eds.), Mainstreaming Climate Change in Development Cooperation: Theory, Practice and Implications for the European Union (Cambridge University Press, 2010), at 99.
111 This includes, e.g., the 2010 human right to water and sanitation adopted by the UN General Assembly, n. 32 above.
112 See Earth System Governance Project, n. 58 above, at 3.
113 See M. Allen, n. 54 above.
114 See Earth System Governance Project, n. 58 above, at 4.
fight for an international Rule of Law is a fight against politics', and is thus not possible. The rule of law at the inter-State level is inherently contradictory because it is both based on State practice and aims at being objective and normative; and that while the procedural elements promote stability and maintaining the status quo, the substantive elements question the status quo. Since the international arena is not a community of States with common values, powerful countries will determine agendas, principles and instruments.

However, there are good reasons to support the rule of law and constitutionalization projects. First, adopting a systems approach shows us that we share one planet and we have one set of planetary boundaries. This calls for a common approach. Second, climate change, and many of the common global, current and yet long-term problems, can only be systematically addressed through a consistent and predictable body of rules. Third, various voluntary, hybrid governance activities often do not meet the criteria of legitimacy, equity and predictability. Fourth, the idea of a common, systemic, comprehensive, legitimate, equitable and predictable system often has to compete with the reality of ad hoc changes in law which themselves are compromising on accountability, legitimacy, equity and predictability and are going soft, thereby questioning the very raison d’être of law. Fifth, political processes in the developed countries see the rule of law as essential within their own contexts, and have been actively promoting it in the developing world as both an ‘objective of and condition for development assistance’. If it is so important domestically, then how can it be less important internationally? Finally, it is now foolhardy to continue a hypocritical approach as the new hegemons may have an increasing influence on globalisation in the future. The values of current and future hegemons if included in the rule of law project may seek to benefit all countries. Politics needs law to sustain its legitimacy, and ‘those who seek to bestow legitimacy must themselves embody it; and those who invoke international law must themselves submit to it’.

**INSTITUTIONALIZING RULE OF LAW THROUGH CONSTITUTIONALIZATION**

If we accept that the rule of law needs to be pushed further, then the next question is how do we institutionalize this? This can be done through the process of constitutionalization. Such a process can draw inspiration from *jus cogens* norms – that is, norms ‘accepted and recognized by the international community of States as a whole… from which no derogation is permitted and which can be modified only by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character’; and obligations *erga omnes* – that is, obligations owed towards the international community as a whole, the fulfilment of which is in the interest of the international community. These obligations include the duties of States concerning the basic rights of humans (i.e., the protection of human life and the conditions indispensable to safeguarding human dignity, human worth and the development of the human personality). The respect for human rights is, in turn, related to environmental protection because environmental degradation is, in itself, a serious threat to human life and health. Thus States would have an obligation *erga omnes* to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. The International Court of Justice does not distinguish clearly between *jus cogens* and obligations *erga omnes*. However, this does not impede the acknowledgement and observation of these norms. The protection of human rights – a common principle of humankind, or a global value (another contested term) – can be achieved through the protection of the environment and the promotion of...
sustainable development. The latter, as a means to achieve the former, can also be considered a global value.

In substantive terms, the constitutionalization project could draw inspiration from the UN Charter, whose constitutional character of providing fundamental principles and global values for society is presently debated. However, some values are globally shared — namely, respect for human dignity, social progress and sustainable development, peace and security, and justice. Other sources of inspiration include the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the human rights arena, the discussions on the right to development, and the emerging norms on the equitable sharing of transboundary resources in the water arena.

The rule of law and the constitutionalization projects also need to take cognizance of the changing realities in State structure and domestic law. The State is a sovereign legal entity in international relations but its role is under pressure because of globalization and the shift from government to governance, which are accompanied by the rise of the non-State actor. This is not an either/or situation, but a paradox with which we will have to live. Furthermore, given that the State is still the legal negotiating unit in public international law, it is the key authority within the domestic system empowered by national constitutions and legal systems. To the extent that the power of the State is contested and it shrinks, it may be unable to promote the rule of law (especially in the context of some developing countries). It may not have the authority to regulate the domestic context, thereby allowing other transnational actors to take over the process of governance.

Furthermore, although the State is the legal authority, its power is eroding and other actors and levels of governance are assuming greater responsibilities. Hence, the constitutionalization project needs to broaden its intergovernmental character to include different actors at multiple levels of governance. This is also justified by the fact that whether environmental issues are defined as global (global heritage, global concern, global public goods, systems perspective) or local is often determined by the politics of scale, and it is becoming clear that most environmental problems are simultaneously both local and global, and have both local through to global drivers/causes and impacts. Law, too, may need to examine the potential of developing a conceptual framework for analyzing the new multilevel governance frameworks. Some efforts in this direction are already visible with national courts being empowered by international treaties to deal with transboundary issues.

**BACKCASTING TO THE FUTURE**

A transition to a rule of law world can be achieved through four different steps; ideas; the agency of actors; institutions; and policy windows/tipping points that allow for change. The idea is the need for constitutionalization within which multilevel governance systems can function. This idea needs to be promoted by the appropriate actors, including legal scholars, global leaders (e.g., Kofi Annan), countries (e.g., the countries of the European Union) and social movements. For example, Global Transition 2012 – a civil society network is aiming to create social support for a global green and fair economy that meets minimum needs, stays within planetary boundaries and is adaptive — could become a carrier of the notion of the rule of law. The third step is the need for institutions that support this idea — for example, national courts, human rights courts, international arbitrators and other adjudicators. And then there is a need for the right moment to push these ideas. We argue that what moment could be better than the present? We are facing global environmental, financial, economic and demographic crises, and existing powers are threatened by the rise of new ones who may use the absence of the rule of law at global level to bring alternative and less acceptable rules. New powers have always asked for a new economic and political order and have questioned the inequity of the global system. In addition, civil society has been activated world-wide, twitter is available as a tool for mass communication of ideas in a simple way, and the stage is being set for Rio+20!

**CONCLUSION**

This article has argued that current international environmental governance is reactive, incoherent, frag-
mented, inequitable, unable to account for systems approaches, and ad hoc rather than principled. The lack of political will, path-dependency, technological and institutional lock-in and strong vested interests are blocking the adoption of policy options that may be commensurate with the rate of current problems. When we project into the future, old problems are exacerbated and new problems will likely emerge in 2050. If international law and policy are unable to deal with current problems, will the incremental process of law development be able to deal with the anticipated problems of the future?

This article concludes that because of the interconnectedness of problems, governance is likely to remain fragmented. However, if we are to make sense of the fragmented policy process, if there is to be the rule of law over the rule of power, then some degree of constitutionalization, providing a framework for multilevel governance systems and the green economy, becomes inevitable and necessary in order to protect basic human rights, the rights of developing countries to develop, the equitable sharing of resources between States, and the sharing of responsibilities for problems caused to others in accordance with key principles. Although the Rio+20 Summit is occurring within a growing movement to promote the ‘green economy’, such an economy will only be sustainable within the context of a ‘green and equitable rule of law polity’.

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