

Rethinking Global Institutions in Environmental Protection: Guardians or Bystanders?

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ABSTRACT

Global environmental degradation, driven by climate change, resource overexploitation, and rapid urban expansion, challenges the effectiveness of international institutions in functioning as genuine guardians rather than passive bystanders in environmental protection. This study critically examines the role of international organizations by analyzing their legal and institutional frameworks, evaluating their practical performance, identifying key implementation constraints, and formulating reform-oriented measures. The research applies a descriptive, analytical, critical, and inductive approach through a systematic assessment of international legal instruments, institutional practices, and relevant scholarly discourse. The study finds that environmental degradation continues to intensify despite the proliferation of international agreements, indicating a persistent gap between normative commitments and practical outcomes. Limited national capacities, weak coordination among international institutions, and the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms significantly undermine institutional effectiveness. Consequently, many international obligations operate at a formal level without achieving substantive implementation. The study concludes that strengthening international environmental governance requires comprehensive legal and institutional reforms that enhance compliance, improve coordination, and ensure effective enforcement of environmental obligations.



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1. Introduction

The wild environment has always been one of the main supports of life on Earth. The wild ecosystems are full of various kinds of living organisms, which are the foundation for the sustenance of the humans and the rest of the living beings¹. Nevertheless, in the last decades, the wild environment has been putting up with more and more challenges due to human activities that were not sustainable and that resulted in the acceleration of

¹ Pu Yan and others, 'The Essential Role of Biodiversity in the Key Axes of Ecosystem Function', *Global Change Biology*, 29.16 (2023), 4569–85 <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.16666>

desertification, degradation of land, and loss of habitats; all of which have had a negative impact on food, water, healthcare, and the stability of global ecosystems². Unsustainable development projects, forest fires, climate change, overfishing, and illegal wildlife trade are some of the challenges that have been causing the wild environment to degrade and they are alarms that indicate such enormous trends of wild environmental degradation³. These challenges result in the major release of carbon, the disruption of the hydrological cycle, an increase in the risk of floods and droughts, and the extinction of a multitude of species. In addition to these problems, there are also the negative effects on genetic diversity, the extinction of a vast number of species, the disruption of food chains, the transmission of diseases from animals to humans, the increase of temperatures, the melting of polar ice caps, and the changes in the patterns of migration and reproduction; which are all factors contributing to the destabilization of the planet and the creation of irreversible environmental shifts⁴.

International organizations have a pivotal role in facing these risks, as they are the ones that first set up a legal order for the international community to protect wild environments with their marshalling of multilateral agreements, the setting of global environmental standards, the providing of forums for coordination and knowledge exchange, and the broadening of the concept of protection to cover a global aspect. The international legal system is supported by these organizations in the emergence of the principles of responsibility and cooperation among nations to fight against the degradation of wild ecosystems globally⁵. The environmental issues keep on increasing, even though there are several international treaties like the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), and the convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in place. This shows a significant disconnect between the international law and the needs of the nations, as well as poor environmental governance, lack of coordination among institutions, and inadequacies in the international enforcement tools. Therefore, the present research intends to not only reveal the importance of International Organizations in the setting up of international wildlife law but also to evaluate the actual effectiveness of the law in practice.

O'Neill (2022) asserts that international environmental organizations are the very ones who take care of the wild protection agreements by the means of improving, controlling, and supervising environmental governance in such a way that they make it easy for the states to cooperate and to fulfill their environmental obligations⁶. These organizations also

² Insan Ali - and Anisur Rahman -, 'Environmental Degradation: Causes, Effects and Solutions', *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, 6.3 (2024) <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i03.20366>

³ Eric L. Bullock and others, 'Satellite-based Estimates Reveal Widespread Forest Degradation in the Amazon', *Global Change Biology*, 26.5 (2020), 2956–69 <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.15029>

⁴ Paul A. Garber and others, 'Global Wildlife Trade and Trafficking Contribute to the World's Nonhuman Primate Conservation Crisis', *Frontiers in Conservation Science*, 5 (2024) <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcosc.2024.1400613> Raies A Bhat and others, 'Climate Change and Its Effects on Biodiversity: A Global Perspective', *Plant Science Review*, 5.2 (2024), 21–27 <https://doi.org/10.51470/PSR.2024.05.02.21> M. Goldman, E., Carter, S., & Sims, 'Global Forest Review', *Fires Drove Record-Breaking Tropical Forest Loss in 2024*; Kenneth Toah Nsah, 'Conserving Africa's Eden? Green Colonialism, Neoliberal Capitalism, and Sustainable Development in Congo Basin Literature', *Humanities*, 12.3 (2023), 38 <https://doi.org/10.3390/h12030038>

⁵ Jianyu Deng, 'Enhancing Environmental Conservation through the Implementation of GMOs', *MedScien*, 1.9 (2024) <https://doi.org/10.61173/z026t125>

⁶ Kate O'Neill, 'International Organizations', in *Routledge Handbook of Global Environmental Politics* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 105–17 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003008873-11>

function as venues where negotiations and information exchanges take place, thus making global agreements more effective. Similarly, Melliou (2015) mentions the contribution of international organizations to the building up of international relations in the field of environment, while acknowledging the persistence of difficulties in proper implementation due to the lack of enforcement mechanisms and the disparity of economic measures applied in the environmental sector. However, the available policy instruments can be a major factor in changing the situation for the better and making it more effective and proactive⁷.

According to Annabi and Jalali (2023), international organizations play a significant role in the conservation of animals and their habitats by supporting the agreements made among the countries through cooperation, help in drafting international laws, and negotiation and consensus building. They also emphasize the importance of capacity-building in developing countries, environmental education, and coordination in conflict resolution with regard to the environment⁸. The United Nations and its specialized agencies, especially the UN Environment Programs (UNEP), are among the key players in enforcing these agreements and thus, in global environmental governance. Akter (2024) highlights the global cooperation needed in the making of effective environmental policies through treaties, though he does not mention explicitly the role of international organizations in enforcement regarding wild protection. Instead, he points out that they provide a framework within which efforts to resolve urgent environmental issues can be coordinated and the exchange of knowledge, resources, and technologies for sustainable development can occur, thereby stressing the necessity of involving all stakeholders including the marginalized communities to ensure the success of the policy implementation and adaptation⁹.

In the same way, Hedemann-Robinson (2018) points out the function of international organizations in making states comply with global treaties regarding the wild environment. They develop systems for monitoring and reporting to appropriate authorities, support the development of skills, and provide technical assistance aimed at ensuring that states meet their obligations and deal with the conditions of enforcement, hence, maintaining the compliance of the parties¹⁰. According to Syamsu et al. (2024), the international environmental organizations are capable of solving the global environmental issues like wildfires, soil degradation, and water pollution which, in turn, do affect the protection of the environment in the whole world. The aforementioned organizations can contribute to the national policies through influencing and raising awareness of global environmental protection programs by their cooperative activities¹¹.

⁷ Charoula Melliou, 'International Cooperation: The Scope and Challenges of International Environmental Agreements', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2015 <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2743147>

⁸ Alireza Annabi and Mahmoud Jalali, 'Investigating The Central Performance of International Organizations in Environmental Protection', *International Journal of New Findings in Health and Educational Sciences (IJHES)*, 1.2 (2023), 1–25 <https://doi.org/10.63053/ijhes.11>

⁹ Kudrat-E-Khuda Babu and others, 'The Principles of International Environmental Protection and Global Obligations: An Analysis Based on the Legal Context', *Nature Environment and Pollution Technology*, 22.3 (2023), 1401–9 <https://doi.org/10.46488/NEPT.2023.v22i03.026>

¹⁰ Martin Hedemann-Robinson, *Enforcement of International Environmental Law* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018). | Series: Routledge research in international environmental law: Routledge, 2018) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351066587>

¹¹ Syamsir Syamsu, Diah Gustiniati Maulani and Dauri A, 'ROLE AND POSITION OF INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT', *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 12.04 (2024), 1186–93 <https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/18662>

Baldwin Jr. et al. (2016) argue that international organizations are major facilitators in the enforcement of global treaties on the protection of wild ecosystems and the resolution of transboundary environmental conflicts by allowing the interaction of government and non-government actors alongside the private sector. They acknowledge that there are enormous obstacles in the way of international cooperation enhancement, yet they still believe that such activities are imperative for solving global environmental challenges and for the observance of both national and international laws¹². In contrast, Volik and Bespalova (2021) highlight the indispensable role played by international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, in maintaining the integrity of wild environments through environmental education, investment in environmental projects, and increased community participation at national and international levels thereby preserving natural heritage for future generations¹³.

Albakjaji and Baroudy (2024) emphasize various issues that make it hard for international organizations to carry out wildlife protection agreements, like respect for the sovereignty of nations, non-uniform local application, scarcity of funds, poor institutional setups, different levels of commitments, and lack of political will, which altogether result in non-uniform compliance that is dependent on economic and political considerations¹⁴. Oli et al. (2024) point out various factors that hinder the proper execution of international environmental agreements; among these are the lack of strong compliance systems, limited political support mainly in developing countries, inadequate training of environmental staff, and poor public understanding of pollution dangers. They call for a holistic approach to the enforcement of environmental law and to increasing regulatory compliance. This goes hand in hand with the view of Khater et al. (2025a), who claim that only by designing and applying comprehensive national law frameworks based on principles and standards established by international environmental organizations, can we reach high rates of environmental compliance¹⁵.

A review of the literature reveals that previous research overwhelmingly discussed the international organizations' involvement in the legal definition of the environmental protection and their active role in the enforcement of related treaties. However, they did not go into the details of the effectiveness of the international obligations relating to the wild environment protection, and most of them did not put forth any practical mechanisms for correcting the international compliance shortcomings. On the contrary, the current study is assessing the role of international organizations in the safeguarding of wild environments, identifying the obstacles to their effectiveness at both international and national levels and suggesting qualitative solutions and propositions that would lead to the compliance with the wild protection obligations being enhanced. In doing so, it clearly fills the gap in the literature with regard to the practical aspect of international organizations' effectiveness in wild protection. Besides, the study gives a full account of the theoretical

¹² Gunnar Baldwin and others, 'International Compliance and Enforcement Networks: The Critical Role of Collaboration in Environmental Protection', in *Environmental Crime and Collaborative State Intervention* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), pp. 21–38 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-56257-9_2

¹³ Viacheslav Volik and Olha Bespalova, 'The Role of International Organizations in Maintaining Environmental Security', *Teise*, 121 (2021), 148–57 <https://doi.org/10.15388/Teise.2021.121.9>

¹⁴ Mohamad Albakjaji and Jinane El Baroudy, 'The Effectiveness of the International Environmental Law: The Issues of State Sovereignty, National Interests, and Differing Levels of Commitments', *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 3.7 (2024), 1348–54 <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i7.4297>

¹⁵ Maya Khater, Yassine Chami and Mohamad Albakjaji, 'Legal Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development in the United Arab Emirates', *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, 5.2 (2025), 378–411 <https://doi.org/10.53955/jhcls.v5i2.469>

legal framework existing, but it also uncovers the problems in international environmental governance such as weak global environmental governance, overlapping mandates, and poor national compliance and concurrently proposes practical, realistic reforms to strengthen the capacity of international organizations in wild environment protection.

The fundamental research question is: How far do International Organizations have the requisite legal and institutional structures in place for the successful safeguarding of wild environments? Which obstacles impair their ability to implement environmental duties? And what are the measures through which the environmental governance can be made more effective such that it would lead to compliance and also reduce the overexploitation of the earth's land-based environments? Accordingly, the research aims falls into four main aspects: to delineate the legal and institutional frameworks that regulate organizations' participation in this area; judge the efficacy of the enforcement mechanisms of environmental accords and the containment of wild degradation; reveal the most significant legal and institutional barriers both at the international and national levels that prevent effective protection; and recommend feasible ways to boost global adherence.

2. Research Method

The research adopts a descriptive, analytical, and critical methodology that involves reviewing international legal texts pertinent to natural habitats, evaluating the degree of state adherence to their provisions, and subsequently measuring the impact and effectiveness of international organizations in protecting wild environments by pinpointing the gaps in compliance mechanisms and international environmental governance, finally resulting in practical, applicable reforms¹⁶. Moreover, the research employs an inductive approach by following the paths of legal frameworks in pertinent international accords, conducting literature and previous studies reviews on the participation of international organizations and the institutional challenges which face environmental compliance mechanisms, and finally arrive at the practical findings and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of these organizations' protection of wild environments and shift from a coordinating role to a more powerful executive role. The main legal sources consist of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), along with secondary sources, which are books, peer-reviewed academic articles, and literature reviews¹⁷. The application of this methodological framework allows scrutiny of the legal aspects of the international organizations' safeguarding of the wildest environments, evaluation of the power of their executive institutions, the capability of the states to be legally bound regarding environmental matters, and the pinpointing of obstacles, both legal and institutional, that compromise the

¹⁶ Dina Imad and others, 'Doctrinal and Comparative Assessment of GMO Liability Laws in the UAE', *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, 6.1 (2026), 31–58 <https://doi.org/10.53955/jhcls.v6i1.701>

¹⁷ Mohamed El-Erian, 'The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Enhancing Corporate Governance and Achieving Sustainable Development', *Access to Justice in Eastern Europe*, 2026, 208 <https://doi.org/10.33327/AJEE-18-9.1-a000177>

safeguarding, plus the suggesting of solutions and ways to amplify the details of the executors' functions¹⁸.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. *The International Legal and Institutional Framework for Protecting wild Environments*

The results of this study indicate that international wild environment protection treaties and organizations are extremely important in the global environmental policy-making and execution process by using the legal and institutional mechanisms and functions of great sophistication. They not only facilitate cooperation among nations but also add to the creation of the international environmental law and set up the platforms for tackling the most urgent environmental issues. In this regard, the UNCBD, the UNCCD and the CITES stand out as the main supports of wild nature protection. These frameworks impose very precise duties not only to control the trade in endangered species but also to protect biodiversity and combat land degradation and desertification globally. Moreover, they promote the establishment of efficient channels for cooperation, financing, and environmental monitoring thus earning their status of indispensability to sustainable development and continuance of wild life for humans in the future¹⁹.

Besides, the United Nations Environment Programs (UNEP), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) play effective technical roles ensuring that the technical and knowledge support is provided and the environmental sustainability and wild environments are kept on the international agenda. However, this research informs that such positions have to deal with enormous difficulties that block the success of global initiatives directed towards the prevention of wild systems' degradation. Legal, institutional/administrative, and national are the three major levels at which limitations occur. In the realm of legal disputes, one of the main issues is the loose binding character of most international conventions meant for the protection of the wild environment; specifically, the UNCBD and CITES that are mainly based on voluntary compliance and do not impose any penalties for non-compliance. Furthermore, there is a lack of an international court that deals specifically with violations of environmental laws between countries, which results in a lower level of responsibility for the degradation of wild environments. The mechanisms to discourage such acts are few, and the agreements rely on the countries' reports rather than on a system of binding oversight, which in turn means that many commitments are treated as recommendations without actual penalties for the breach of such commitments²⁰.

At the institutional and administrative levels, there are challenges such as the lack of a central platform or official mechanism that can unify efforts among international environmental organizations which have overlapping powers, unstable and limited resources, and also inefficient international monitoring and follow-up systems for

¹⁸ Yassine Chami and others, 'Abuse of Rights: A Comparative Study between Mālikī Jurisprudence & Positive Law', *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, 25.2 (2025), 415–28 <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v25i2.44606>

¹⁹ Abouelnour, M. M., ALQaydi, A. M., Alhourani, M. I., Telfah, S. M., & Abou Adel, M. (2024). The ideology of giving in Sheikh Sultan Al Qasimi's speeches. *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*, 22(2), 8687–8705. <https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.2.00654>

²⁰ Yassine Chami and Maya Khater, 'THE INFLUENCE OF MALIKI JURISPRUDENCE ON THE FRENCH CIVIL LAW IN TERMS OF THE OPPOSABILITY OF THE RELATIVE EFFECT OF CONTRACT TO THIRD PARTIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY', *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law*, 13.1 (2025), 123–33 <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjssl.vol13no1.1157>

measuring compliance effectiveness. Thus, the primary difficulty impeding the power of international organizations to safeguard wild habitats is the legal and institutional problems, that is, insufficient monitoring and enforcement, no effective compulsory mechanisms, coupled with national-level barriers to implementation. Hence, international environmental governance still requires extensive legal, institutional, and financial reforms to make strong the international enforcement and oversight mechanisms on one hand, and to empower the states to implement their obligations on the other²¹.

Since the mid-20th century, the global system gradually learned the necessity of safeguarding wild habitats and ecosystems. The engagement of international organizations in the task of environmental protection through their coordination of international activities has been considerable, including the protection of wild environments along with the ecosystems and rare and endangered species they host. International organizations indeed take the major part in creating the international legal framework for the protection of wild environments. They perform many different roles, such as formulating guidelines and customary rules, promoting cooperation on the international and regional levels, and even influencing the policies of individual countries. These organizations have, in the last decades, produced quite a few pronouncements and guidelines that were not just political statements, but rather legal principles that became increasingly important in environmental policy-making worldwide and thus, slowly, led to the signing of international treaties with force of law²².

The 1972 Stockholm Declaration was a very significant event to the development of international environmental law, as it presented the concept of the environment as a common heritage of all mankind and the right to a dignified life as an essential part of the environmental protection. It also raised the question of the relationship between the economic growth, pollution and overall human welfare which was a matter of concern to both industrialized and developing countries²³. The 1992 Rio Declaration reasserted the need for the environmental dimension to be part of the development strategies and, at the same time, new principles were introduced that made the states' environmental commitments even stronger²⁴. International environmental law formulates a set of essential legal principles that serve as the foundation for contemporary environmental policies and regulatory frameworks at both international and national levels. Among these, the prevention principle requires states and relevant actors to anticipate and avoid environmental harm before it occurs, based on the recognition that post hoc remediation imposes significantly higher economic and ecological costs than preventive action. This principle informs the adoption of environmental impact assessments, regulatory restrictions on activities that threaten ecosystems, and conservation measures aimed at safeguarding biodiversity and natural habitats.

The precautionary principle compels decision makers to take protective measures in circumstances where scientific certainty regarding environmental risks remains incomplete. It emphasizes early intervention to prevent potentially irreversible

²¹ Khater, Yassine Chami and Mohamad Albakjaji.

²² Maya Khater and others, 'Assessing the Impact of Green Tourism on Sustainable Development: A Case Study of the United Arab Emirates', *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 6.2 (2025) <https://doi.org/10.58256/0m0wvr07>

²³ United Nations, 'United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification', *Treaty Adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994*, 1994.

²⁴ United Nations, *Treaty Adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro on 5 June 1992*. United Nations., 1992.

environmental damage and reorients governance from a reactive approach toward a proactive framework. This principle plays a critical role in biodiversity protection by regulating activities that may endanger species survival despite the absence of conclusive scientific evidence. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities acknowledges that environmental degradation constitutes a shared global concern while assigning differentiated obligations based on historical contributions and varying capacities among states. It requires developed countries to assume greater responsibility through financial assistance and technology transfer to developing countries. This principle strengthens international environmental cooperation and promotes a more equitable distribution of responsibilities in addressing global environmental challenges.²⁵

In addition to the abovementioned principles, international organizations have established additional ones, such as the principle of sustainable development, which links environmental conservation to economic development; the principle of international cooperation, which emphasizes the importance of cooperation and coordination between countries; and the principle of intergenerational justice, which guarantees the rights of future generations to a healthy environment²⁶. International organizations have facilitated the adoption of several key agreements that constitute the core of the international legal framework for the protection of the wild environment. Among these instruments, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora of 1973 establishes a regulatory regime that controls international trade in endangered species through a system of permits and strict monitoring mechanisms. This convention seeks to eliminate illegal trade by imposing binding obligations on states with respect to import and export activities. However, it limits its scope to trade regulation and does not directly address habitat protection or ecosystem management, despite demonstrating relatively strong compliance and enforcement structures compared to other environmental agreements²⁷.

The Convention on Biological Diversity of 1992 provides a comprehensive framework for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity through coordinated international action. It requires states to integrate biodiversity protection into national policies and to implement strategies aimed at conserving ecosystems such as forests, wetlands, and grasslands. These measures include the protection of endangered species, the management of protected areas, and the development of national environmental plans. Nevertheless, the convention primarily relies on reporting mechanisms and cooperative monitoring, which reduces its effectiveness due to the absence of binding enforcement measures. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification of 1994 addresses land degradation and desertification by promoting sustainable land management practices and supporting affected states through technical and financial assistance. It obliges states to adopt national action plans and implement measures to restore degraded lands, particularly in regions vulnerable to environmental stress. While this convention emphasizes planning and

²⁵ Rohan Yadav, 'International Environmental Law Principles and Their Application in Environment Protection Act, 2076', *Bharatpur Pragya: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3 (2025), 120–36 <https://doi.org/10.3126/bpjms.v3i01.76248>

²⁶ Adel, Mohammed A., Ahmed M. Mohamed, and Mohammed Altwajji, (2024). The representation of women with disabilities in Shahira Al-Hasan's Cochlea's Secrets. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 26(6), 8. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol26/iss6/8>

²⁷ Yassine Chami and Maya Khater, 'Re-Evaluating Contractual Relativity: Third-Party Effects in Islamic and Positive Legal Frameworks', *Mazahib*, 24.2 (2025), 309–28 <https://doi.org/10.21093/mj.v24i2.11151>

international cooperation, it does not impose strict enforcement obligations and depends significantly on external funding mechanisms²⁸.

3.2. Roles of International Environmental Organizations in Wild Environment Protection

International environmental organizations perform executive, technical, and normative functions that significantly shape the protection of wild environments and the evolution of global environmental governance. These institutions actively coordinate international cooperation, develop regulatory standards, provide scientific expertise, and facilitate the implementation of environmental commitments across jurisdictions. Through these integrated roles, they establish a structured framework that links global policy formulation with national level implementation, thereby enhancing the collective capacity of states to address increasingly complex environmental challenges.²⁹

The United Nations Environment Programme plays a central role in directing global environmental governance by formulating policy agendas, strengthening multilateral cooperation, and providing technical assistance to states. It actively promotes the implementation of biodiversity conservation frameworks by facilitating coordination among governments and advancing sustainable ecosystem management strategies. The Programme supports initiatives that address deforestation and forest degradation, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and the preservation of biodiversity. In addition, it develops comprehensive environmental assessment instruments that evaluate global ecological conditions, identify emerging risks, and provide evidence-based projections to guide policymaking. These assessment mechanisms enable states to adopt preventive and adaptive strategies grounded in scientific analysis. The Programme also collaborates with international financial institutions to mobilize resources for environmental projects, including forest conservation, ecosystem restoration, and pollution control, thereby reinforcing the financial dimension of environmental governance³⁰.

The Food and Agriculture Organization performs a specialized technical function in the sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity conservation. It promotes responsible utilization of wildlife and natural ecosystems in a manner that supports food security while preserving ecological balance. The Organization prioritizes forest conservation, particularly in regions characterized by high biodiversity, and implements programs designed to reduce deforestation and restore degraded ecosystems. It addresses land degradation and desertification through reforestation initiatives and sustainable land management practices that enhance ecosystem resilience. Furthermore, it strengthens institutional and technical capacities at the national level by providing training, tools, and policy guidance to governments and local communities. Through its global forest resource assessments, the Organization generates comprehensive data on forest conditions, vegetation cover, and land use patterns, which support evidence-based policymaking and enable continuous monitoring of environmental progress. These contributions position the

²⁸ Maya Khater and Yassine Chami, 'Effectiveness of the Legal Framework for Humanitarian Assistance during Armed Conflicts: The Aggression against Lebanon as a Case Study', *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 6.1 (2025) <https://doi.org/10.58256/caqpva90>

²⁹ 'Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations', in *FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31*.

³⁰ Jinane El Baroudy, Mohamad Albakjaji and Maya Khater, 'Between Protection and Destruction: The Legal Tension Between Military Necessity and Cultural Heritage Protection in International Humanitarian Law', *F1000Research*, 14 (2025), 1032 <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.170650.2>

Organization as a key-actor in bridging environmental protection with sustainable development objectives.³¹

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization contributes to environmental protection by integrating ecological conservation with cultural, educational, and scientific dimensions. It promotes a holistic approach that recognizes the interdependence between human societies and natural ecosystems. Through its programs, it advances sustainable development by encouraging practices that balance environmental preservation with social and cultural considerations. The Organization also designates and protects sites of exceptional natural value, thereby enhancing their legal status and international recognition. This approach not only safeguards biodiversity but also reinforces the cultural and historical significance of natural landscapes, creating a multidimensional framework for conservation that extends beyond purely ecological considerations.³²

The International Union for Conservation of Nature serves as a leading scientific and technical authority in biodiversity conservation and wildlife protection. It develops global standards and assessment tools that inform environmental policy and regulatory frameworks. Its analytical instruments evaluate the status of species and ecosystems, providing critical data that guide conservation priorities and policy interventions. The Union also establishes standards for the management of protected areas, ensuring that critical habitats receive adequate protection and sustainable oversight. In addition, it contributes to the formulation of environmental policies by offering technical expertise and facilitating coordination among states and international organizations. Through its advisory mechanisms and specialized commissions, it supports decision making processes and promotes the integration of environmental considerations into economic and developmental activities. This role strengthens the scientific and legal foundations of global environmental governance³³.

The World-Wide Fund for Nature operates as a major non-governmental actor that complements institutional efforts through practical implementation, financial mobilization, and public engagement. It focuses on the protection of endangered species and the conservation of critical habitats by designing and executing field-based conservation projects. The organization collaborates with governments, civil society organizations, and private sector actors to implement environmental initiatives that address biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. It also conducts global awareness campaigns that aim to influence public behavior and reduce activities that harm wildlife, including illegal trade and unsustainable consumption. Through partnerships and advocacy, it supports the enforcement of environmental regulations and strengthens monitoring mechanisms that protect vulnerable species. Its operational approach enhances the practical effectiveness of environmental governance by translating policy commitments into tangible conservation outcomes³⁴.

³¹ UNESCO., 'About the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme.'

³² 'United Nations Environment Programme' (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

³³ Sholahuddin Al-Fatih and others, 'Questioning Ecological Justice in Indonesian Forestry Regulations', *Contrarius*, 2.3 (2026), 226–46 <https://doi.org/10.53955/contrarius.v2i3.295>

³⁴ Theresia Anita Christiani and others, 'Indonesia's Palm Oil Plantation Regulations for Promoting Community Protection and Justice', *Contrarius*, 2.3 (2026), 247–74 <https://doi.org/10.53955/contrarius.v2i3.296>

These organizations do not operate in isolation but rather interact within an interconnected institutional framework characterized by functional complementarity and coordinated action. The United Nations Environment Programme establishes the overarching normative and policy direction, while the Food and Agriculture Organization provides technical expertise in resource management. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization contributes a cultural and educational dimension that reinforces conservation efforts, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature supplies scientific standards and analytical tools that guide policy formulation. The World-Wide Fund for Nature strengthens implementation through financial resources, advocacy, and field level interventions. This multidimensional interaction creates a comprehensive system that integrates legal norms, scientific knowledge, technical capacity, and practical execution³⁵.

Despite these significant contributions, the effectiveness of international environmental organizations remains constrained by structural and operational limitations. Weak enforcement mechanisms, uneven national capacities, and fragmented institutional coordination continue to hinder the full realization of environmental objectives. Many international commitments remain largely normative and lack binding force at the implementation stage, which reduces their practical impact on environmental protection. In addition, disparities in financial resources and technological capabilities among states further complicate the execution of global environmental strategies. The strengthening the role of international environmental organizations requires comprehensive legal and institutional reforms that enhance compliance, improve coordination, and reinforce accountability mechanisms. It also necessitates the development of more effective enforcement tools and the expansion of financial and technical support for developing countries. By addressing these challenges, the international community can transform existing institutional frameworks into more effective instruments for protecting the wild environment and ensuring the sustainability of global ecosystems³⁶.

3.3. Rethinking Global Institutions in Environmental Protection: Guardians or Bystanders?

Notwithstanding the important advancements in the legal frameworks and the international organizations' decisions, the practical effectiveness is still restricted because of the aforementioned problems that are deeply rooted in the structure, institutions, politics, and economy, thus widening the rift between the law on paper and its actual implementation. The obstacles are of three kinds: international institutional, national, and exceptional caused by conflicts and disasters. The interval that separates the formal commitment and the real implementation is one of the most important barriers to the legitimacy of environmental organizations and agreements. A lot of international decisions are still recommendations and declarations that do not lead to obligations or binding national policies. Countries usually show their support politically, but do not take enough domestic action because of a lack of political will, economic or financial constraints, or

³⁵ Absori Absori and others, 'Principle of Ecological Restorative Justice in Corporate Environmental Crimes Policies', *Contrarius*, 2.2 (2026), 87–109 <https://doi.org/10.53955/contrarius.v2i2.271>

³⁶ Andri Winjaya Laksana, Bambang Manumayoso and Arida Turymshayeva, 'The Effect of Tax Transparency on the Effectiveness of Indonesia's Mining Tax Policy', *Contrarius*, 2.2 (2026), 183–204 <https://doi.org/10.53955/contrarius.v2i2.290>

conflicting national priorities³⁷. For instance, the Rio (1992) forest protection recommendations were not practically followed in many developing countries, which continued to exploit trees for short-term economic benefits.

The majority of international environmental decisions lack monitoring and follow-up bodies that are effective which makes them less enforceable and turns them into mere general guidance without penalties for non-compliance. Even in cases when there is monitoring (for example, national reports), it is often not based on standardized benchmarks and lacks the power to impose sanctions which diminishes its practical impact³⁸. Consequently, the international commitments are mostly evident unless they are supported by strong oversight and enforcement tools that are efficient³⁹. This is consistent with the weak binding power and the lack of strong executive authority of most international environmental treaties. CBD and CITES, for instance, have no power to create legal obligations and impose direct sanctions on states that do not comply; they can primarily provide recommendations or offer incentives for states that show good implementation but cannot force those states that ignore obligations. Besides, there are no effective judicial instruments to hold accountable the environment, there being no international environmental court that specializes in handling cases of states or individuals who are engaged in environmental violations or in the illegal trading of endangered species. Thus, the environmental treaty regulations are insufficiently complied with and the legal accountability mechanisms for environmental degradation are ineffective⁴⁰.

Even though the UN Security Council has the power to make decisions that must be followed according to the UN Charter, it hardly ever takes part in the issues of the environment, and rather military and political threats to peace and security become its focus. Therefore, it cannot be considered a good instrument for dealing with crises in the environment or for wildlife protection, and it makes international environmental law less powerful in terms of deterrence and enforcement. The ecosystem's international aspect does not only suffer from a poor governance system, but it is also disunited and rendered powerless because of the lack of the effective international deterrent that is supposed to be applied to natural disasters, thereby causing its suffering to continue and be even more severe. Fragmentation in the governance of the international environment is the main result of the many international organizations that are in the environment and their overlapping efforts and weak cooperation among them. This difficulty is made worse by the lack of a single global coordination mechanism⁴¹. There is, for instance, a clear overlap of functions and a lack of effective coordination among UNEP, CBD, FAO, and IUCN when it comes to protecting wild reserves. This, in turn, makes it more difficult to reach the environmental goals not only in an efficient but also in a sustainable and uniform manner.

To conclude, one of the major limitations that international environmental organizations face in their operation is the instability of funding. The majority of organizations, such as

³⁷ Ralf Nordbeck, 'International Policy Transfer and Domestic Politics. The Limited Effectiveness of National Environmental Strategies in Romania', *Comparative Southeast European Studies*, 63.3 (2015), 393–411 <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2015-630304>

³⁸ Ludwig Krämer, 'The Time for Lofty Speeches Is Over - It Is Time for Implementation: The Problem of 50 Years of Application of International Environmental Law', *Revista Catalana de Dret Ambiental*, 13.2 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.17345/rcda3464>

³⁹ Khater and others.

⁴⁰ Hannes R. Stephan and Fariborz Zelli, 'International Organizations and the Global Environment', in *The Politics of the Environment* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 52–70 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315728278-4>

⁴¹ Albakjaji and Baroudy.

UNEP and WWF, totally depend on the voluntary contributions of donor countries. As a result, the whole environmental program may be influenced by changes in political priorities or economic conditions in the donor country. Such a situation triggers a cycle of financial instability that prevents the projects from being carried out continuously and thus leads to a prolongation of the period for achieving strategic objectives⁴². On the other hand, limited funding cuts off the projects that demand a lot of money and resources, like the projects of nature reserves or the conservation of endangered species, but also, it limits the organizations' capacity to create the environmental monitoring systems and mechanisms for accountability that are not only effective but also very reliable.

On the national level, the preservation of wilderness areas is quite difficult and almost impossible to get rid of because of international agreements on environmental protection, and these are the main challenges the wild environments face. Reports have it that more than 40% of the countries are not yet using their international biodiversity commitments in their national policies, which point out the difference between what countries committed to do and what they actually did. To a great extent, this is the result of a shortage of political will in some countries which consider the safeguarding of wild areas a matter of sovereignty that is off-limits to international organizations or other nations' intervention⁴³. This circumstance brings about the case of necessary international cooperation that is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of environmental agreements being restricted.

The situation becomes more serious when the protection of wild environments interferes with the economic priorities of nations. For-instance a state might use its forest resources for mining, agriculture or urbanization, giving precedence to short-term economic gains above its environmental obligations⁴⁴. Also, there is the problem of feeble legal and institutional frameworks for wild environmental protection. In some states, the environmental law is ambiguous or ineffective and thus do not prevent overhunting or illegal wildlife trade, and there are no independent national environmental oversight bodies to oversee and enforce such laws. As a result, opportunities for corruption or inefficiencies in administration of supervision may arise.

The situation is even worse in developing countries, which are extremely short of resources. Therefore, they cannot implement the world's highest environmental protection standards. Many of the developing countries' environmental projects are not of large scale due to insufficient funds and lack of environmental experts, which leads to poor planning and ineffective implementation of environmental programs. For instance, the trafficking networks that are a threat to biodiversity in some African countries are able to operate because of the governments' inability to control illegal wildlife trade as a result of weak security and border enforcement⁴⁵.

The negative impacts of armed conflicts on wildlife besides the disasters caused by environmental and climate change have made countries draw back on their ability to impose environmental laws. Enforcement of environmental protection laws is almost

⁴² Nordbeck.

⁴³ Albakjaji and Baroudy.

⁴⁴ Wanting Shao, 'Environmental Diplomacy in Transition: Contemporary Impediments and Policy Countermeasures', *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 24.1 (2023), 71–76 <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/24/20230576>

⁴⁵ M. J. Kelly, 'Overcoming Obstacles to the Effective Implementation of International Environmental Agreements.', *Georgetown International Environmental Law Review*, 9 (1997), 447–488; Shao.

impossible during wars as natural habitats and wildlife reserves are destroyed in the process and such actions take place, both directly and indirectly, in the affected areas⁴⁶. The occurrence of wars leads to loss of controlled areas designated for protection and this automatically affects the environment negatively due to movements of people, who are displaced, and military activities like extraction of natural resources⁴⁷. On the other hand, environmental and climatic calamities in the form of droughts and wildfires severely degrade wildlife habitats and keep putting oppressed species constantly under threat. The crises usually call for extensive international intervention exceeding the capabilities of the affected countries in some cases. One striking example is that of climate change which has led to Europe experiencing a record heat wave, thereby resulting in a whopping 87% increase of wildfires across the continent and destruction of more than 400,000 hectares since early 2025⁴⁸. The above-mentioned situation clearly shows the very close interdependence between climate change and loss of ecosystems. The issues hindering the effectiveness of international organizations are not restricted to poor legal bindings only. Moreover, there exist problems in the framework of global environmental governance, differences in national capabilities, as well as lack of political will and fragmented funding and institutional efforts. Thus, these problems must be dealt with immediately in order for effectiveness to be improved. It implies that such structural changes in the system would be a condition for achieving not only a well-protected but also a sustainable environment.

The debate exposes the fact that international organizations have legal and institutional frameworks which in theory can be used for the implementation of protecting atmosphere's wildest parts. However, turning these powers into practice still runs into major legal and institutional problems which impede the whole international environmental governance system's ability to cut down on the degradation of land ecosystems and the decrease in biodiversity⁴⁹. This suggests the need for reform mechanisms that will not only improve the power of international organizations in the area of wild environments protection but also increase the states' adherence to their environmental duties and finally shift from the traditional voluntary commitment-based global environmental governance model to a more binding one⁵⁰.

The legal structure that oversees international environmental organizations is still mainly advisory rather than obligatory, thus requiring reforms in law to establish enforceable compliance as the norm instead of voluntary adherence if the organizations are to be made more effective⁵¹. This entails the creation of international accountability

⁴⁶ J. El Baroudy, M. Albakjaji and M. Khater, 'Between Protection and Destruction: The Legal Tension Between Military Necessity and Cultural Heritage Protection in International Humanitarian Law', *F1000Research*, 14 (2025), 1032 <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.170650.2>

⁴⁷ Florian Krampe, Joakim Kreutz and Tobias Ide, "Armed Conflict Causes Long-Lasting Environmental Harms", *Environment and Security*, 2025 <https://doi.org/10.1177/27538796251323739>

⁴⁸ Muhammad Aamir Mahmood, 'Building Resilience', in *Strengthening Global Resilience to Natural Disasters* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2025), pp. 231–42 <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-9745-9.ch009>

⁴⁹ Iokiñe Rodríguez and others, 'Decolonizing Wildfire Risk Management: Indigenous Responses to Fire Criminalization Policies and Increasingly Flammable Forest Landscapes in Lomerío, Bolivia', *Environmental Science & Policy*, 147 (2023), 103–15 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2023.06.005>

⁵⁰ Zhixin Lin and others, 'River System Changes under Urban Expansion: Insights from the Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou Metropolitan Area, China', *Journal of Hydrology: Regional Studies*, 53 (2024), 101766 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejrh.2024.101766>

⁵¹ *Reframing Global Environmental Governance: Results of a CIGI/CIS Collaboration*, ed. by Jennifer Clapp Steven Bernstein and and Matthew Hoffmann (The Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2009);

systems that depend on a State receiving financial help and technical support. The tying of international aid to a state's observance of environmental treaties would not only secure better observance but also prevent the violation of environmental laws under the pretext of national sovereignty. Moreover, it demands the changing of the normative frameworks into step-by-step obligations that are in line with the capacities of the States, thus allowing for the assessment of implementation and the conducting of continuous monitoring⁵². Furthermore, the creation of an international environmental court or a UN judicial body to handle conflicts arising from international environmental law would grant the global environmental governance system an independent court enforcement mechanism. This would guarantee that both countries and individuals are responsible for very serious breaches of international environmental law, thus, providing a solution to one of the most important enforcement gaps that currently exist⁵³.

The challenges mentioned previously indicate the necessity of coordinated responses at the State and international organization levels, which would involve the combination of the reinforcement of international accountability mechanisms with the dismantling of fragmentation in global environmental governance through harmonization of institutional efforts and activation of coordination mechanisms among the different environmental organizations. The problem of disunity and lack of collaboration in the environmental governance of the world has only gotten worse, marking the need for a global UN platform under the auspices of the United Nations that will take the lead in coordinating policies relating to the various environmental agreements, creating common reporting and monitoring mechanisms, and identifying global environmental priorities in a balanced and integrated way⁵⁴.

To guarantee the long-term efficiency of wild environment protection, it is a must to have an equal sharing of environmental responsibilities between the developed and the developing countries. The developed countries must take the lead in the economic and technical support and in the environmental projects financing for the developing countries, while the latter, on their part, are to practice good development policies that are in line with the environment. Moreover, lack of coordination that is not conducive to sustainability is one of the major impediments to the rollout of long-term environmental initiatives. Hence, the mechanisms of finance should be revisited in order to change the scenario under which international agencies depend on the good-willingness of donor states for contributions towards the setting up of an international fund that would be permanent and would be able to provide for the effective safeguarding of the earth's surface environments. This fund

Ajeck Portia Phe, 'A Legal Appraisal of the Conceptualization of Environmental Protection', *Studies in Law and Justice*, 4.4 (2025), 36–46 <https://doi.org/10.56397/SLJ.2025.08.03>

⁵² Imad, D., Maya Khater, N. Abouhaiba, E. Qutieshat and A. Almatrooshi, 'Doctrinal and Comparative Assessment of GMO Liability Laws in the UAE', *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, 6.1 (2026), 31–58 <https://doi.org/10.53955/jhcls.v6i1.701/>

⁵³ I Wayan Sukania and others, 'Legal Protection of Intellectual Property Rights in Indonesia for SME Performance', *Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues (JSDERI)*, 3.3 (2025), 515–39 <https://doi.org/10.53955/jsderi.v3i3.104>

⁵⁴ Bambang Manumayoso and others, 'Sustainable Tourism in Indonesia's Ring of Fire: Toward Ecological Justice and Green Energy', *Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues (JSDERI)*, 3.3 (2025), 590–615 <https://doi.org/10.53955/jsderi.v3i3.105>

would be supported not only by compulsory contributions but also by environmental taxes on industries that pollute, donations from the business sector, and the local populace⁵⁵.

The enhancement of international environmental governance at the national level is still very much associated to the above-mentioned measures. These are: the adoption of the standards for wild environmental protection into domestic laws and, consequently, the support for the institutions and the establishment of the relevant skills and the preparation of the integrated policies that will ensure the coexistence of economic development and conservation of the ecosystem. In particular, this means that the corresponding laws must be brought in line with the international commitments aimed at the wild environmental protection and that the protecting measures and procedures must be put across all the agricultural, industrial and urban sectors in addition to the necessary building of capacities both human and technical for the national environmental institutions⁵⁶.

Empowerment of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the private sector in a supporting role to act as watchers and implementers still focusing on transparency and shared responsibility is one of the important steps to be taken in the future⁵⁷. It is a way of accompanying the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, Goal 15 (Life on Land), which intends to prevent and reverse the loss of biodiversity through the measures of protecting and restoring wild ecosystems, combating desertification, and managing forests sustainably as well as land degradation. Thus, the facilitation of the role of international organizations in the preservation of land environments requires a holistic view that connects legal and institutional reform, better financing, and the participation of national and local stakeholders within a worldwide system of governance that is participatory and accountable at all times, thereby guaranteeing the effective protection of earth ecosystems⁵⁸.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that international organizations play a pivotal role in protecting wild ecosystems and advancing compliance with international environmental obligations. However, their effectiveness remains constrained by persistent legal, structural, and institutional limitations. Weak monitoring and follow up mechanisms, uneven state capacities, limited compliance, and the absence of effective enforcement tools continue to undermine the implementation of environmental commitments. In addition, overlapping institutional mandates and the tension between economic interests and environmental protection further reduce the operational impact of global environmental governance. The findings confirm that the existing framework often operates at a normative level without achieving consistent and measurable outcomes in protecting terrestrial ecosystems. This

⁵⁵ Bambang Ali Kusumo and others, 'Corporate Crime Prevention Through Sustainable Governance and Regulatory Reform', *Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues (JSDERI)*, 3.3 (2025), 616–40 <https://doi.org/10.53955/jsderi.v3i3.168>

⁵⁶ M J Stewardson, J A Webb and A Horne, 'Chapter 7 - Environmental Flows and Eco-Hydrological Assessments in Rivers', in *Decision Making in Water Resources Policy and Management*, ed. by Barry T Hart and Jane Doolan (Academic Press, 2017), pp. 113–32 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-810523-8.00008-2>

⁵⁷ Adel, Mohammed A., Ahmed M. Mohamed, and Mohammed Altwajji, (2024). The representation of women with disabilities in Shahira Al-Hasan's Cochlea's Secrets. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 26(6), 8. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol26/iss6/8>

⁵⁸ J Cairns, W Glamore and F Johnson, 'Environmental Water Requirements and Climate Sensitivity of Australia's Upland Swamps', *Science of The Total Environment*, 966 (2025), 178792 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2025.178792>

gap highlights the need to move beyond formal commitments toward a more effective system that ensures implementation, accountability, and tangible environmental results. Accordingly, the study underscores the urgency of comprehensive legal and institutional reform to strengthen global environmental governance and enhance the capacity of international organizations to function as effective agents of environmental protection.

To address these challenges, the study advances several key recommendations. It proposes the establishment of an international environmental court with jurisdiction over transboundary environmental disputes to strengthen legal accountability. It emphasizes the need to revise international environmental agreements by incorporating binding compliance mechanisms and clearly defined sanctions for violations. It calls for improved institutional coordination among international organizations to reduce fragmentation, eliminate duplication, and enhance policy coherence. It further highlights the importance of expanding financial and technical support for developing countries to strengthen their capacity to implement environmental policies and manage natural resources effectively. Finally, it recommends the active involvement of non-governmental actors in monitoring and evaluation processes to increase transparency and reinforce accountability. Through these measures, the study affirms that strengthening enforcement, coordination, and capacity building remains essential to transform international environmental governance into a more effective system capable of safeguarding wild environments.

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