

Unveiling Inequalities

A spotlight on senior appointments at key UN environment and development bodies



About this briefing

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Senior appointments to UN posts have historically been selected through politicised processes that prioritize Global North and male leaders. This dynamic is especially troubling in the field of climate governance since the countries whose nationals are underrepresented in leadership positions often face disproportionate impacts of climate change due to their vulnerabilities, limited resources, and dependence on climate-sensitive sectors. This briefing maps underrepresentation in key UN entities and makes recommendations for strengthening the system.

Plataforma CIPÓ is an independent, non-profit, women-led Brazil-based think tank dedicated to international cooperation to promote climate action and sustainable development, from Latin American and Global South perspectives. CIPÓ develops evidence-based research and promotes dialogue and coordination between multiple actors to influence public policies, connecting the local to the global.

Blue Smoke is a working group created in 2022 to shine a light on elections and appointments to senior positions within the United Nations. The working group consists of UNA-UK, Plataforma CIPÓ and Strategy for Humanity and relies on the expertise of a wide network of experts, advisors and sources. We support multilateralism. We see the UN, for all its flaws, as the most legitimate body humanity has at present to bring states, civil society and other stakeholders together under the principles of the Organisation to stand up for human rights, sustainable development and peace.

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1. Introduction

Promoting inclusive, merit-based and transparent appointment processes is key to ensuring the success of the United Nations system's promise to "employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic, social", as well as the environmental "advancement of all peoples". These words, from the UN Charter, make the commitment clear. It emphasizes the importance of gender equality, recognizing that rights should not be limited by gender. The Charter also underscores the role of justice in maintaining international peace and security, and the need for fair solutions. Additionally, it highlights the significance of geographical representation, acknowledging that every part of the world has a stake in the UN's mission for global well-being and human rights. Moreover, article 100(2) of the Charter seeks to establish a truly independent international service which Member States must not attempt to influence, and article 101(3) asserts that staff should be recruited "on as wide a geographical basis as possible".

In reality, such commitments are largely ignored. Senior appointments to UN posts have historically been selected through a politicized process that prioritizes Global North and male leaders, and it's an open secret that posts are often traded among Member States for political capital. This process impacts how agencies and programmes fulfill their mandates. However, the need for a global combined effort to fight climate change and ensure a just transition to a sustainable future for all life on the planet, among other global challenges, demands a fairer, more democratic system.

In 2022, the United Nations Association-UK, Strategy for Humanity, and Plataforma CIPÓ joined efforts to create Blue Smoke – an initiative shining a light on elections and appointments to senior positions within the United Nations in a bid to make them more inclusive, merit-based, and transparent.

The lack of transparency, accountability, meritocracy, civil society participation and representation compromises the UN and its entities' credibility and ability to lead the global response to the climate emergency and to tackle the deep inequality that

impacts vulnerable and disproportionately affected groups. Global South countries have historically been less represented in top UN appointments through this current system, which greatly impacts how solutions are presented, negotiated and implemented in their own territories.

Although the UN has a network of over 400 Gender Focal Points to reach gender parity and create safe environments across the UN bodies, the top-level leadership recruitments do not reflect that. According to the 2022 ["Energize. Exchange. Enhance: Advancing gender parity across the UN system"](#) report, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has commented on the urgent need and personal priority to achieve gender parity within the organization. As of 2022, the representation of women is at 46.6% in the UN system, yet, there are organizations within the UN body that a woman has never led. Therefore, the work to ensure women are represented in all aspects of leadership and decision-making still remains a critical priority.

Plataforma CIPÓ previously looked at the barriers to effective participation that civil society organizations from the Global South face when it comes to UN climate processes [through a 2021 report](#) – making the case for the urgent need to improve access to decision-making. Expanding on that work, this policy briefing looks at the current decision-makers and why choosing the right leaders is key if the international community hopes to successfully face the climate crisis.

As a global issue, climate change transcends national borders and requires collaborative efforts among nations to mitigate its impacts and find sustainable solutions, which is why UN bodies that have a key role in climate-related issues are the focus of this briefing. Effective international climate governance promotes and ensures ambitious action against climate change, setting guidelines to be followed globally, and ensuring cohesion and collaboration, especially when it comes to pooling resources to advance mitigation and adaptation strategies where they are needed the most.

It is crucial that Global South countries are well represented in climate governance, as they often face disproportionate impacts of climate change due to their vulnerabilities, limited resources, and dependence on climate-sensitive sectors. Putting Global South countries at the center of climate governance ensures that decisions reflect the diverse realities of those most affected and recognizes the need for equitable distribution of responsibilities and benefits. Their participation also enhances the credibility and legitimacy of global climate initiatives, fostering a sense of shared ownership and cooperation in the quest for a more sustainable future.

The concepts of “Global North” and “Global South” are key analytical tools used in this briefing. Through them, countries are grouped not only based on their physical geography but also taking into account a system of political and economic domination and/or subordination that translates into inequality among countries. In the context of climate change, which disproportionately affects people from the Global South, the fact that leadership responsible for guiding the world through it is from the Global North - responsible for the majority of the environmental destruction that led us to the climate emergency - highlights a fundamental contradiction that must be called out and tackled.

Based on this understanding, this policy briefing shines light on the history of senior appointments at four United Nations bodies that are crucial for coordinating global action to tackle climate change, development, and biodiversity challenges – the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Combined, these four bodies have only had 20% of female senior appointments and on average 40% of Global South representatives.

As data and analysis in this briefing will show, the UNDP, one of the UN bodies with the biggest budgets, has only once been led by a woman and once by a Global South citizen. The UNEP has also been underrepresented by women and the Global South. The FAO, although showing balanced North-South representation, has never been led by a woman. Finally, while CBD has a considerably more

equitable representation, it also has an opaque history of leadership, which this policy briefing calls attention to.

The issues highlighted in this policy briefing are not constrained to these four organizations – the UN has never had a female Secretary-General, for example, and only two out of eleven of UNESCO’s Directors-General have been from the Global South. The entities highlighted here offer a case study of how issues of opaque, unaccountable appointment processes impact vital entities critical to the UN’s work tackling the climate crisis.

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It is not easy to find information on senior UN appointments, such as the criteria for candidates’ selection, their relevant experience and background, and how they carried out their mandates. A regular citizen will find it challenging to acquire substantial information through internet searches or browsing the entities’ public websites, for instance. This posed a significant challenge to this briefing, requiring the authors to conduct interviews with individuals who have previously worked in or with these four UN entities.

In this briefing we analyze the past senior appointments at UNDP, and then proceed to do the same with UNEP, FAO, and the CBD, highlighting their lack of female and Global South representation, as well as specific instances that demonstrate the opaqueness of the process to appoint the heads of these organizations. In addition, we highlight recommendations for improving these processes with the view to strengthening the capacity of the institutions within the UN to face the climate crisis and wider global challenges, by making them more transparent, accountable, efficient, democratic, and ultimately, more representative of those most affected by climate and development issues.

2. UN senior appointments in climate governance

THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the leading UN entity that fights to tackle the issue of poverty and inequality. The UNDP works in 170 countries with approximately 7400 official personnel, as [reported](#) in 2022. However, the organization's leadership does not show sufficient diversity.

Since its establishment in the 1960s, UNDP has been dominated by male leaders from the Global North, with only one out of nine leaders from a Global South country. The predominance of the Global North within the organization reflects a power imbalance that undermines the representation and perspectives of the countries most affected by development challenges and climate change. The existing appointment process evidently fails to address this inequality, and highlights the organization's need for more transparent, accountable, and inclusive practices.

ADMINISTRATOR	START OF TERM	END OF TERM	WOMEN	NATIONALITY	REGION	GLOBAL SOUTH
Achim Steiner	2017	2025		Germany/ Brazil ¹	Europe/South America	
Helen Clark	2009	2017	✓	New Zealand	Oceania	
Kemal Derviş	2005	2009		Turkey	Asia	✓
Mark Malloch-Brown	1999	2005		UK	Europe	
James Gustave Speth	1993	1999		USA	North America	
William Henry Draper	1986	1993		USA	North America	
F. Bradford Morse	1976	1986		USA	North America	
Rudolf A. Peterson	1972	1976		USA	North America	
Paul G. Hoffman	1966	1972		USA	North America	

¹ While Steiner possesses both German and Brazilian citizenship, his education and the majority of his life and work experience have been in the Global North. Hence, for the purposes of this analysis, he is not regarded as a representative of the Global South.

Another significant concern is the chronic gender disparity within the UNDP's leadership. Of the nine Administrators since 1966, only one has been a woman. The first female post-holder was in 2009; [Helen Clark](#), from New Zealand, served two terms. This gender imbalance not only perpetuates gender inequality but also deprives the organization of diverse perspectives and experiences crucial for addressing the complex and interconnected issues of sustainable development. It is worth noting that it is not just a matter of representativeness and democracy, but also a practical consideration that can improve the organization's functionality.

In general, there is a glaring lack of information publicly available about appointment processes, which is concerning considering the UNDP is the largest UN programme. The opacity of appointment processes raises doubts about the criteria used for selecting leaders, and whether appointments are merit-based or if personal connections and political bargains count more than a candidate's experience. For example, critics argued that Helen Clark's selection process in 2009 was influenced by her background as a former Prime Minister of New Zealand. There are also reports of Prime Minister John Key lobbying on her behalf with other international leaders.²

Another key issue to consider with an organization as influential and heavily funded is that of misconduct. During the tenure of Achim Steiner, starting in 2017 and expected to end in 2025, allegations of misconduct and misappropriation of funds have emerged. According to the letter seen by the [Financial Times](#), "[an investigation by Foreign Policy in 2019](#)" published whistleblower accounts alleging the misappropriation of millions of dollars at a UNDP-run Global Environment Facility (GEF) project in Russia. Twelve donor countries – including the United States, France, Australia, and Japan – have since sought an independent review of the UNDP's handling of that project". This case underscores the urgent need for enhanced oversight mechanisms within the UNDP to prevent such occurrences and ensure that resources are effectively directed toward sustainable development goals.

Brice Böhmer, head of climate governance integrity at Transparency International, [told](#) the Financial Times that "when it comes to climate, we need to have much higher standards. If it is a project that is supposed to help an affected population adapt, then this is like penalizing them twice".

² Source: [Clark to be confirmed in top UN role today](#), 25 March 2009.

THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

The UN’s leading global authority on the environment is the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). UNEP has been transformational with its critical work to address humanity’s most pressing environmental challenges for over 50 years. UNEP has universal membership that encompasses all 193 UN Member states, as well as representation from civil society, businesses, and other major stakeholders and organizations - making its platforms the [world’s highest-level decision-making body](#) on the environment.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	START OF TERM	END OF TERM	WOMEN	NATIONALITY	REGION	GLOBAL SOUTH
Inger Andersen	2019	Unknown ³	✓	Denmark	Europe	
Joyce Msuya	Aug 2018	June 2019	✓	Tanzania	Africa	✓
Erik Solheim	2016	2018		Norway	Europe	
Achim Steiner	2006	2016		Germany/ Brazil	Europe/South America	
Klaus Töpfer	1998	2006		Germany	Europe	
Elizabeth Dowdeswell	1992	1998	✓	Canada	North America	
Mostafa Tolba	1975	1992		Egypt	Africa	✓
Maurice Strong	1972	1975		Canada	Europe	

However, similar to UNDP, UNEP has also faced comparable challenges regarding its leadership appointments. UNEP has also been characterized by a predominance of leaders from the Global North, with just two out of eight Executive Directors hailing from the Global South. Additionally, out of these eight Executive Directors, only three have been women.

Transparency also remains a concern within the UNEP. The lack of information surrounding the appointment processes of certain Executive Directors suggests that important decisions were not subjected to adequate public scrutiny and merit-based processes. For instance, the 17-year term of Mostafa Tolba, an Egyptian scientist who led the organization until his retirement in 1992, raises a number of questions. Tolba’s scientific background was highly regarded, but limited information is available about the circumstances that led to his

appointment and the reasons for his extended tenure as the longest-serving Executive Director of UNEP. Blue Smoke has determined the standard length of terms for senior appointments is roughly five years, and typically post-holders do not serve more than two terms. It is unclear why Tolba held onto this post for an uncharacteristically long time. This lack of transparency and consistency raises concerns about potential favoritism or exclusion of other qualified candidates, potentially undermining public trust in the Programme.

There were notable [accomplishments during Tolba’s tenure](#), such as the [significant role the organization played in shaping international environmental policy](#), through the negotiation and adoption of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. However, [Tolba’s term](#) was not free from controversy and wasn’t immune to criticism. Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have

³ Based on the available public domain information, we were unable to establish when Andersen’s term is expected to end.

expressed concern over the lack of transparency in project funding, and the limited involvement of civil society in decision-making. Moreover, “UNEP has appeared at times overly bureaucratic”, an aspect that [Tolba himself acknowledged had some foundation](#).

Another notable figure in UNEP’s history is Maurice Strong, a Canadian fossil fuel businessman who was the organization’s first Executive Director. [Strong faced accusations of bribery and conflicts of interest](#) related to his involvement in the UN programme Oil-for-Food and his connections with North Korea. Although Strong was never formally charged with wrongdoing, his career was marked by scandals and conflicts of interest. In recent times, Erik Solheim, an Executive Director from Norway, [resigned in 2018](#)

[due to controversy](#) surrounding his excessive travel expenses and rule-breaking.

Furthermore, the reappointment processes of Inger Andersen, the current Director of UNEP, faced criticism for lacking transparency. As a previous [edition](#) of Blue Smoke exhibited, Anderson’s 2023 [reappointment process as the head of UNEP was highly contested](#) by Russia for failing to ensure adequate regional representation.

These incidents further highlight the need for transparent and merit-based appointment processes at UNEP in order to strengthen this office and its vitally important mandate.

THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a key player in the global transformation toward sustainable food systems with a central role in fighting climate change, biodiversity loss, and desertification. Operating in more than 130 countries worldwide with 195 members FAO is the agency of the United Nations that leads the efforts to defeat issues of hunger and food (in)security. Historically, most of FAO’s leadership have come from the Global South (five out of nine), but the organization has never had a woman to lead it.

DIRECTOR-GENERAL	START OF TERM	END OF TERM	WOMEN	NATIONALITY	REGION	GLOBAL SOUTH
Qu Dongyu	2019	2023		China	Asia	✓
José Graziano da Silva	2012	2019		Brazil	South America	✓
Jacques Diouf	1994	2011		Senegal	Africa	✓
Edouard Saouma	1975	1993		Lebanon	Africa	✓
Addeke Hendrik Boerma	1967	1975		Netherlands	Europe	
Binay Ranjan Sen	1956	1967		India	Asia	✓
Philip V. Cardon	1954	1956		USA	North America	
Norris E. Dodd	1948	1953		USA	North America	
John Boyd Orr	1945	1948		Scotland	Europe	

FAO's elections for Director-General, as stated by one of our interviewees, are widely known events among the staff. Campaigns are held in the FAO headquarters premises in Rome, and there are debates between different candidates, although they are limited to local offices and not publicized to a global audience. Similar to other UN agencies, the election process is heavily influenced by politics and diplomacy, without adequate participation of staff or civil society. According to one of our sources, although the election process is publicized internally, the actual negotiations to select the agency's head take place behind closed doors among Member States.

Historically, most FAO Directors-General have been from the Global South. Our sources agreed on the importance of that to the agency's policy-making, considering its strategy is mainly focused on the Southern Hemisphere. In general, FAO is known for promoting South-South cooperation and non-assistentialist policies that promote and advance autonomy for these countries. That does not mean that the Global North does not heavily influence FAO policies, as numerous positions within the organization and other partner agencies are occupied by representatives of the "developed" world. For instance, former US President Donald Trump nominated FAO's current second-in-command, Beth Bechdol, a US agribusiness figure that has been credited with [influencing FAO's Director-General Qu Dongyu to cave in to a powerful pesticide lobby](#).⁴

FAO has never been led by a woman since its establishment in 1945

Besides the presence of the Global South, however, FAO has never been led by a woman since its establishment in 1945. All of the organization's nine Directors-General have been men, with no indication of an imminent change in this regard. This reality highlights a concerning lack of prioritization of gender equality within an organization that has a crucial role in tackling the profound gender inequalities in food insecurity.

In July, 2023, the Chinese Qu Dongyu was reelected as FAO's Director General until July 31, 2027. He was running unopposed after [Tajikistan and Iraq withdrew their candidates](#). It has been reported that [China lobbied intensely to have Qu initially elected in 2019](#), pressuring developing countries to provide evidence of how they voted. There have been allegations that [China forgave millions of dollars of debt in exchange for an African State withdrawing its candidate](#), and threatened economic retaliation against smaller countries if they opposed Beijing's candidate. Although this is an entirely common practice, considering the highly political nature of UN appointments, China has recently stood out for its open and direct negotiation techniques. According to our sources, this does not mean that Qu Dongyu's mandate has been significantly more politicized or less transparent when compared to those of previous post-holders.

Considering their interlinked mandates and shared responsibilities in leading the fight against hunger within the UN system, FAO has long collaborated with the World Food Programme (WFP) – although WFP does not sit under FAO. Unlike FAO, the WFP's most powerful position has been ring-fenced by Global North countries – the [last five WFP Executive Directors](#) have been from the United States. [A 2021 staff survey](#) found that over 1,500 employees had experienced racism in the workplace. Despite multiple official complaints, there has been an overall lack of action from the WFP's senior figures – a challenge that the recently elected US citizen Cindy McCain will need to address urgently in her term.

If the UN intends to effectively address all forms of discrimination and coordinate global action to achieve sustainable food systems, as well as confront the significant challenges in reducing hunger, it is imperative that it works to eliminate political brokering as the decisive factor when selecting the leaders of FAO. The same works for the WFP and other relevant UN agencies regarding this subject.

⁴ It should be noted, however, that [different sources also credit Qu Dongyu and his Chinese staff](#) as the ones responsible for FAO's pesticide-friendly policies.

THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the most important multilateral treaty and the international legal instrument for conserving biological diversity. The overall objective of the CBD is to stop biodiversity collapse. The associated organization does show considerable representation of diversity, both regionally and gender-wise. However, there are still concerning issues about the leadership selection process and the mandates that have followed.

The body advertised the post of Executive Secretary in February 2023, after Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, who is Tanzanian, stepped down midway through her term to become UNEP’s Deputy Executive Director. Following this, UK national David Cooper is serving as Acting Executive Secretary, but as of June 2023, there has been no public announcement regarding who will be selected to replace Cooper on a permanent basis, or what the expected timeline or process is for this.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY	START OF TERM	END OF TERM	WOMEN	NATIONALITY	REGION	GLOBAL SOUTH
David Cooper (Acting)	2023	Unknown		UK	Europe	
Elizabeth Maruma Mrema	2019	2023	✓	Tanzania	Africa	✓
Cristiana Paşca Palmer	2017	2019	✓	Romania	Europe	
Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias	2012	2017		Brazil	South America	✓
Ahmed Djoghlaif	2006	2012		Algeria	Africa	✓
Hamdallah Zedan	1998	2005		Egypt	Africa	✓
Calestous Juma	1995	1998		Kenya	Africa	✓
Angela Cropper	1993	1995	✓	Trinidad and Tobago	Central America	✓

Among their past seven Executive Secretaries, only two have successfully led the CBD through extended terms. It is worth noting the incoming Executive Secretary will have the fundamental task of leading the implementation of the recently adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, an ambitious global plan for nature conservation. A robust and merit-based appointment process will ensure a strong platform for this mandate.

While chief appointments within the CBD have been geographically diverse, with one European, four Africans, and two Latin Americans, only three have

been women. The Convention, therefore, shows relatively consistent regional representation, which is important considering that Global South represents the biggest concentrations of forests and tropical ecosystems that make up most of the planet’s biodiversity. However, the Convention’s lack of gender representativeness is still concerning.

The CBD’s recruitment process, managed by UNEP, is remarkably opaque. The programme does not disclose the names of short-listed candidates nor when a decision will take place. [Blue Smoke received information](#) from an anonymous source that UNEP allegedly conducts a single 45-minute virtual

interview to select the candidate. This is not the rigorous recruitment process that would be expected from such an important Convention. The source disclosed that current candidates include at least two women, from the Philippines and Denmark, and two men, from Uganda and the United Kingdom. However, there is no information in the public domain to confirm such a claim.

The most controversial Executive Secretary of the CDB was Christina Pașca Palmer, from Romania. In 2019, Palmer resigned after [widespread staff resignations and illness, and multiple allegations that she discriminated against African staff members](#). Climate Home News (CHN) reports that between the beginning of 2017 and the middle of 2019, one-fifth of the total personnel had left the Convention's secretariat.

Allegations of discrimination against the organization's African staff, which is unacceptable at any level of leadership in an international organization, let alone at the level of the Executive Secretary, can have a highly detrimental impact on the success of the concerned body. Executive Secretaries often serve as global spokespersons for their areas of responsibility. However, when there is a general breakdown in staff morale due to the

members feeling singled out due to the color of their skin, it raises concerns about the merit and the effectiveness of the leadership.

It is also reported by [the aforementioned Climate Home News article](#) that former CBD Executive Secretary, the Egyptian Hamdallah Zedan accused Palmer of improperly intervening in deliberations over renewal of her contract. Blue Smoke's source stated that Erik Solheim, the UNEP Executive Director in 2016, said on the record during the Cancun COP that Pașca Palmer's appointment was made to fulfill the expectations of East European countries after they expected to be awarded with the Secretary-General post, which instead went to António Guterres, from Portugal.

However, Pașca Palmer is just one aspect of CDB's problematic past. Preceding this, the Convention suffered from recruitment delays, high absence rates, and staff turnover. The high turnover in staffing has extended to its leadership raising questions over its ability to deliver its mission. An interview with a source that has previously worked with CBD reinforced the understanding that its turbulent leadership, record interferes with the Convention's work, described as disorganized and inefficient when compared to other similar bodies.

3. Policy Recommendations

In light of the critical importance of effective leadership within the UN entities and considering the main issues presented - such as the lack of transparency, consistency, accountability, representation, and civil society participation - below are five recommendations that should be considered with the objective of strengthening these key bodies' capacity to tackle global challenges and deliver their mandates effectively. The recommendations address various facets of leadership within four UN entities, UNDP, UNEP, FAO, and CBD, each with a unique focus on merit-based appointments, diversity, transparency, and collaboration. In the following bullet points, we will delve into these recommendations, which provide a roadmap for achieving effective and accountable leadership in these UN bodies to also foster inclusivity within the organizations and build public trust in its leadership.

■ **The United Nations entities should prioritize merit-based appointments to senior leadership positions.** This should involve selecting candidates based on their qualifications, experience, and expertise rather than personal choices or political considerations. A transparent and rigorous selection process should be established to identify the most qualified individuals for these roles, ensuring that competence, life experience, and merit are the primary factors in decision-making. The UN bodies should regularly **review and strengthen their selection criteria and evaluation procedures** for their senior positions. This would ensure that the criteria align with the evolving challenges and demands of the respective fields.

■ **Diversity in leadership enhances decision-making, fosters innovation, and promotes inclusivity and democracy.** Efforts should be made to **achieve gender parity in senior leadership** positions within the UN bodies. Special measurements should be implemented to encourage the appointment of women and address the existing gender imbalance. It is also crucial to **increase the representation of candidates from the Global South** in senior leadership positions. In that sense, the UN bodies should actively

seek out and consider qualified individuals from underrepresented regions, ensuring a more balanced geographical distribution of leadership roles. Additionally, **candidates from marginalized communities** should be actively encouraged to apply and special consideration should be given to Black candidates, ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, and people with disabilities, among others.

■ **To enhance public trust and confidence, the UN bodies should establish mechanisms for accountability and transparency in senior leadership positions.** This can be achieved, for instance, by publishing selection criteria, shortlists, and final appointments, allowing public scrutiny and feedback. Moreover, regular reporting on the progress and performance of senior leaders should be provided to ensure transparency and promote effective governance and public scrutiny.

■ **Collaboration among UN bodies and other relevant international and regional organizations** could contribute to more effective senior leadership appointments and must be carried out. Sharing best practices and lessons learned in leadership selection processes can help improve appointments' overall quality and transparency. Greater coordination among the organizations and larger collaboration on capacity-building initiatives can enhance the pool of qualified candidates and promote a global perspective in the overall leadership positions among the UN bodies.

■ **The UN bodies should strengthen civil society participation.** This includes involving NGOs, social movements, think tanks, and academia during campaign processes for the selection and evaluation of candidates for UN leadership roles. This could be achieved by establishing mechanisms to solicit their input, such as public consultations, open forums, and debates in the presence of the candidates. This could help foster more transparent and democratic appointments and mandates.

4. Conclusion

Implementing the policy recommendations outlined above is of utmost importance for two main compelling reasons, particularly within the UNDP, UNEP, FAO, and CBD. The work conducted by these organizations and their presence worldwide urges the critical need for improved leadership practices in the context of pressing global challenges like the climate crisis. These recommendations serve as the cornerstone for enhancing the effectiveness of environmental governance within the UN bodies.

First, by prioritizing merit-based appointments and strengthening the evaluation procedures, the UN bodies can ensure that individuals with the necessary qualifications and skills are selected for senior leadership positions. This focus on competence and merit is crucial for fostering effective decision-making, problem-solving, and successfully implementing the UN's mandates. It empowers the organization to enhance its leadership capacity and address pressing global challenges effectively. This recommendation and approach are especially pertinent to the UNEP and CBD, which already play pivotal roles in environmental conservation and biodiversity protection.

Second, inclusive and diverse appointments are vital in shaping a more equitable and representative leadership structure. By actively encouraging the appointment of women and candidates from the Global South and marginalized communities, the UN can incorporate a broader range of perspectives, experiences, and ideas into its decision-making processes, recommendations, and politics, which makes them more democratic. That also sends a powerful message that the UN is committed to fostering inclusivity, fairness, and representativeness within its ranks. For example, when coordinating international efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change and transition to a more sustainable future, as pivotal focuses by the UNEP and FAO, adopting these recommendations will provide the framework for selecting leaders who can then navigate the intricate challenges posed by the global environmental issue. Furthermore, these policy recommendations are also instrumental in enhancing the representation and legitimacy of the UN as a global organization. Through these measures, the UN can more effectively tackle the world's complex challenges and fulfill its vital mission of promoting peace, human rights, and sustainable development on a global scale.

In summary, these recommendations are fundamental for environmental governance within the UN system and its concerned entities, like the UNDP, UNEP, FAO, and CBD, because enhanced leadership efficacy, inclusivity, and transparency ultimately lead to more informed and equitable decisions that can address pressing global environmental challenges. Effective environmental governance must be adapted and practiced to effectively protect our planet's resources and secure a sustainable future for all.



Close up of a monumental Tree of Hope, placed in the middle of the stadium where athletes and participants pinned leaves with environmental wishes - Bengaluru, 5 June 2011. Credit: UNEP

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