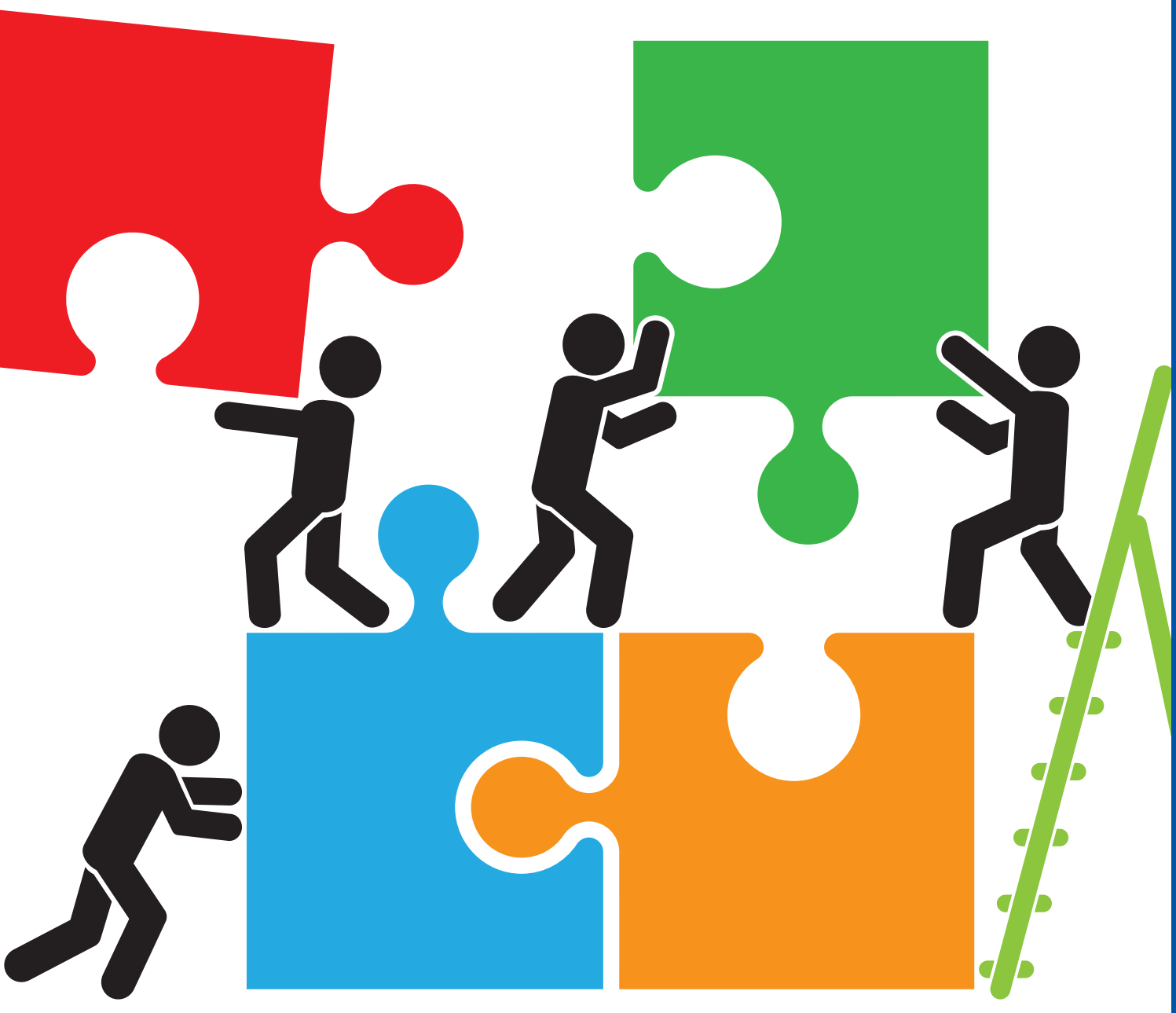
Poverty-Environment Action's Integrated Approach



POVERTY-ENVIRONMENT ACTION POLICY BRIEF

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SUMMARY

The imperative to take an integrated approach to poverty reduction and environmental sustainability is growing stronger:

- **To tackle linked problems** – whether linked climate, nature and poverty crises at the national level, or people's livelihoods suffering from pollution or floods
- **To tackle system failures that lie behind these problems** – whether siloed governance or the exclusion of poor people, the environment or traditional world views
- **To implement holistic policies** – finding ways to achieve policy goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals or inclusive green growth in diverse sectors and localities
- **To shape holistic plans** – national development plans, or post-COVID green recovery strategies, will be more robust If they consider their poverty and environmental implications
- **To link the solutions** – governance, technology and behavioural solutions are more effective if they work together
- **To combine energies and resources** – uniting the stakeholders and the funds to achieve real synergies

Calls for integration have been consistently made over 50 years, since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, and repeated in almost all development commitments since then.

In practice, integration has been more elusive. But we can learn from the gradual evolution of progressive environmental and development institutions – which have shifted from siloed approaches to safeguards, to synergies where possible, and which now seek fully integrated sustainable development.

We can also learn from the experience of the Poverty-Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals (PEA) and its predecessor the Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI) over 16 years on four continents, which has introduced **economic and expenditure analyses** and **participatory approaches**, working with national mandates and central authorities such as finance and planning ministries to get poverty-environment issues integrated in major decisions.

This policy brief highlights key lessons from PEI/PEA experience, notably on:

- The constraints imposed by fragmented and outdated **institutional structures and information flows** that reflect past priorities and narrower interests than face decision-makers today
- The need to build **trust** as a precondition and driver of integration
- The importance of addressing **gender and inequality**, both to generate this trust and to tackle the underlying causes of many poverty-environment problems
- The need to offer the **space** and to build the **capacity** to adopt integrated approaches
- The value of using normal, existing in-country **policy/decision-making cycles** – finding the right entry points into them, and then working with and enriching those processes

Based on this and complementary experience, we propose a practical organizing framework for integration – organized around the typical decision-making cycle of planning, budgeting, investing, executing, monitoring, review and dialogue. Integration in one step reinforces results in another. A new PEA Handbook offers detailed guidance on tasks, tools and tactics for each step.

Almost every international agreement on sustainable development and the environment over the past half century, beginning with the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, has called for an **integrated approach to environmental and poverty issues**. The urgency of that call continues to resonate, when many decisions need to be made to tackle linked climate, nature and poverty emergencies following the COVID pandemic. In exploring and advocating for an integrated approach in achieving sustainable development, this policy brief offers:

- An improved **understanding of the links between the poverty and environmental challenges** that influence achievement of holistic goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or an inclusive green economy
- **Learning from the programmatic approach** used by Poverty-Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals (PEA) and its predecessor the Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI), both joint efforts of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to tackle these challenges on four continents over 16 years, along with complementary lessons from other initiatives
- A **practical framework** for applying the various activities involved in an integrated approach, based around a typical policy/decision-making cycle

Armed with this information, readers can help **develop best-bet strategies for achieving integrated results** more effectively, efficiently, equitably and at scale.

The need for integration

The well-being of people and the well-being of nature are interdependent. On the one hand, poor people are dependent on the environment for their livelihoods and economic growth, and are vulnerable to its degradation. On the other, local environmental quality and global public goods alike depend not only upon governments and corporations but also upon women, men and indigenous people to manage soils, water and biodiversity in balanced and integrated ways.

Escalating poverty and environmental problems are linked and indivisible. The climate is changing, biodiversity is disappearing, and pollution and land degradation are sharply rising. Each of these problems has knock-on effects on the others – and especially on poverty and inequality. Women and men become stranded in poverty in devastated environmental conditions, vulnerable to climate shocks, and finding it impossible to adapt. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how human interference with nature creates conditions for diseases to leap from animals to humans. Such huge, complex and critical problems face global society (linked climate, nature, poverty and pandemic emergencies), right down to local livelihoods – with farmers and fishers, among others, finding their livelihoods have become inviable.

The underlying causes of environmental and poverty problems are often identical and reflect systemic failures. These include the unchecked power of some groups over others, the erosion of rights and capabilities of poorer groups, and perverse economic signals that make environmental assets worth more if converted (e.g. deforestation) than if conserved. System-wide

governance, policy, investment and management shifts are needed if poverty–environment problems are to be tackled together in coherent ways.[1]

Most responses to these complex problems have been fragmented, short term or lacking in vision. In today's linked realities, institutions should be complementing and cooperating. But too many institutions are "siloed" and cannot work well together. They tend to be built around separate interests such as poverty reduction or environmental sustainability – which makes them compete for attention and resources.

Solutions tend to be one-sided. There is pressure to make critical new policy decisions on poverty and on the environment that may fail if they are not treated in integrated ways. For example, new environmental policy commitments such as protecting 30 per cent of land for biodiversity by 2030 (30x30), carbon pricing and low-carbon energy transitions entail numerous social risks that must be accounted for and mitigated. Individual solutions are unlikely to be truly transformative, but rather several solutions will need to be packaged together. For example, reducing greenhouse gas emissions requires not only technological innovations but also concomitant behavioural changes – that is, an integrated approach.

An integrated approach offers multidimensional lenses on problems and solutions. For example, what has been perceived as an environmental problem can sometimes be better resolved if it is instead treated as a poverty problem, and vice versa. Specific environmental challenges that involve women may turn out to be better addressed as a gender intervention than as an environmental response on its own. An integrated poverty–environment approach can improve the robustness of responses.

Time is short to resolve poverty–environment problems. Climate, nature and inequality emergencies are upon us. The crises we face are linked, and action on each alone risks worsening the others. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and other interdisciplinary groups of experts warn that we have until 2030 to avoid many social, economic and environmental tipping points colliding in a perfect storm of system collapses. The relationship between inequality and environmental degradation in particular has come dramatically into focus with the COVID crisis.

An integrated and balanced approach is the only logical way to tackle linked problems. It combines energies and resources and fosters system-wide reform. This way, we hope to move from a vicious downward spiral of cascading problems to a virtuous circle of reinforcing solutions – and from individual "magic bullets" to systemic institutional reform. In adopting the SDGs, governments realized that the integrated nature of the goals demands a cross-government integrated approach to their planning and monitoring. In fact, across the 17 SDGs, 93 indicators are related to the environment.[2]

More effective public policymaking, planning, budgeting, investment management and governance systems are needed if linked poverty–environment challenges are to be met. Four kinds of integration are needed for achieving sustainable development:

- **Horizontal integration –** which can link themes and disciplines. Multi-sector, multi-theme and interdisciplinary ways of working can transcend sectoral silos; facilitate coherent policies and programmes; and optimize poverty–environment benefits across sectors, resources and groups of people.

[1] Note that we here use "poverty–environment" to refer to a broad gamut of related issues, including poverty, gender, environment and climate.

[2] For the most recent report by UNEP on the status of the SDGs, see UNEP (2019).

- **Vertical integration –** which can powerfully link top-down policy vision with bottom-up societal demand and capability. Multi-level strategies that link relevant interests – global, national and local – facilitate coherent policies and programmes especially for public goods, and optimize poverty-environment benefits across these hierarchies.
- **Stakeholder integration –** which can build trust and collective action. Identifying relevant stakeholders; bringing them together; and linking their capacities, resources and motivations will aid in the common pursuit of sustainable development, including through collective action.
- **Temporal integration –** can enable continuous improvement. Step-by-step integration throughout the decision-making cycle, learning and improving all the while, will help the necessary longer-term institutional reforms to evolve.

In most countries, some of these elements of integration are already in place. They might be at a pilot scale connected to a major sustainable development plan or to a support programme such as PEI/PEA. They might be more deeply engrained, such as where indigenous holistic governance still applies. Wherever they are, these elements need to be recognized and woven together more robustly, informed by a good analysis of what will deliver the SDGs most effectively, efficiently, equitably and sustainably.

The drivers of integration

Calls for sustainable development have in large part been driven by intergovernmental initiatives – which have also invariably called for an integrated approach. Indeed, calls for integration have been consistently made over 50 years, changing little since the novel inclusion of poverty-environment integration in the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment – and repeated in almost all development commitments since then (box 1), as well in most multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

The 2030 Agenda presents sustainable development as the integration of five global challenges – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. It calls for an integrated approach to implementing these multiple commitments in an indivisible way, placing equal emphasis on their economic, social and environmental dimensions to ensure benefits in all five areas into the long term. The other landmark global agreements of 2015 – including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change – add similar integration expectations to the 2030 Agenda.

It is not surprising that adopting an integrated approach is a core part of the United Nations (UN) reform agenda. A 2018 UN Resolution reaffirms the need to "better support countries in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda in line with national needs and priorities in a coherent and integrated manner." The UN has been both an intellectual and operational leader of integration – especially through PEI/PEA, which have been recognized as good examples of One UN in practice. The UN has been a driver of consensus on the importance of poverty-environment issues, too: in 2019, the UN Environment Assembly adopted a comprehensive resolution to act in response to the challenges of the Poverty Environment Nexus.

Development cooperation as a whole now seeks this integration as a priority. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD, 2021) sets out key commitments to improve development cooperation under the 2030 Agenda, including (i) coordinated approaches on the environment and climate, (ii) systematic integration of environmental and climate objectives and (iii) support to developing countries in making just sustainability transitions.

BOX 1 Calls for integrated approaches to deliver sustainable development since 1972

- **1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment:** "States should adopt an **integrated and coordinated approach** to their development planning."
- **1980 World Conservation Strategy (WCS)** introduces the concept of sustainable development: "[There is a need to] **integrate every stage** of the conversation and development processes, from the initial setting of policies to their eventual implementation and operation."
- **1987 United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)** popularized sustainable development: "The ability to choose policy paths that are sustainable requires that the ecological dimensions of policy be considered **at the same time** as the economic, trade, energy, agricultural, industrial, and other dimensions."
- **1992 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio Earth Summit)** defined Agenda 21 as a tool to foster a "balanced and **integrated approach** to environment and development questions."
- **1993 Convention on Biological Diversity** requires parties to "**integrate**, as far as possible and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies."
- **1993 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change** stipulates that "policies and measures to protect the climate system...should be **integrated** with national development programmes..."
- **2001 Millennium Development Goals** called for the "**integration of the principles** of sustainable development into country policies and programmes."
- **2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development** report calls for "**Integration** of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced manner."
- **2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)** "The Future We Want" outcome document acknowledges: "insufficient progress and setbacks in the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development...[calling for a high-level political forum to] enhance **integration** of the three dimensions...in a holistic and cross sectoral manner at all levels."
- **2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Summit** "Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" calls for "achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and **integrated** manner."
- **2019 United Nations Environment Assembly: Resolution on the Poverty-Environment Nexus** "Urges Member States to apply **integrated**, innovative and coherent approaches in policies, laws, plans and budgets on poverty eradication through sustainable environment and natural resources management; to align with the 2030 Agenda."
- **2021 COP26** draft text calls for implementing nationally determined contributions "in an **integrated**, holistic and balanced manner...[to] enhance linkages, create synergies and facilitate coordination."

Until recently, the record of real integration has often been less impressive. Sometimes integration has been short-lived, perhaps imposed by a mainstreaming programme rather than truly embedded.

At the other end of the scale, traditional and indigenous peoples' governance and resource management have often been powerful drivers of integration. Whereas government agendas are typically fragmented, many local traditional and most indigenous governance and knowledge systems are nature-based, honour the complex interdependence of all life forms, do not separate the well-being of people from that of nature, and embody a notion of progress that is often cyclical rather than linear. Such traditions recognize that

poverty is experienced very differently, depending upon context. Moreover, local people often relate more strongly to environmental, poverty, gender or conflict realities than they do to the economic sector problems that normally preoccupy government and aid policy (OECD, 2019). Thus, securing the rights of indigenous peoples to their lands, territories and resources can achieve economic and social success on their terms – while at the same time conserving and restoring ecosystems, increasing carbon storage and scaling up agro-ecosystems for sustainable food production. Yet these local and traditional integration approaches have often been excluded from today's predominant formal decision-making, especially at national levels.

Recent in-country experience of integration in formal government systems has been growing. For example, a 2018 study by UNEP and CEPEI, with Government of Brazil support, assessed 57 examples of integrated approach to achieving the SDGs across 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. These approaches – labelled variously as whole of government, whole of society, cross-sectoral, multiple mainstreaming, transversal etc. – were mostly one-off and additive rather than fully embedded and did not break down institutional silos. Nevertheless, these initiatives have begun to influence day-to-day government planning and procedures.

Over the longer term, we can observe a gradual convergence of institutional paradigms to integrate environmental and human issues. Real integration has been the result of a slow and quiet evolution of perspectives and paradigms (at its best, learning from traditional approaches and enabling them). Figure 1 shows how environmental and development institutions by and large have evolved over the decades. Globally, and especially in many progressive countries, there has been a gradual trend from (i) completely siloed institutions that work separately and sometimes conflict, to (ii) some mutual recognition and safeguards to do no harm, and then at times to (iii) fuller integration of agendas to address synergies and thereby do more good.

As a result, environmental institutions in most countries now no longer adopt the simplistic approach of just keeping people out of protected areas. Many have instead moved to community biodiversity management and similar practices. Similarly, development institutions in most countries now rarely adopt a blunt "liquidate natural capital to replace with physical and financial capital" approach. Many embrace the SDGs, which are devised so that people and nature thrive together.

This evolution towards greater poverty-environment integration seems to happen when the following elements converge:

- The **links between poverty problems and environmental problems become painfully real** and cannot be ignored – as with floods and droughts where poor people suffer most
- The **limits of separate, siloed action frustrate progress** and leaders are driven to give serious consideration to more collaborative approaches
- The **public takes up campaigns** on issues such as land rights, health and responsible consumption that clearly link poverty-environment concerns, creating incentives for businesses and policymakers to respond
- **International agreements call for integration**, offering a mandate for change
- **Initiatives for mainstreaming offer integration tools, processes, and capacity** that are relevant to the integration level reached by the country or locality (e.g. tools that suit countries at the silo stage will be different from those in countries that are already seeking synergies)

Besides increasing market behaviour on corporate environmental, social and governance issues, these government and civil society drivers together open up possibilities for integration. As the 2021 climate and biodiversity Conferences of the Parties have

FIGURE 1 **Trends towards integration and convergence across environmental and development institutions**

	ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTIONS How they treat people	INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRATION Level reached	DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTIONS How they treat the environment
4	**Nature *with* people** Well-being of people and nature; landscapes 2010s on	**Structural reforms *for* sustainable development** Transformative change to make sustainable development new norm	**Development *with* nature** Resilient systems; natural capital; SDGs 2010 on
3	**Nature *for* people** Ecosystems approach, community-based natural resource management 1990s–2000s	**Synergies** Aim for poverty-environment win-wins (but only where possible)	**Nature *co-benefits* from development** Sustainable land/natural resource/livelihoods, MDG 7 2000s on
2	**Nature *despite* people** Tackling habitat loss/pollution 1970s–1990s	**Safeguards** Aim to avoid damaging poverty-environment trade-offs	**Development *doing no harm* to nature** Land/natural resource management, environmental impact assessment 1990s on
1	**Nature *without* people** Species and protected areas 1950s–1970s	**Silos** Separate, unlinked poverty and environment agendas; often in conflict	**Development by *converting* nature** Land and natural resource development 1950s on

DRIVERS OF INTEGRATION

Powerful feedbacks between environment and poverty problems are increasingly experienced: both positive and negative effects become real and are strongly felt

Limits of institutional silos become apparent: people find they can't achieve desired outcomes through a single agenda

Societal demand for integration: people campaign on issues with linked poverty-environment causes, e.g. health, pollution, jobs; concern for just transition to minimize losers

Top-down drivers of integration: states need public goods and resource efficiency; businesses need to secure scarce resources; some political leaders champion sustainable development

INSTITUTIONAL BRIDGES THAT BUILD TRUST & ENABLE INTEGRATION

Plural policy processes: that pull agendas together e.g. green economy strategies, reciprocal mainstreaming connecting environment and development (e.g. PEI/PEA)

Groups and networks: that bridge and balance twin imperatives of social justice and environmental sustainability; sustainable development councils, units, researchers

Integrated planning tools: sustainability assessment, environmental/climate expenditure reviews, sustainable development forecasting, modelling

Integrated metrics: multidimensional poverty, natural and social capital accounts, resilience, footprints, beyond GDP

Localization processes: decentralization, participation, landscape/nexus approaches that make cross-issue local realities real

SOURCE: Bass (2019).

shown, this is emboldening many to make a leap towards fuller integration of the twin imperatives of social justice and environmental sustainability.

PEI and PEA have responded to and mobilized many of these drivers – and in fact, working for over 16 years in four continents, have themselves become a significant driver of integration. The next section summarizes PEI/PEA's establishment and experience.

The PEI/PEA experience of integration

Both UNDP and UNEP had separate programmes on poverty-environment linkages from 1998. These came together in 2003, affording two decades of experience in how to integrate major agendas.

The UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative ran from 2005 to 2018. It had an initial emphasis on influencing national plans for development and/or poverty reduction as well as sector development plans to include environmental objectives relevant to poor groups. When it became clear that budgeting and implementation mattered as much as plans in terms of achieving poverty-environment outcomes, PEI extended into budgeting and implementation processes, too.

Poverty-Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals was launched in 2018 and runs to 2022. PEA promotes "an integrated approach which contributes to bringing poverty, environment and climate objectives into the heart of national and subnational plans, policies, budgets, and public and private finance – so as to strengthen the sustainable management of natural resources and to alleviate poverty" (UNDP-UNEP PEA 2018b). PEA has made further progress in at least three areas that PEI had realized were priorities:

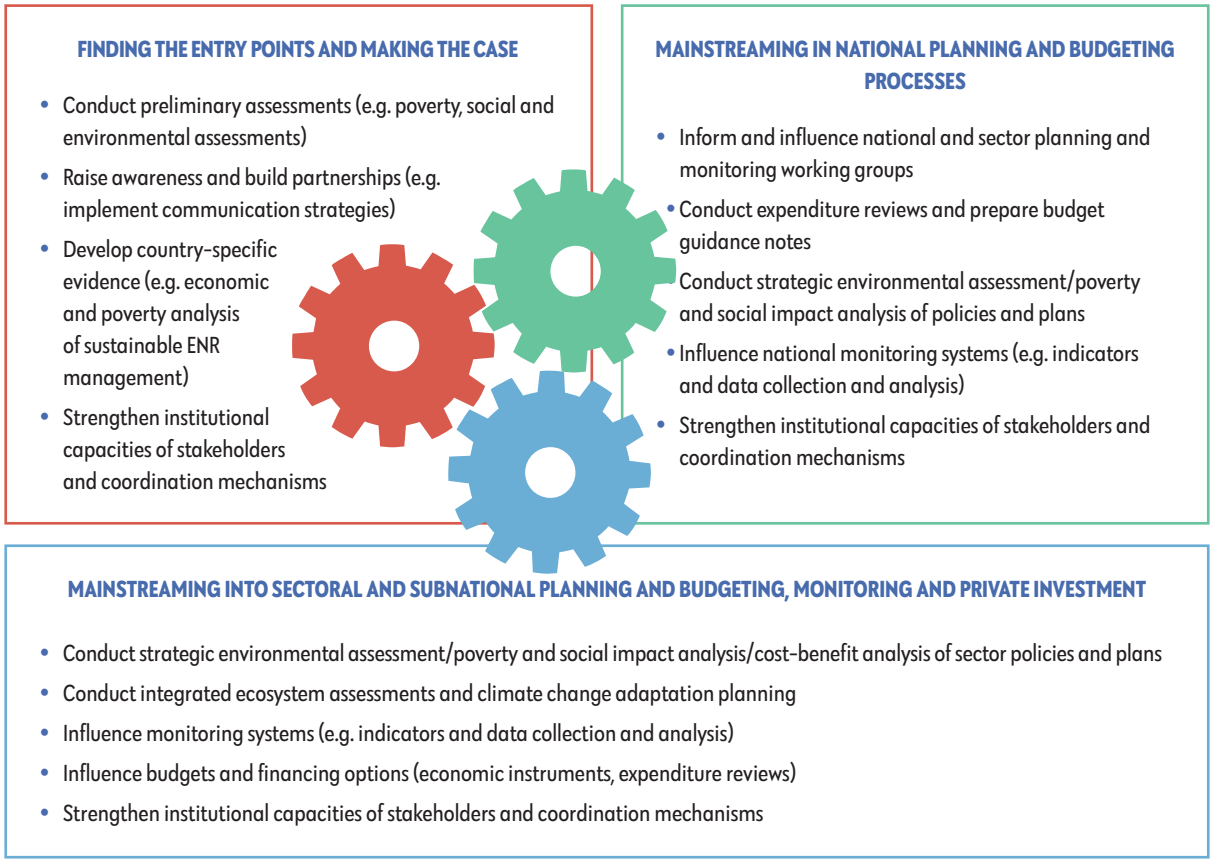
- Aligning finance and investment with poverty, environment and climate objectives
- Developing and applying methodologies to assess environmental and natural resource (ENR)–multidimensional poverty links
- Applying rights-based and gender approaches to better target and engage poor and marginalized groups

PEI and PEA have been significant drivers of integration in developing countries. They pioneered integrated approaches to poverty-environment mainstreaming: first in support of national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with an emphasis on the environment as it was marginal in the MDGs; and now as a model for the integrated approaches needed to implement the more balanced 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. What initially seemed a technical exercise was soon clearly found to be a more complex and demanding process of policy and institutional change requiring a programmatic approach (figure 2) which might take 10–20 years to fully achieve across national, sectoral and local levels.

PEI/PEA have provided significant **additionality** in achieving integration, exemplified by the following:

- **The PEI/PEA programmatic approach –** which seeks strategic entry points into existing national decision-making processes, feeds those processes with analysis and ideas, and improves them by bringing in new actors and tools
- **Focusing on finance and development authorities as integration leaders –** because real budgets, taxation, expenditure and investment are the bottom line of development, whereas plans often end up neglected
- **Setting up environmental focal points in most ministries –** and ensuring coordination between them and with the finance and development authorities, so relevant environmental issues are always considered, and safeguards deployed in their planning, budgeting and spending

FIGURE 2 **PEI/PEA programmatic approach for poverty-environment mainstreaming**



SOURCE: UNDP-UNEP PEI (2015).

- **Widening perspectives and metrics on poverty –** with new frameworks, tools and indicators for multidimensional poverty measurement, to strengthen the poverty side of environmental assessment and vice versa, and to get a better handle on SDG planning and monitoring
- **Integrating gendered and other disaggregated social dimensions –** with new data on poverty-environment-gender links that influence many country policies and monitoring frameworks (36 in Africa)
- **Conducting economic analyses including climate and environment expenditure reviews –** to reveal potentials to increase income and revenue and to target public and private investment
- **Taking integration to decentralized levels –** building context-specific poverty-environment data and capacities for district development plans, green villages, etc.; such integration is where real development happens
- **Creating integrated knowledge –** publishing well-researched stories of change, evaluations, and guidance on poverty-environment progress, growing a comprehensive body of knowledge
- **Pioneering One UN –** mobilizing complementary UN mandates and resources to address both development and environmental authorities and players and to improve coherence
- **Offering continuity of support –** resulting in two and even three five-year plans being influenced in a country (e.g. Rwanda, Mali), in the process

building both country expertise and institutional "wiring" and supporting South-South exchange on poverty-environment mainstreaming

Many countries benefit from the valuable legacy PEI/PEA helped them create. PEI/PEA have helped countries embed poverty-environment concerns in government systems across the policy cycle. Governments now have new capacities, procedures, data and financial provisions for poverty reduction and environmental management. And all partner countries have national plans – and some subnational and sectoral plans and commitments – that mainstream poverty-environment concerns.

While not yet completely embedded, this legacy has established a strong mandate for further progress. It constitutes assets for future integration that make each country fitter for achieving sustainable development. Where in-country entry points for sustainable development were once uncertain, they are now clearer and function better. Where there were limited resources in-country, there are now experienced people, tested methodologies – and sometimes bigger budgets and new funds. The European Commission cites the PEI/PEA programmatic approach as a proven means for mainstreaming within developing country systems and multi/bilateral support (EC, 2016).

But there is still more to do. Plans need to be implemented. Capacity must be mobilized and incentivized. New procedures should be embedded and streamlined, and pilot projects reviewed and scaled up. To help update the approach, we explore below the lessons of PEI/PEA and related initiatives in terms of the challenges to integration and best practices in meeting them.

The lessons of integration – challenges and what works

Extensive and in-depth experience of integration approaches that endure beyond one-off mainstreaming projects has been elusive. Some of the challenges of integration have been clear for some time (see e.g. Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2009). But now with the multi-year, multi-continent, multi-agency, multidisciplinary, multi-instrument PEI/PEA, we have compelling evidence of good integration practice that overcomes the challenges and mobilizes the drivers of integration.

PEI and PEA have revealed a rich range of lessons. Several documents have been produced in the last few years that draw these out (e.g. Bann, 2019; UNDP-UNEP PEI, 2018a, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). These lessons offer a very credible and proven basis for practical guidance on the implementation of holistic goals such as the SDGs or inclusive green economies.

PEI/PEA lessons that relate to poverty-environment integration are highlighted below presented in terms of the challenges faced in poverty-environment integration. Each of these 10 challenges are explained, followed by good practices PEI/PEA identified or used for tackling these challenges.

DOMINANT PARADIGMS AND KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS THAT EXCLUDE MANY POVERTY-ENVIRONMENT CONCERNS

THE CHALLENGE

Prevailing development paradigms tend to ignore the breadth of poverty-environment issues and promote a narrow range of economic goals. Different world views, especially on the environment, are often difficult to recognize and reconcile with the economic paradigm.

GOOD PRACTICES

Work within the dominant economic paradigm, informing it with good economic evidence. A vital starting point for making the case for

poverty-environment policy integration and investment is the proactive use of the prevailing economic framing, while introducing economic evidence on poverty-environment issues such as the costs and benefits of unsustainable and sustainable ENR management options.

Recognize diverse perspectives and knowledge traditions and share their value. The three dimensions of sustainable development – social, environment and economic – must be equally emphasized in mainstreaming efforts. This means drawing on knowledge and disciplines beyond economics, which only incompletely recognizes all three dimensions; using the interdisciplinary science that has been deployed by IPCC, IPBES and others; and bringing in other (traditional) forms of knowledge, especially those that are respected locally.

FRAGMENTED INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

THE CHALLENGE

Narrow organizational mandates, processes, disciplines, incentives and metrics need to be overcome, as they lead to separate, siloed work and block integration. Also, the lack of effective horizontal and vertical coherence and coordination mechanisms makes it difficult to implement cross-sectoral priorities.

GOOD PRACTICES

Target existing processes for integration rather than creating parallel systems. The most effective way to promote integrated approaches usually involves targeting the existing planning, budgeting and institutional coordination mechanisms and tools that stakeholders trust most, and enabling them to better respond to the three dimensions of sustainable development. This helps strengthen confidence and institutional capacity, although it will take time. Creating parallel mechanisms outside routine mainstream systems can be tempting, as it can be done quickly under the control of one initiative, but it is counterproductive in the long run and is discouraged.

Use analysis and communications to improve vertical and horizontal coordination. Institutional contextual analysis can identify gaps in policy and budget coherence so that planning, budgeting, data and monitoring procedures can be adapted to get the right kinds of information flowing to the right people in key decision-making moments. A special focus is often needed on the barriers to subnational levels acting on national integration decisions. Poverty-environment issues become starkly evident at these levels, but it cannot be assumed that there will be a trickle-down effect between national/sector and subnational policies. This is also a key area for capacity development.

INADEQUATE LEADERSHIP FOR INTEGRATION

THE CHALLENGE

The most effective sources of poverty-environment leadership, coherence and coordination are often not identified, mobilized or promoted.

GOOD PRACTICES

Work with and through ministries of planning and finance to integrate poverty-environment objectives into national development priorities. These ministries should take the lead in integration because of (i) the close relationship between poverty-environment mainstreaming and national development planning and fiscal management, and (ii) their formal links with other ministries. Although ministries of environment might often seem to be leaders in poverty-environment, PEI's shift in attention from them to ministries of planning or finance not only accelerated and strengthened the inclusion of sustainability objectives in national development plans but also, with time, strengthened the environmental sector

itself. Environment ministries need to play roles as environmental champions, regulators and experts but not always (there are exceptions) as leaders of integration.

Institutionalize mechanisms to plan and track environmental spending to close the financing gap. There is often a gap between the ambitions for environmental protection as articulated in national plans and policies and the resources allocated to this in budgeting and expenditure processes. A deliberate focus on finance and financial decisions throughout the policy cycle is essential. Also essential is ensuring that all planning and finance ministries have strong environment/climate units within them, and ensuring improved collaboration between ministries of environment/natural resources and those in charge of planning and finance.

Mobilize the mandates of other sector and cross-cutting ministries. It is valuable to work with ministries of planning for the national plan, ministries of finance for the budget, statistical bureaus for monitoring priority indicators of success, civil service authorities for executive decision-making rules – and environment ministries for environmental standards and compliance.

Key sector ministries have important roles in integration, too. Where they adopt and lead on sustainability and inclusive environmental objectives – such as agriculture taking on gender-responsive climate change adaptation and environmentally friendly equitable land management and agricultural inputs, or industries adopting sustainable consumption and production – this can lead to successful integration.

LACK OF TRUST AND WEAK POLITICAL WILL FOR INTEGRATING POVERTY-ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

THE CHALLENGE

The actors that need to work together for poverty-environment integration have rarely collaborated and therefore do not know or trust each other. There is much to overcome – vested interests, resistance to evidence, resistance to change, and "mainstreaming fatigue" from too many one-way pushes for integration.

GOOD PRACTICES

Managing relationships is the secret to success in poverty-environment integration. Building and maintaining a collegial and trusted working relationship with key government players is essential, as these are gatekeepers to mainstreaming. Diplomacy can be more important than money, as UNDP and UNEP have found, and even a small contribution and/or a long-term presence can have a big impact if good relations with the government are made, with technical advisors being perceived as part of the government team.

Devote greater attention to the political economy. Political economy analysis can usefully inform integration tactics, identifying a wider range of opportunities to factor poverty-environment considerations into the entire policy process than if attention is given to just one or two of its stages. Sometimes such analysis will point to an integration strategy that works **with** the grain of political economy, i.e. working with current formal systems, powers and vested interests; and sometimes **against** the grain, where new or marginalized players are beginning to win the argument better and where informal pressures can be exerted. Because such issues may be sensitive, practitioners should seek expert analysis and proceed cautiously.

LACK OF POLICY SPACE FOR COLLECTIVE POVERTY-ENVIRONMENT DEBATE AND ACTION

THE CHALLENGE

The relevance of poverty-environment issues to mainstream policy priorities is barely recognized, and there are few mainstream policy spaces to debate them – despite growing societal concern and lobbying on the issues.

GOOD PRACTICES

Link poverty-environment issues to high-priority policy areas such as economic growth, job creation or poverty reduction. Poverty-environment issues are often ignored, as they are perceived to be abstract or irrelevant to the imperatives decision-makers are asked to address. Recognizing this reality, at least initially, it helps to make the case for poverty-environment integration in terms of what this can do for currently accepted national, sector or local priorities such as economic growth and jobs.

Participatory processes, even if initially one-off, are a best bet for beginning collective action and can lead to more permanent forums for integration. Offering participatory processes that enable target stakeholders and relevant government officials to engage can facilitate the acceptance of evidence, even if it challenges current policy discourse and/or practices.

Integration is ultimately a political process subject to institutional and societal dynamics. Poverty-environment integration is not a formal technocratic process. While aiming at routine in-country planning cycles and policy processes does make sense for influencing the mainstream, there are also many informal processes, as well as political events and one-off major investment decisions outside formal plans, that can strongly affect outcomes and can only sometimes be influenced. Again, it is important to understand the political economy.

GENDER AND EXCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS

THE CHALLENGE

Voice and power imbalances between stakeholders make the environmental needs of marginal groups invisible to policy; consequently, there is weak understanding that gender equity and other forms of equality are preconditions for both environmental sustainability and poverty elimination.

GOOD PRACTICES

Poverty-environment issues analysis is more likely to generate change if it substantially engages relevant stakeholders. In PEI experience, integrated social, economic and environmental evidence that demonstrates the links between poverty and environment is more likely to be used for policymaking if it is the result of a consultative process that involves target stakeholders and government officials. This practice facilitates the acceptance of evidence even if it challenges current policy discourse and/or practices. The extra time needed here is worth it in creating the strong ownership of analysis that is critical for driving change.

Multidimensional poverty and vulnerability assessment can expose what previously were hidden issues. Gender-disaggregated assessment, poverty and social impact analysis, and poverty impact assessment can help here. Such analysis should address and involve women and men, girls and boys, young and old, rich and poor, in relevant urban and rural settings, and cover their different roles – as producers and consumers, as holders of (traditional) knowledge on poverty-environment links and sustainable pathways that could be scaled up, and as drivers and recipients of environmental change. Gender gap analysis can

be used to identify disparities between men and women – for example, costing the gender gap in terms of earnings, productivity and access.

Include and empower poor people in the entire process of integration. Women, minorities and indigenous peoples are not simply the subjects of analysis but also need to be involved in decision-making. PEI/PEA experience highlights the support local communities and governments need in order to compel the private sector to see business success more holistically and to become more environmentally and socially responsible. This is particularly pressing in light of increasing flows of private sector investments into key natural resource sectors.

INCOMPLETE METRICS, DATA AND EVIDENCE

THE CHALLENGE

Narrow and siloed metrics mean poverty-environment links are barely covered in household, poverty and environment surveys and national economic data. Gaps in such data limit policy design and may create biases towards solutions for which there are more readily available data.

GOOD PRACTICES

Evidence needs to be integrated if it is to support evidence-based, integrated and inclusive policymaking, planning and implementation. Evidence needs to be integrated (clearly demonstrating poverty-environment linkages), yet also disaggregated (by income, gender and other key characteristics), strategically targeted (policy relevant, addressing national and sectoral goals and targets), yet also accessible (user friendly including for public interest groups to support transparency and dialogue), and credible (in its sources and methods). Governmental action is more likely to be triggered if the analysis is "owned," using data that is regularly compiled by central government agencies, with inputs from local government.

Proactively use economic and financial evidence on the costs and benefits of unsustainable and sustainable ENR management. Targeted, detailed economic evidence of the development benefits of implementing poverty-environment objectives has proven to be a powerful tool. Presenting environmental losses in financial terms also helps to provide an entry point to discussions. Public climate and/or environmental expenditure reviews shine a strong light on the gap between the economic benefits of sustainable ENR management and the amount currently spent. Multidimensional poverty indices that include environmental aspects can fill methodological gaps that hinder assessment of if and how increased public expenditure has led to improved poverty and environmental outcomes.

Focusing on critical sectors or localities can motivate policymakers to act. When the negative effects of unsustainable use of natural resources and gender inequity etc. are made apparent with regard to the targets and goals of a key economic sector, there is more motivation for that sector to adopt an integrated approach to policymaking and budgeting. Evidence demonstrating how poverty-environment linkages in a sector affect its goals and targets and, importantly, the objectives of other sectors, can galvanize cross-sector support to address poverty-environment challenges.

Using SDG metrics in routine data systems can support integrated monitoring. The global SDGs and associated targets can offer a holistic view, both horizontally across sectors and themes, and vertically down from the national to local levels. If national development aspirations are to change substantially and reflect more interdependent outcomes, partnerships between statistics bureaus and their main user institutions need to generate data that provide such metrics. Natural capital accounting and wealth accounting can form a useful basis in this regard. In fact, it can take

relatively little time to begin to develop useful accounts for some poverty–environment issues.

INADEQUATE CAPACITIES AND POWERS, NOTABLY AT DECENTRALIZED LEVELS

THE CHALLENGE

There is inadequate experience, skills and capacity in the various tasks of integration, especially at the local levels where some poverty–environment issues are most keenly felt.

GOOD PRACTICES

Targeted capacity building of relevant ministries should be approached with urgency, but also as a long-term process of institutional change. Because institutional weaknesses are a key barrier to effective change, addressing the capacity gaps for vertical (national, regional, local) and horizontal (cross-sectoral) planning and implementation of sustainable development is a foundational need – especially for SDG localization and implementation. While short-term exercises such as training can break some logjams, poverty–environment integration is a long-term task of institutional strengthening that should be able to withstand personnel and political changes. Continuous, but adaptable, support over time is vital.

Strengthen the capacity of ministries of environment. While the focus has shifted to ministries of planning and finance as leads in integration, it is nevertheless important to strengthen the analytical and policy engagement capacity of ministries of environment. Ministries of environment need to be able to address poverty–environment issues both within their own mandates and by engaging with planning, finance and key sector ministries.

Establishing environmental and/or poverty focal points in sector ministries can be helpful. Environmental focal points or units in sector ministries can help to integrate environmental sustainability into respective sector policies, plans and budgets. Similarly, gender focal points in environmental and natural resource ministries can help weave together environmental and poverty agendas and action.

Objectives must be translated into action. National poverty–environment objectives must be transformed into concrete actions through sector and district plans, and the guidelines for producing these plans, if any real change is to be realized. Realistically, substantive and simultaneous engagement in multiple sectors, districts or provinces is unlikely – it was certainly beyond PEI/PEA staff and financial resources. Engaging in pilot districts and sectors, plus seeking to integrate poverty–environment objectives more broadly by including poverty–environment elements in central government guidelines for planning and monitoring in all localities and sectors, proved to be the most realistic strategy in Africa. In Asia Pacific, the strategy selected was to invest in local government, given active decentralization taking place in the region.

The tasks of integration must become embedded in individual officers' work. Many mainstreaming initiatives in the past simply added integration tasks temporarily to the duties of a few officers, perhaps with a project-related incentive. The tasks were dropped when the project ended. The main lesson is to include integration tasks in defining new jobs and revising others, and in officers' job descriptions and staff contracts, performance incentives and assessments.

LACK OF INVESTMENT IN INTEGRATED INITIATIVES

THE CHALLENGE

The cost of tackling some of the deeper or most widespread poverty–environment problems and

associated policy/institutional reform tends to exceed the typically low budgets for mainstreaming.

GOOD PRACTICES

Initiatives for driving integration need to be strategic and catalytic. With its relatively small budget, PEI had to target the most strategic entry points for change as well as for catalysing support from strategic partners to ensure sustainability beyond project end.

Partnerships with larger and better-resourced actors are essential for bringing in more resources. The needs for institutional reform and capacity development, for strengthening data and analysis, and for piloting and scaling new integration approaches etc., demand a major undertaking well beyond the capacity and resources of single programmes. For this reason, PEI/PEA coordinated with UNDP, UNEP, UN Women, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, as well as development cooperation partners at the country level, among others, on joint initiatives and projects. This underscores the need to identify relevant larger entities and programmes engaged in complementary poverty and/or environment initiatives as partners, so each can play to its respective strengths.

Public environmental and climate expenditure reviews have proven to be particularly useful to leverage investment. These reviews can highlight the discrepancy between investments required for securing pro-poor environmental sustainability, the actual investments made, and the resulting benefits to the economy and livelihoods. The use of public expenditure reviews has helped design new nationally established funds to achieve linked social, environmental and economic outcomes – as well as successfully attract other sources of funding for concrete action on the ground.

Budget tools can facilitate integration of poverty-environment objectives. These tools – which include budgeting and spending guidelines, budget call circulars and guidelines, sector budget checklists and budget codes/tagging – have helped to ensure that budget allocations are in line with national and sector policy objectives; to improve tracking of both budget allocations and actual expenditures and to make transparent any discrepancies between the two; and, once a time series is built up, to improve the efficiency of expenditure allocation.

Private sector investment will be needed to achieve economy-wide integration of poverty-environment objectives at scale. This means targeting strategic entry points in a country's investment management system and establishing the terms of private investment in priority poverty-environment sectors. This is a very active area for PEA innovation; promising tools include foreign direct investment guidelines and associated social and environmental safeguards, legal templates for investment project agreements, national sustainable finance roadmaps, sustainable finance forums, green bonds, private bank lending guidance, environmental corporate reporting in stock exchanges, investment tracking tools, and training financial regulatory staff.

LACK OF CONTINUED EFFORT

THE CHALLENGE

This challenge comprises three systemic weaknesses: (i) **short-termism** – favouring quick-fix solutions within development projects or electoral cycles as opposed to the longer time required to undertake institutional reforms, (ii) **weak monitoring** of critical poverty-environment dimensions and (iii) **lack of follow-up** throughout the policy/decision cycle.

GOOD PRACTICES

Poverty-environment mainstreaming in government systems requires long-term support. Poverty-environment mainstreaming entails institutional change across government, which

is a complex, continuous affair usually taking many years. For promising shifts in the mandates, procedures and capacities of government and business machinery alike to be fully realized and sustainable, long-term technical and funding support is desirable. Moreover, if international organizations are to take the right decision – to support integration primarily through national systems, rather than imposing their own systems – they should be realistic about what they can expect, especially in early phases when the nine other challenges outlined above will also be prominent.

The national monitoring system is a highly strategic entry point for poverty-environment support. Regular monitoring of poverty-environment issues is important – and not only through project-based interventions – so trends positive and negative can be identified and managed. Poverty-environment monitoring is a prerequisite for truly embedding poverty-environment concerns into institutional behaviour. Central and financial authorities, donors and concerned citizens alike have an interest in how successful development is monitored and assessed. Multidimensional poverty measurement has increasingly afforded a powerful means of obtaining the comprehensive economic, social and environmental data and analysis required for planning and assessing progress in holistic policies such as the SDGs.

The entire policy cycle should be addressed to fully embed poverty-environment objectives. PEI/PEA's work, even if it originally focused on integrating poverty-environment issues into assessment and planning tasks, soon moved on to work in the budgeting, expenditure and implementation phases of the policy cycle in order to become fully embedded. This reflects earlier lessons on environmental mainstreaming (e.g. Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2009) and integrated policymaking for sustainable development (e.g. UNEP, 2009). PEI/PEA stand out for ensuring the longer-term continuity of support to integrate poverty-environment into all decision-making phases.

SUMMARY

Looking across these many lessons, five cross-cutting themes are critical and should inform future integration efforts:

- The constraints imposed by fragmented and outdated **institutional structures and information flows** that reflect past priorities and narrower interests than face decision-makers today
- The need to build **trust** as a precondition and driver of integration
- The importance of addressing **gender and inequality**, both to generate this trust and to tackle the underlying causes of many poverty-environment problems
- Offering the **space** and supporting the **capacity** to adopt integrated approaches
- Above all, making use of the unifying framework of the **policy/decision-making cycle**

The integrated approach: a proposed strategic framework for improved practice

Informed by the above lessons, we can confidently propose a strategy of using locally mandated decision-making processes/cycles as the main vehicles for integration. This will mobilize multiple actors and their many disciplines to reach robust decisions at the national, local or sector levels that will achieve the poverty-environment impacts sought by pursuing holistic goals such as the SDGs. Using existing integration procedures, adapting them, and enriching them with tools that are better suited for integration will improve ownership of the integration process and its results.

Figure 3 illustrates the desirable trajectory of poverty-environment integration. The aim is to move towards impacts in terms of poverty reduction

and environmental sustainability that are mutually supportive, and away from situations where either poor people or the environment (and sometimes both) continue to lose out. The upstream test of integration en route to such impacts would be policy coherence between poverty objectives and environmental objectives. But the downstream test of integration will surely be improved well-being of people and natural systems.

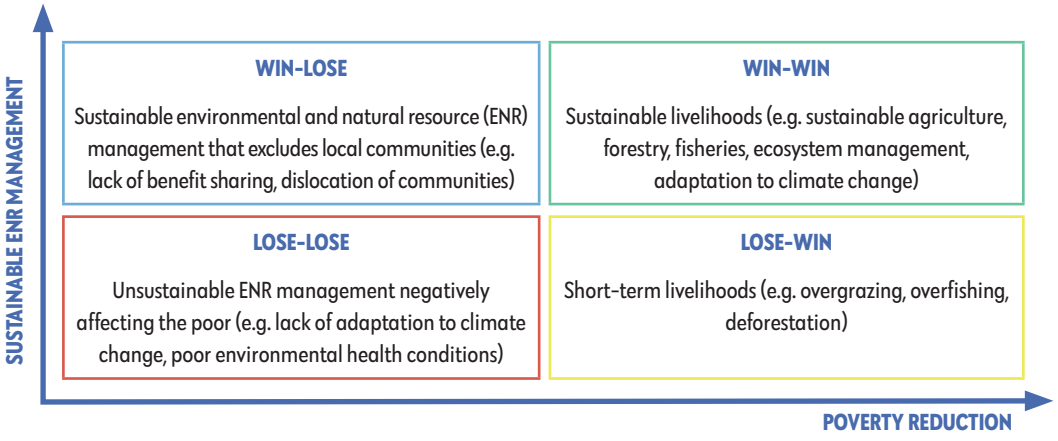
We propose a schematic that embraces all the poverty-environment integration tasks, tools and tactics involved in a typical decision-making cycle. Figure 4 summarizes effective decision-making as six broadly cyclical activities from analysis to plans to monitoring, plus two foundations that drive these activities – integrated institutions and integrated information. For each of these, proven poverty-environment integration practices from PEI/PEA experience and other initiatives are summarized.

The schematic is based on the premise that opportunities for poverty-environment integration may be found at every stage in policymaking and that coordination among different policymaking stages is key to ensuring an integrated approach is followed through. It aims ultimately to lock poverty-environment considerations into policy processes from the beginning – before a policy issue is even brought into government agendas and certainly before proposals are put on the table. By internalizing poverty-environment assessment without identifying it separately, the assessment becomes a natural and organic component of the policy process. By thinking about the whole cycle at the outset, gaps in capacity and procedure between the stages are identified in advance. All of this should improve decision-making efficiency and sustainability as sustainable development concerns are anticipated and addressed early on, rather than reactively.

Applying the integrated approach

In this 50th anniversary year of the first call for an integrated approach to sustainable development, the PEI flagship handbook on poverty-environment mainstreaming is being revised and re-imagined as an interactive website. It will provide practical operational guidance on the tasks, tools and roles for integrating poverty-environment objectives at each stage in the policy cycle. The target audience is national, sectoral, local and development assistance policymakers and senior officials,

FIGURE 3 Integration trajectory: maximizing win-win impacts on poverty reduction and environmental sustainability



SOURCE: UNDP-UNEP PEI (2015).

FIGURE 4 The policy cycle: schematic for integrating poverty-environment objectives

ANALYSING

Nexus of linked poverty-environment issues:
- Multidimensional poverty
- Natural capital accounts

Assessing impact:
- Gender and difference
- Environmental impact
- Economic implications

Political economy:
- Institutions and context
- Stakeholders and powers
- Change and change processes

MONITORING

Metrics of poverty-environment outcomes:
- Micro/sector (e.g. multidimensional poverty)
- Macro (beyond GDP, natural capital accounts)

Metrics of poverty-environment integration process:
- Participation and integrated decisions around policy cycle

Links to mainstream monitoring and evaluation systems:
- National statistical systems
- Business, investor systems

Feeding into learning processes

IMPLEMENTING

Collective action:
- Coordination of poverty-environment mainstreaming
- Collaboration among disciplines
- Pilot exercises and action-learning
- Partnerships for joint poverty-environment outcomes
- Poverty-environment instruments such as payment for ecosystem services, nature-based solutions, joint social and environmental protection schemes

INSTITUTION BUILDING

Building poverty-environment roles, silo-breaking:
- Ministries of finance, development, environment, key sectors
- Poverty-environment focal points in all ministries
- Coherent body of sustainable development law
- Donor coordination, One UN

Inclusion and empowerment:
- Rights-based approach
- Gender and social justice

Building poverty-environment integration capacity:
- Embed poverty-environment in government machinery
- Interdisciplinary approaches

Poverty-environment communities of practice

COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

Communications strategy:
- Reaching stakeholders
- Raising poverty-environment integration profile
- Sharing poverty-environment knowledge
- Advocacy/influencing for poverty-environment
- Products for many audiences – narratives, publications, media, social media, events

ENGAGING AND DIALOGUING

Participation/consultation process:
- Actors, spaces, knowledge, time

Inclusive dialogue steps:
- Engage
- Explore
- Change

Participatory methodologies:
- Creating consensus and political will

PLANNING

Understanding decision processes:
- Identify poverty-environment–relevant plans and processes
- National, local, sector levels

Mapping players and procedures:
- Poverty-environment entry points in cycle

Strategy to integrate poverty-environment:
- Engage stakeholders
- Get the right data
- Scenarios and modelling
- Prioritization
- Influence target plans

FISCAL AND FINANCING

Fiscal triangle – poverty-environment integrated in borrowing, taxing, spending:
- Poverty-environment in budget cycle
- Public poverty-environment expenditure review
- Fiscal reform for poverty-environment
- Public procurement for poverty-environment

Environmental economic studies, cost benefit analysis

Private investment for poverty-environment outcomes:
- Investment treaties, standards
- Green funds, green bonds

NOTE: This is a generic cycle. Individual governments and ministries will have their own, as will relevant businesses, civil society organizations / non-governmental organizations, and community groups.

notably those charged with responding to the SDGs or post-COVID green recovery with new policies, plans and reforms.

The handbook will also support practitioners who are designing and/or operating projects in the environment or development who may want to adopt more integrated approaches, such as integrated landscape management, community-based conservation, or joint environmental and social protection schemes.

Following is a brief scoping checklist drawn from the handbook with some initial prompts to help those working on initiatives with poverty-environment implications to scope an action plan towards achieving truly integrated outcomes:

- List the linked poverty-environment **problems** you face and/or **outcomes** you seek in your sector, social group, locality or ecosystem service.
- Determine which **actors** – authorities, non-governmental organizations, partners, other projects etc. – also aim at these problems and/or outcomes. You may want to engage, and potentially work, with them.
- Find out what **existing country policies, laws and plans** apply to these poverty-environment impacts. They might be the SDGs and global MEAs or regional agreements (e.g. on river basins or seas). Integrate the country's commitments into the intervention.
- Identify the **decision-making processes** relevant to your selected poverty-environment issues. Assess which already handle some of the holistic policy commitments and plans, or resist them or fail in them. You will want to align your strategy proactively with important procedures, dates and events.
- Find out what kinds of **information** these decision-making processes need; when they need it; and if they are open to a more balanced set of social, environmental, economic and governance data that will support integrated approaches.
- Armed with this information, make the basic **case for an integrated approach** to your initiative – its benefits, costs and risks compared to a more traditional siloed approach. Show where it will lead to positive poverty-environment impacts across the SDGs.
- Identify the **best entry point** for influencing relevant decision-making with your case – national, local, sector, organizational etc. – and at which **stage** – e.g. monitoring, debate, or planning decisions.
- Select from a range of **analytical and communications tools** that suit the entry point and its level of sophistication in handling integrated issues.

To be clear, integration is not about a standardized top-down imposition. It should suit national contexts and encourage national and local stakeholders to work together to achieve integration in a bottom-up manner. PEI/PEA have been among a minority of international programmes with a participatory approach to integration. In development work generally, the prevailing paradigm has emphasized a trickle-down theory of change that assumes progress will ultimately reach poor people and marginal concerns such as the environment. This paradigm has been dominant for years – yet it has never achieved sustainable development or poverty reduction at scale in spite of occasional drives for mainstreaming particular issues.

In contrast, PEI/PEA have aimed directly at helping national stakeholders address integrated outcomes where they are most needed, in ways that suit their context and support authentic institutional reform and long-term capacity. It is therefore now timely to draw on PEI/PEA experience, as well as that of other initiatives, to achieve the integrated approaches that have been called for over the last 50 years.

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