

1. UN agencies are run by national governments who are their members ; these organisations with specialised purposes (from health to meteorology to communications) were formed even before the League of Nations and United Nations . In the UK , the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has an overall brief to ensure that the delegations to these agencies from various UK government departments and their semi independent agencies represent UK interests effectively . But the profile in Whitehall and Westminster of these UN agencies is not as high as for foreign affairs including international crises .The UN association in the UK works hard to raise the profile of UN bodies. These agencies have a vital role for key aspects of all countries of the world, both developed and developing countries ; for example health warnings, food safety , communications , aviation, weather forecasting etc .Sometimes ministers attend the meetings of the UN agencies ; but many fewer from UK than other countries.I recall my kinsman Baroness Bottomley attended the WMO meetings when she was minister of health. Mr Meacher at DEFRA was an assiduous attender of meetings at UNEP.

2.

My first point is that the agencies need reviewing from time to time in light of urgent issues. But while UN and national governments always look at efficiency , they seem reluctant to look at the fundamentals of their operation and the budgets allocated in relation to the urgency of the problem. (I am pleased that the UK contribution to UN agencies is not dependent on their policies and particular decisions ; nor is subject to lobbying by commercial or political organisations as are US contributions- currently there are threats to WHO about their policy that sugar levels be dropped to the equivalent on one glass of soda drink per day),

Currently water resources are critical but UN programmes (unesco ihp and wmo operational hydrology) have very small budgets (in the case of WMO less than 5%), although availability of water is one the key objectives of DFID . Sometimes new agencies are needed (eg UNEP) .UNEP did a good job on ozone hole , but it is not being directed by member countries coordinating/publicising the national. Regional and global problems atmospheric and marine pollution (regional bodies and IMO play an important but limited role). Is DEFRA considering a stronger coordination by UNEP in this area? (rememdering how many areas including London are exceeding air pollution health limits)

The UN bodies are generally open in their communications . It is important that the recent exposure about certain governments spying on the confidential communications of other governments and non-governmental organisations does not lead to a loss of trust between countries and agencies working in the UN. I hope the minister in replying will provide assurance on this point .

3 uk govt reviews the efficacy of the agencies , but does not focus sufficiently on benefits to UK (eg dealing with flooding where other countries have developed useful approaches and have better research facilities; FAO studies of GMOs in agriculture are surely important; the recent reviews by UN bodies of UK health and housing are very useful, even if controversial)

One way to ensure improved benefits to UK would be to involve uk stakeholders to a greater extent in our involvement with UN agencies , for example through regular -pre-meetings (as at the met office in the 1990's) , report back meetings, wider participation in

uk delegations or as observers (as Acops does at IMO and LDC).The US is much stronger in this respect and is ruthless in using bits delegation to promote US technology and even products(eg lightning detection) -inconceivable by most uk delegations .

At the executive level of some UN agencies I should like to say that there are now excellent relations between UN agencies and NGOs on issues connected with climate and environment. Other UN agencies have NGOs as observers who can provide expert input .

3. Although the UN as a whole has broad targets eg MDG and reducing carbon emissions , there could be more specific targets for agencies or groups of agencies . These targets should be openly discussed by parliaments and stakeholders , and progress(or regress) towards achieving them should also be openly reviewed. Targets require data, which remains a great weakness of the UN system.
4. At least UN bodies could urge countries to be more systematic in gathering data and open with their data. Even the most basic data is not available eg whether there is or is not a sewage plant in a capital city. A study in Ghana showed that several organisations are collecting environmental and health data , but which is not well coordinated . The study in collaboration with these organisations recommended the establishment of 'meta-data' centres which specify what data is available and under what conditions (including price where relevant).

5 what are the main issues where such goals and targets are needed , in relation to recent crises

-Syrian (and earlier Iraq)conflict ;improved humanitarian aid and technical methods of identifying combatants and their weapons (UN Humanitarian bodies?)

-Bangladesh factory collapse; improved targets for ILO on factory health and safety
-floods in Europe, Pakistan, droughts in California ; the water programmes need more technical focus and bigger budgets (in WMO 4% is on water ; 96 % on meteorology)

- pollution episodes ; need targets to help coordinate international and regional programmes , with UN agencies (UNEP, IMO WMO etc)

-improved warnings and assistance before, during and after natural and artificial disasters ; UNISDR coordinates but with more funds it could have more ambitious targets (which could stimulate research eg into very difficult problems like earthquakes, where there are signs of hope)

-this morning a meeting here showed the need for FAO studies of future food and fish stocks to be more widely understood by world leaders , and how they are in danger from exploitation , pollution and climate change

I look forward to the minister's response to some of the issues raised here . I declare my interest as a former PR at WMO for UK as head of Met Office , and subsequently as President of an NGO Acops , and VP of Globe working well with UN agencies.

yours
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Lord Hunt