Carbon Dioxide Storage in the Sub-seabed and Sustainable Development: Please Mind the Gap

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally defined as “development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” the notion of sustainable development prominently shaped the debate at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, bringing together existing concepts “in a more systematic form than hitherto.” UNCED resulted in the creation of the substantive and procedural architecture of sustainable development through the consolidation of existing and emerging principles and a roadmap towards its implementation. The Conference had a momentum effect (at least initially) in stimulating legal and policy thinking around...
synergies and conflicts between economic growth, environmental protection and social justice, as “interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development.” As a principle or simply as a concept, the language of sustainable development has gradually been incorporated into a body of soft law instruments, case law, and treaty provisions and informed national law and policy.

But, as we celebrate 20 years since the Rio outcomes, progress on their implementation has been "depressingly slow," and barriers and gaps remain. What has been increasingly clear is that the challenges associated with the implementation and integration of sustainable development objectives within the current multi-level environmental governance regime are deeply influenced, if not substantially driven, by the complexities, intrinsic tensions and conflicting priorities embedded in the concept itself. In this context, the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (referred to as Rio+20) was convened with the aims of a) "securing renewed political commitment for sustainable development," b) "assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the


10. French, n. 7 above, p. 51. On this point, see also Handl, n. 8 above.