

INTRICACIES OF GREEN DIPLOMACY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21st CENTURY

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Abstract

In the face of escalating environmental challenges, the nexus between diplomacy and sustainable development has emerged as a pivotal arena for global cooperation in the 21st century. Resource scarcity (Water, energy, arable land et al), Trans-boundary environmental pollution and the tendency of capitalist forces for harnessing it for material growth has lead world into a terrible situation. The present neo-liberal era has endeavoured to address the problem but the disparity in their implement is a bigger problem. Addressing the issue with Environmental justice taking account of third world countries needs a well-crafted diplomacy. By examining the diplomatic initiatives and international collaborations promoting environmentally sustainable practices, the aim of this study is to assess the impact of green diplomacy on achieving sustainable development goals and seeks to illuminate the intricate interplay between diplomatic efforts and environmental stewardship. This comprehensive exploration not only provides insights into the past and present dynamics of green diplomacy but also lays a foundation for informed discussions and policy considerations to shape a sustainable future.

Keywords: Green Diplomacy, Global Governance, Environmental Justice, Third World Countries, Bio-diversity conservation, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), African Union Agenda 2063.

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Introduction

In the crucible of the 21st century, as humanity confronts unprecedented environmental challenges, the intersection of diplomacy and sustainable development has emerged as a focal point for global discourse and action. At the heart of this dynamic relationship lies the idea of "Green Diplomacy," a strategic and coordinated path to international relations that places environmental considerations at its core. Sir Harold Nicholson, defined diplomacy¹ as “Diplomacy is the management of international relations by means of negotiations; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys the business or art of the diplomat” Green Diplomacy, at its essence, encapsulates diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing and mitigating environmental challenges. It goes beyond traditional diplomatic practices by integrating ecological considerations into international relations, recognizing that the health of the planet is intricately linked to the well-being of nations. Green Diplomacy encompasses a spectrum of activities, from negotiating international agreements on climate change to fostering collaborations for sustainable resource management. This reflects the growing recognition that environmental sustainability is not merely a national concern but a shared responsibility demanding concerted diplomatic endeavours.

Embedded within the core of Green Diplomacy is the overarching goal of Sustainable Development—a paradigm that seeks to harmonize economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental responsibility. Sustainable Development, as articulated in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, envisions a future where nations strive for balance. In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission² defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The significance of sustainable development lies in its holistic approach, recognizing the interdependence of economic growth, social equity, and environmental health. Green Diplomacy serves as the vehicle through which nations collaborate to navigate the complexities of achieving sustainable development in an increasingly interconnected world. As the urgency of addressing climate change and

biodiversity loss intensifies, understanding the synergy between Green Diplomacy and Sustainable Development becomes imperative. In the words of Broadhead³, ‘Green diplomacy—by which I mean the process of ordering the international governance issues dealing with the natural world and its myriad problems and challenges—is now a regular part of the international scene, and as long as we do not push too hard or too fast, we can make steady progress’.

Historical Context

International environmental agreements have historically been considered to be in the realm of “low politics”, disconnected from the realm of “high politics” of war of war and peace⁴. During the cold war era and the formation of United Nations, Green Diplomacy takes its root. But in the initial year, it was not given due importance as it deserves. It was actually last quarter of previous century that few diplomatic steps were manoeuvred on the name of “Green summits”. It was understood that Green Diplomacy is imperative for future generation. The mythological concept of ‘After us- the floods!’ replaced the idea of ‘After us- the Future generation!’. Thus, Green Diplomacy becomes global in the interest and for the international community. Since 1972, few so-called ‘green summits’ were institutionalised for example, Stockholm (1972), Rio De Janerio (1992), Rio +5 (New York 1997), Johannesburg (2002).

Realist Scholar Hans J. Morgenthau in his book, “Politics Among Nations” advocated for state-centric attitude in international relations. This approach leads to conflicts and war among nations. Aggression and environmental tensions can occur in various ways: scarcity of vital resources, such as water, the disputes regarding some global issues, the settlement of the disputes arising from major ecological accidents, solving the ecological refugees’ problem, which creates environmental disadvantages etc.

The roots of environmental diplomacy trace back to the mid-20th century when nations began recognizing the trans-boundary nature of environmental challenges. Early endeavours, exemplified by the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, marked a pivotal moment where world leaders acknowledged the need for collective action to address global environmental

issues. The 1980s witnessed a growing awareness of the interconnectedness between diplomacy and the environment, as evidenced by landmark initiatives such as the Brundtland Commission's report, which introduced the concept of sustainable development. However, it was in the late 20th century that the term "Green Diplomacy" gained prominence. The mounting evidence of climate change and ecological degradation propelled environmental concerns to the forefront of international relations. The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro marked a watershed moment, bringing forth the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. These agreements laid the groundwork for a new era of diplomatic engagement, acknowledging the imperative of integrating environmental sustainability into global policy frameworks. The late 20th century thus witnessed the birth of Green Diplomacy, characterized by an explicit commitment to environmental preservation and the pursuit of sustainable development goals through diplomatic channels. As the international community entered the 21st century, the stage was set for a more concerted and coordinated global effort to address environmental challenges, with Green Diplomacy positioned as a key instrument in the pursuit of a sustainable and resilient future.

Key Milestones

The Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 stands as an iconic moment in the evolution of Green Diplomacy. Also known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the summit brought together world leaders to address pressing environmental issues. It yielded two pivotal agreements: The Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The UNFCCC laid the groundwork for subsequent climate negotiations, setting the stage for the Kyoto Protocol and, eventually, the Paris Agreement. Fast forward to 2015, the Paris Agreement represents a landmark in global efforts to combat climate change. Forged during the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21), the agreement saw nearly 200 countries committing to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Additionally, nations pledged to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees

Celsius, recognizing the heightened risks associated with a warmer planet. The Paris Agreement exemplifies the maturation of Green Diplomacy, showcasing a collective commitment to address climate change and transition to a low-carbon, sustainable future. These milestones underscore the critical role of international agreements in shaping the trajectory of Green Diplomacy, providing frameworks for cooperation and action on a global scale.

Montreal Protocol (1987)

The Montreal Protocol is a pioneering international treaty aimed at protecting the ozone layer by phasing out the production of substances responsible for ozone depletion, such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). This landmark agreement demonstrated early global cooperation in addressing environmental challenges and laid the groundwork for future environmental diplomacy efforts.

Kyoto Protocol (1997)

Building on the UNFCCC from the Earth Summit, the Kyoto Protocol established binding emission reduction targets for developed countries. It marked a significant step in operationalizing climate action and fostering international collaboration to address the growing concerns of global warming.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015)

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflects a comprehensive and integrated approach to global challenges. The SDGs encompass a broad range of issues, from poverty alleviation to environmental sustainability, highlighting the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental dimensions in international relations.

Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol (2016)

The Kigali Amendment targets hydro fluorocarbons (HFCs), potent greenhouse gases used in refrigeration and air conditioning. By phasing down the production and consumption of HFCs, the amendment aims to contribute significantly to global efforts to mitigate climate change, showcasing the adaptability of international agreements to address emerging environmental issues.

UN Ocean Conference (2017)

Focusing on the sustainable use and conservation of the world's oceans, the UN Ocean Conference brought attention to the critical role oceans play in global environmental health. It emphasized the need for international cooperation to address issues such as marine pollution, overfishing, and the impacts of climate change on ocean ecosystems.

COP26 and Glasgow Climate Pact (2021)

The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) culminated in the Glasgow Climate Pact, reinforcing commitments to limit global warming and accelerate action to tackle climate change. The pact underscores the ongoing importance of diplomatic efforts in achieving the goals set forth in the Paris Agreement.

These milestones collectively showcase the progression of Green Diplomacy, illustrating how international cooperation has evolved to address a spectrum of environmental issues and promote sustainable development on a global scale.

Steps under United Nations Framework

International organizations play a pivotal role in advancing the principles of Green Diplomacy and facilitating collaborative efforts towards sustainable development. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), established in 1972, stands as a vanguard in coordinating global environmental

initiatives. UNEP serves as a platform for nations to exchange information, develop policies, and collectively address trans-boundary environmental challenges. Through projects, reports, and advocacy, UNEP acts as a catalyst for fostering international cooperation and elevating environmental concerns on the diplomatic stage.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 by the United Nations further solidifies the integration of environmental considerations into the broader framework of international development. The SDGs, a set of 17 interconnected goals, explicitly recognize the interdependence of environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Through goals such as "Climate Action" (Goal 13) and "Life Below Water" (Goal 14), the SDGs provide a roadmap for nations to address environmental challenges in tandem with other pressing global issues. The SDGs underscore the significance of holistic and inclusive approaches in international relations, reinforcing the idea that sustainable development requires a concerted, multidimensional effort that spans borders and sectors.

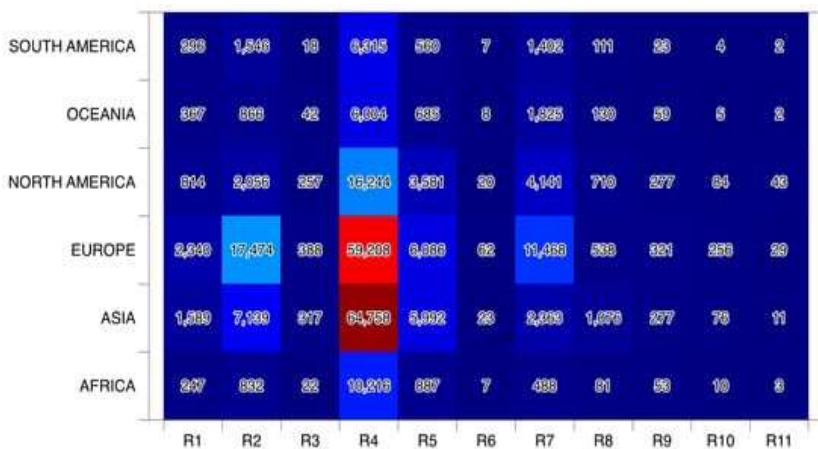


Figure 1: Contribution of each continent to UN resolutions.

In essence, these international organizations act as catalysts for cooperation, providing platforms for dialogue, setting agendas, and driving the implementation of diplomatic initiatives that contribute to a more sustainable and resilient global future. Their roles are integral in shaping the discourse of Green Diplomacy and amplifying the collective voice of nations in addressing environmental challenges on the world stage.

Instead of these few steps by world community, it seems that adequate and prompt action has been not taken yet. In the words of Greta Thunberg, a Swedish environmental activist, "For 25 years, countless people have come to the U.N. climate conferences begging our world leaders to stop emissions, and clearly that has not worked as emissions are continuing to rise. So I will not beg the world leaders to care for our future" She asserts that we need to get angry and understand what is at stake. And then we need to transform that anger into action and to stand together united and just never give up. While addressing at UN Climate Action Summit in 2019, she warns world leader in her famous speech, 'How dare you?' It reflects that UN actions are not adequate.

Regional Initiatives in Green Diplomacy

In the landscape of Green Diplomacy, regional initiatives serve as crucibles for tailored strategies that address unique environmental challenges within specific geographic contexts. Two noteworthy endeavours, the European Green Deal and the African Union's Agenda 2063, exemplify the regional commitment to embedding sustainability at the heart of diplomatic endeavours.

The European Green Deal, unveiled in 2019 by the European Commission, represents a comprehensive roadmap for the European Union (EU) to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. At its core, the deal outlines ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance energy efficiency, and preserve biodiversity. By combining legislative proposals, financial instruments, and

diplomatic outreach, the European Green Deal demonstrates how a regional bloc can synchronize economic development with environmental sustainability, setting a precedent for green growth and innovation.

Meanwhile, the African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions a prosperous and sustainable Africa, guided by principles of inclusivity, resilience, and self-reliance. Adopted in 2013, this agenda recognizes the intricate linkages between environmental health and socio-economic development on the African continent. With a focus on climate resilience, sustainable agriculture, and conservation, Agenda 2063 underscores the importance of regional collaboration in addressing challenges unique to Africa. It showcases how regional initiatives can align with global goals while tailoring strategies to the specific needs and aspirations of a diverse continent.

These types of many regional initiatives not only demonstrate a commitment to environmental sustainability but also highlight the potential for shared visions and cooperative action at a regional level. As integral components of Green Diplomacy, these endeavours amplify the global impact of diplomatic efforts by addressing regional nuances and fostering collaboration among neighbouring nations with shared ecological concerns.

Diplomatic Initiatives in Green Diplomacy

Green Diplomacy manifests its impact through successful initiatives that transcend borders, fostering collaboration and inspiring collective action. Two exemplary diplomatic endeavours include bilateral agreements promoting green technologies and multilateral collaborations addressing climate change. Bilateral agreements focused on advancing green technologies exemplify the power of diplomatic cooperation in propelling sustainable innovation. For instance, diplomatic engagements between nations can result in the exchange of expertise, resources, and research collaboration, fostering the development and adoption of environmentally friendly technologies. These agreements often include joint ventures, research partnerships, and technology transfer programs, showcasing how nations can leverage diplomatic channels to accelerate the transition towards a low-carbon and sustainable future.

The complexities of climate change demand coordinated global responses, and multilateral collaborations serve as instrumental platforms for such efforts. Agreements such as the Paris Agreement, forged through multilateral diplomacy, stand as milestones in the pursuit of climate action. These initiatives bring together diverse nations, each with its unique challenges and contributions, under a shared commitment to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Through negotiations, commitments, and shared responsibilities, multilateral collaborations underscore the efficacy of diplomatic efforts in addressing one of the most pressing global challenges, demonstrating the potential for collective action on a planetary scale.

Diplomatic initiatives addressing conservation and biodiversity protection represent a critical aspect of Green Diplomacy. International collaborations, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and regional agreements for protected areas, demonstrate the commitment of nations to preserve the planet's biodiversity. Through diplomatic channels, countries can develop strategies for sustainable land use, address deforestation, and establish cross-border initiatives to protect endangered species, showcasing the role of diplomacy in preserving the Earth's ecological richness.

These successful diplomatic initiatives highlight the versatility of Green Diplomacy in tackling diverse environmental challenges. By fostering cooperation, promoting innovation, and addressing global issues collectively, these endeavours contribute to the overarching goal of achieving sustainability and resilience in the 21st century.

Challenges and Failures in Green Diplomacy

While Green Diplomacy has made notable strides, it is not without its challenges and instances of less-than-optimal outcomes. Two prominent areas of concern are obstacles in diplomatic negotiations and the inadequate implementation of agreements. Diplomatic negotiations, especially those pertaining to environmental issues, often face inherent challenges. Divergent national interests, conflicting economic priorities, and geopolitical tensions can impede progress in reaching comprehensive agreements. The complexity

of environmental challenges, coupled with the need for coordinated global action, can sometimes lead to protracted negotiations and compromises that fall short of addressing the urgency and magnitude of the issues at hand. Moreover, issues related to equity, historical responsibility, and differentiated capabilities among nations pose intricate challenges in finding common ground during diplomatic engagements. Even when diplomatic negotiations succeed in producing agreements, the translation of commitments into concrete actions remains a persistent challenge. Inadequate implementation arises from a range of factors, including domestic political constraints, economic considerations, and varying levels of commitment among participating nations. Insufficient enforcement mechanisms and a lack of accountability may lead to non-compliance or partial adherence to agreed-upon measures. The Paris Agreement, for example, faces challenges in achieving the pledged emission reductions due to variations in national capacities and commitment levels. This gap between intent and execution underscores the need for more robust mechanisms to ensure that diplomatic agreements translate into tangible and measurable outcomes on the ground.

Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved in diplomatic processes and a commitment to enhancing the effectiveness of global environmental governance. By acknowledging and actively working to overcome these obstacles, the international community can fortify the foundations of Green Diplomacy and advance towards more impactful and sustainable outcomes.

The Impact of Green Diplomacy on Sustainable Development Goals

Green Diplomacy, as a strategic approach intertwining environmental considerations with international relations, has a profound impact on achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Green Diplomacy promotes the integration of environmentally sustainable practices into economic development. By fostering green investments, nations can stimulate economic growth while

minimizing environmental impact. Diplomatic initiatives that incentivize renewable energy projects, sustainable infrastructure, and eco-friendly technologies contribute not only to economic prosperity but also align with SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

Diplomatic efforts aimed at fostering sustainable business practices contribute to SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Through international collaborations, nations can establish frameworks for corporate responsibility, circular economies, and reduced resource consumption. Green Diplomacy plays a pivotal role in encouraging cross-border initiatives that prioritize sustainability, influencing corporate behaviour on a global scale.

Green Diplomacy plays a crucial role in international efforts to preserve biodiversity (SDG 15: Life on Land). Diplomatic initiatives that establish trans-boundary conservation areas, regulate wildlife trade, and combat habitat degradation contribute to safeguarding the Earth's rich biodiversity. By fostering collaboration, nations can address ecological challenges that transcend borders, enhancing the effectiveness of conservation strategies.

Diplomatic negotiations on climate change, exemplified by the Paris Agreement, directly impact SDG 13 (Climate Action). Through commitments to reduce carbon emissions, transition to renewable energy sources, and adapt to climate impacts, nations contribute to the global effort to limit temperature rise. Green Diplomacy serves as a catalyst for such agreements, shaping policies that mitigate environmental degradation and promote a sustainable low-carbon future.

Green Diplomacy emphasizes inclusive development strategies that consider social equity (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities). Diplomatic initiatives can address disparities in access to environmental resources, ensuring that sustainable development benefits all segments of society. By promoting inclusive policies, nations can work towards reducing inequality and fostering a more equitable distribution of the benefits of environmental sustainability.

Environmental Justice Considerations

Green Diplomacy places a spotlight on environmental justice, recognizing the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities. Diplomatic efforts that incorporate environmental justice considerations contribute to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by fostering fair and inclusive governance frameworks that address environmental challenges equitably.

In essence, the impact of Green Diplomacy on Sustainable Development Goals transcends borders, fostering a collaborative and interconnected approach to addressing the complex challenges facing humanity in the 21st century. Through diplomatic channels, nations can align their priorities with the SDGs, working collectively towards a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient future.

As technological advancements continue to reshape the global energy landscape, Green Diplomacy is witnessing a surge in initiatives centered around innovative renewable energy solutions. Diplomatic efforts are increasingly focused on fostering collaboration in research and development, promoting the adoption of cutting-edge technologies such as advanced solar and wind energy, and facilitating the international transfer of green technologies. These advancements not only contribute to addressing climate change (SDG 13) but also offer economic opportunities and energy security.

The digital revolution is playing a pivotal role in enhancing environmental monitoring and data-sharing among nations. Digital diplomacy tools, such as satellite imagery, remote sensing technologies, and data analytics, are being leveraged to monitor deforestation, track carbon emissions, and assess the impact of climate change. This trend in technological diplomacy enhances transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making in the pursuit of sustainable development goals.

Evolving Green Diplomacy: Changing Geopolitical Dynamics

The urgency of climate change has propelled environmental issues to the forefront of international relations, influencing geopolitical dynamics. Climate diplomacy is evolving as nations recognize the geopolitical implications of environmental challenges, such as resource scarcity, climate-induced migration, and vulnerabilities to extreme weather events. Green Diplomacy is increasingly intertwined with broader geopolitical considerations, shaping alliances and influencing the global geopolitical landscape. The race for leadership in clean technologies has become a key dimension of contemporary geopolitics. Nations are vying for dominance in industries such as electric vehicles, renewable energy, and green infrastructure. Green Diplomacy is instrumental in navigating the geopolitical dimensions of this competition, influencing trade agreements, investment patterns, and diplomatic alliances centered around sustainable technologies.

Green Diplomacy should emphasize the formation of cross-sectorial partnerships that bring together governments, private sector entities, civil society, and research institutions. By fostering collaboration across diverse stakeholders, nations can leverage a collective pool of resources, expertise, and innovative solutions to address complex environmental challenges comprehensively. Strengthening international collaborations requires a robust commitment to scaling up climate finance mechanisms. Green Diplomacy should advocate for increased financial support to developing nations, enabling them to implement sustainable development projects, adapt to climate impacts, and transition to low-carbon economies. This financial solidarity enhances the effectiveness of global efforts in achieving the SDGs. Effective Green Diplomacy necessitates a seamless integration of environmental considerations into national policies. Diplomats and policymakers should work collaboratively to ensure coherence between domestic policies and international commitments, aligning national development agendas with global sustainability goals.

Green Diplomacy can play a crucial role in harmonizing trade policies with environmental objectives. By advocating for environmentally friendly trade practices, diplomatic efforts can contribute to reducing the ecological footprint of international trade. This includes promoting sustainable supply chains, eco-labelling, and the consideration of environmental criteria in trade agreements. As Green Diplomacy adapts to emerging trends and challenges, these recommendations provide a roadmap for policymakers and diplomats to enhance the effectiveness of diplomatic initiatives in promoting sustainable development on a global scale.

Green Diplomacy has witnessed notable achievements in the form of international agreements and commitments, such as the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These agreements signify a collective recognition of the importance of addressing environmental challenges on a global scale and demonstrate the capacity of diplomatic efforts to forge consensus. Diplomatic initiatives have played a crucial role in promoting advancements in renewable energy and facilitating the transfer of green technologies. Collaborative efforts between nations have led to the expansion of renewable energy infrastructure, the sharing of sustainable practices, and the development of innovative technologies that contribute to the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Persistent Challenges: Obstacles in Negotiations and Implementation

Despite achievements, Green Diplomacy faces persistent challenges related to obstacles in diplomatic negotiations and the subsequent implementation of agreements. Divergent national interests, economic considerations, and geopolitical tensions continue to hinder the progress of negotiations, while the translation of diplomatic commitments into tangible actions on the ground remains a complex and often elusive goal. The challenges of ensuring social equity in the context of Green Diplomacy persist, with marginalized communities often bearing a disproportionate burden of environmental degradation. Addressing these inequalities requires more nuanced diplomatic

strategies that prioritize inclusive development and environmental justice considerations.

Future research should delve into assessing the effectiveness of diplomatic initiatives in achieving measurable environmental and sustainable development outcomes. This includes evaluating the impact of agreements, the efficacy of collaborative projects, and the role of diplomacy in shaping national policies for sustainability. Research can explore emerging trends and innovations in environmental diplomacy, including the role of digital technologies, citizen engagement, and new diplomatic mechanisms. Investigating how diplomacy adapts to technological advancements and societal changes will provide insights into enhancing the agility and relevance of Green Diplomacy. Research should explore how environmental considerations are integrated into broader diplomatic practices and how diplomatic training and education evolve to address the complexities of sustainability. Understanding the shifts in diplomatic norms and practices can inform strategies to strengthen the environmental dimensions of diplomatic engagements. As non-state actors increasingly play a crucial role in environmental governance, future research should investigate the evolving dynamics between governments and non-governmental entities. Exploring how civil society, businesses, and grassroots movements influence diplomatic processes can provide insights into the changing landscape of environmental diplomacy.

Conclusion

While Green Diplomacy has achieved significant milestones, persistent challenges require on-going attention. Future research should focus on refining diplomatic strategies, addressing inequalities, and exploring innovative approaches to enhance the impact of diplomatic efforts on global sustainability.

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