

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2024-10-23

Deposited version:

Publisher Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Well, M., Jörgens, H., Saerbeck, B. & Kolleck, N. (2024). Environmental treaty secretariats as attention-seeking bureaucracies: The climate and biodiversity secretariats' role in international public policymaking. In Helge Jörgens, Nina Kolleck, Mareike Well (Ed.), *International public administrations in environmental governance: The role of autonomy, agency, and the quest for attention*. (pp. 73-106). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Further information on publisher's website:

10.1017/9781009383486.004

Publisher's copyright statement:

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Environmental Treaty Secretariats as Attention-Seeking Bureaucracies

The Climate and Biodiversity Secretariats' Role in International Public Policymaking

MAREIKE WELL, HELGE JÖRGENS, BARBARA SAERBECK, AND NINA KOLLECK

4.1 Introduction

There is little doubt that international bureaucracies can be influential actors in world politics, as this volume emphasizes. The principal question asked by scholars of international public administration is “under which conditions and to what extent international [bureaucratic] influence emerges autonomously from political superiors” (Bauer and Ege 2016: 1021) and what the causal mechanisms are through which this influence occurs. In this chapter we argue that international bureaucracies turn into influential actors at the international level not by covertly attempting to influence international processes but by actively seeking the attention of states, which we illustrate with two case studies that zoom in on international climate and biodiversity politics. We start from a perspective of bureaucracies as institutions that have “a *raison d’être* and organizational and normative principles of its own” (Olsen 2006: 3) and are an essential element of a political system’s decision-making capacity. This contrasts with a different perspective that regards bureaucracies primarily “as a rational tool for executing the commands of elected leaders” (Olsen 2006: 3). From this approach, autonomous bureaucratic influence occurs when bureaucrats hold policy-related preferences that deviate from those of their principals and exploit information asymmetries to shape political programs in accordance with their preferences (McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast 1987: 247). Scholars have focused primarily on the conditions under which unintended agency slack occurs and on the design of incentive structures to effectively control it (Hawkins et al. 2006). We suggest complementing the principal–agent perspective, which conceives of bureaucracies primarily as attention-avoiding organizations, with a public policy perspective that emphasizes the attention-seeking character of those bureaucracies, especially when involved predominantly in the formulation rather than the implementation of public policies. We build on a research tradition that is mainly concerned with policy outputs and bureaucracy’s autonomous

contribution to the problem-solving capacity of the political system as a whole, based on bureaucratic authority (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Busch and Liese 2017). In this view, a certain degree of autonomy from governments and parliaments is seen as desirable and as a necessary precondition for bureaucracies to be able to “speak truth to power” and to fulfill their function as an independent political institution (Olsen 2006: 3). The bureaucratic authority of attention-seeking bureaucracies emphasizes an entrepreneurial stance and is not primarily delegated from their principals (Green 2014: 33; Well et al. 2020: 108).

Against this backdrop, we argue that international bureaucracies actively step into the limelight in order to feed their expert knowledge and policy preferences into the policymaking process of states. Our main argument is that international organizations and multilateral negotiations are limited not by a lack of information but by the capacity of negotiators to process and prioritize the enormous amount of information available. Thus, to influence international multilateral negotiation outcomes, bureaucracies need to attract the attention of state negotiators instead of withholding information from them. In order to illustrate and explore this attention-seeking character of public administrations, we focus on international treaty secretariats as a specific type of bureaucracy that is almost exclusively involved in the early stages of the policy process. Hence, we aim to identify the strategies international treaty secretariats as attention-seeking bureaucracies employ in the early stages of the policy cycle. We describe two potential pathways through which international treaty secretariats may attract the attention of the state parties to multilateral negotiations: (i) They can directly seek the attention of negotiators through close cooperation with, for example, the chairs or presidency of multilateral conferences and (ii) they can facilitate exchange and build up support for their problem definitions and policy recommendations outside of the official negotiation arenas.

The heuristic framework presented here not only is relevant for international bureaucracies but builds on recent research on the autonomy and influence of regulatory agencies in US policymaking (Carpenter 2001; Workman 2015). What this latter research and our approach have in common is a focus on the role of public administrations during the early stages of the policy process, particularly in processes of problem definition, agenda-setting, and policy formulation. With few or no implementation tasks, international treaty secretariats constitute ideal empirical cases for analyzing the mechanisms through which public administrations can have a (partially) autonomous impact on the definition of problems and the design of political programs. Our findings, therefore, will contribute to a recent body of literature studying the role of national as well as international public administrations as agenda-setters, policy entrepreneurs, or policy brokers at the interface of public policy analysis and public administration (e.g., Abbott et al. 2015; Jinnah 2014;

see also Chapters 3, 5, 8, and 9). In order to put our heuristic framework to an empirical test, we conducted two explorative case studies, in which we analyzed the attention-seeking behavior of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat and of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariat. The case studies illuminate attention-seeking strategies of these secretariats during and between multilateral negotiations leading to the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015. The next sections outline our heuristic framework, which is followed by an analysis of interaction strategies of the UNFCCC and CBD Secretariats with the parties and nonparty stakeholders of the respective conventions, using the heuristic framework. The approach is based on qualitative content analysis of interviews conducted with members of the secretariats and party representatives of the conventions and of documents that give insight into the interaction strategies of the secretariats, such as treaty texts, decisions, and reports. Apart from validating our heuristic framework, the findings of our case studies are relevant for the literature on influence and legitimacy in global governance as well as for current climate and biodiversity governance.

4.2 Heuristic Framework: International Secretariats as Attention-Seeking Bureaucracies

From its beginnings, public administration research has been concerned with the political control of bureaucracy and the degree to which bureaucracies can exert autonomous influence on politics and policies (Weber 2018). Normatively, this part of the public administration literature has debated “the appropriate range of discretion for bureaucrats in a democratic polity” (Frederickson et al. 2018: 12). Analytically, it has focused on whether and to what extent bureaucracies exert an autonomous influence on the formulation and the implementation of public policies. Contrasting with Wilson’s (1887) normative postulate of a politics-administration dichotomy, which implies a strict separation of politics and bureaucracy, empirical analyses have shown that “political control over bureaucracy” and “bureaucratic control over policy” are just two sides of the same coin (Frederickson et al. 2018: 18–19). Alford et al. (2017: 752) therefore refer to the blurred line between the political and administrative realms as a “purple zone representing where the ‘red’ of political activity overlaps with the ‘blue’ of administration.”

In the past two decades more and more scholars have started to treat international bureaucracies as autonomous and consequential actors and begun to empirically study their role in processes of international public policymaking (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009; Hawkins et al. 2006; Reinalda and Verbeek 1998). So far, the most influential theoretical approaches for studying the (partially) autonomous role and influence of international bureaucracies are based on principal-agent

models. Scholars adopting a principal–agent perspective argue that (international) bureaucracies hold preferences that deviate from those of their principals (i.e., states), thereby creating problems of oversight and control. Based on a distinction between “collective” and “multiple” principals (Nielson and Tierney 2003: 247), they outline different potential mechanisms through which “agency slack” may occur in international organizations or multilateral treaty systems. According to this view, bureaucracies become actors in their own right, operating “behind the scenes” without openly articulating their preferences and policy positions (Arrow 1985; Hawkins et al. 2006; Mathiason 2007). By withholding policy-relevant information from decision-makers, they may create or reinforce information asymmetries that in turn are the basis for their autonomous influence. They may also exploit constellations characterized by multiple principals by strategically aligning with selected states whose policy preferences are similar to those of the secretariat (Dijkstra 2017).

This chapter builds on these approaches by stressing the importance both of the possession of policy-relevant information and of strategies of alliance-building as the principal sources of autonomy and influence of international bureaucracies. However, our argument differs from these approaches in the way we conceptualize the exchange of policy-relevant information between international bureaucracies and negotiating parties. Our main argument is that international organizations and multilateral negotiations are not limited by a lack of information but by the capacity of negotiators to process and prioritize the enormous amount of information available. Thus, in order to influence negotiation outcomes, international secretariats need to attract the attention of state negotiators instead of withholding information from them. Unless they actively feed their policy-relevant information, problem definitions, and policy preferences into the multilateral negotiations, information provided by other, competing, organizations will prevail.

Consequently, the possession of policy- or process-relevant expert knowledge alone does not turn international bureaucracies into influential actors at the international level. There are two main reasons for this. First, in multilateral negotiations, the alleged informational advantage of treaty secretariats vis-à-vis the representatives of member states is often much smaller than what principal–agent models hold. National delegations typically consist of experienced negotiators with extensive substantial and procedural knowledge in the issue area under negotiation. They are part of a domestic ministerial bureaucracy that might be complemented with expert consultants, which gives them the same advantages of issue-specific expertise, procedural knowledge, and permanence that principal–agent theories see as the main advantage of bureaucratic agents (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009). Thus, in multilateral treaty negotiations the principals of international bureaucracies are mostly themselves national bureaucrats rather than

elected politicians, since the latter typically join multilateral conferences only at the final stage of negotiations (the “ministerial segments”) (Depledge 2005: 194). There may even be tough competition between international and national bureaucrats when it comes to defining processes and policies. Who “wins” such a race for defining key policy and procedural choices may depend more on the individual capacities (such as staff time) national and international bureaucrats can invest into a given subject matter rather than on the availability of information. The dependence of national bureaucrats on the expert knowledge provided by secretariats is therefore limited and varies according to context (e.g., on the salience of the topic in national bureaucracy, which again determines how much staff time is allocated to a given matter). While information asymmetries may play an important role in on-the-ground operations of large international financial organizations like the International Monetary Fund (Cox and Jacobson 1973), they are less relevant for treaty secretariats with relatively small staff and few implementation tasks (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009). Second, the early stages of the policymaking process – problem definition, agenda-setting, and policy formulation – are generally characterized by an excess rather than a lack of policy-relevant information, including diverging definitions of the underlying problem and competing proposals for feasible solutions (Workman 2015). Thus, even where information asymmetries between treaty secretariats and national delegation exist, they normally do not imply that negotiators feel dependent on the policy-relevant information held by secretariats and that they will actively seek this information. We therefore expect negotiators, especially those with strong domestic environmental bureaucracies, to recur to secretariat information, particularly in those cases where the secretariats build close relations to national delegations and actively promote this information. What counts is not only the quality of the information international treaty secretariats hold but the extent to which they manage to bring that information to the attention of the parties to multilateral negotiations.

We thus argue that, in order to become influential, international bureaucracies need to not only possess policy-relevant expert knowledge but also exploit the complex structures and actor constellations of international organizations or multilateral treaty systems in ways to make negotiators take notice and adopt some of the bureaucracy’s policy positions (Jinnah 2014; see also Chapter 9). In other words, in order to influence the outcomes of multilateral negotiations, international secretariats need to actively and strategically seek to draw the attention of the negotiating parties to the problem definitions and policy prescriptions provided by the secretariat. Workman (2015: 3) developed this argument for the domestic policymaking process: “If the supply of information yields bureaucratic influence, then bureaucracies must be willing to be attention-seeking and attention-attracting organizations, rather than the backroom dealers of subsystem

lore.” In this chapter, we contend that this argument also holds for the international policy process.

We argue that international treaty secretariats may best be conceived of as attention-seeking bureaucracies. We develop a heuristic framework that includes two paths by which international secretariats may try to draw the attention of negotiating parties to their own problem definitions and policy recommendations: (i) They may try to supply policy-relevant information directly and from the inside by cooperating closely with a convention’s chairpersons,¹ with its presidency, or with individual groups of countries, trying to use these as multipliers and (ii) they may attempt to build support for their preferred policy outputs by engaging with and communicatively connecting actors within the broader transnational policy network that surrounds multilateral negotiations in order to exert pressure on negotiators from the outside. In both cases, international treaty secretariats act as attention-seeking policy advocates rather than “undercover agents” who try to operate out of the negotiators’ sight. The two strategies are not mutually exclusive and can be employed in combination. International treaty secretariats’ attempts to influence international policy outputs may be motivated either by self-interest (Niskanen 2017) or by professional ethic reflecting what Barnett and Finnemore (2004: 72) describe as “conscientious experts trying to do their job.” Whereas bureaucratic self-interest is usually linked to the survival of international bureaucracies and to the expansion of their mandates as well as their human and material resources, research on international environmental secretariats has shown that international bureaucrats often draw their motivation from deeply held policy beliefs combined with a professional dedication to the overall goals and objectives of their organization or treaty system (Bauer 2006; Depledge 2005: 65). Any combination of bureaucratic self-interest and professional ethic is also possible, for example, when the expansion of mandates is rooted in a treaty secretariat’s holistic vision of a global policy problem and its potential solutions (Well et al. 2020).

Treaty Secretariats as Attention-Seeking Bureaucracies

International secretariats are created to support governments in subsequent rounds of issue-specific negotiations within multilateral treaty regimes, which are mainly concerned with the adoption of new treaty provisions and the revision and refinement of existing ones (Gehring 2012: 51). In these treaty systems, responsibilities for implementation remain mostly at the national level. Thus, if international treaty secretariats wield autonomous influence, we can reasonably expect this influence

¹ These can be negotiations within the Conference of the Parties or the subsidiary bodies of the relevant conventions.

to occur primarily at the stages of problem definition, agenda-setting, and policy formulation. At these stages of the policy process, information asymmetries arguably play a secondary role. The limiting factor is not scarcity of policy-related knowledge but rather the limited capacity of decision-makers to pay attention to the abundance of problem- and policy-relevant information. As Workman (2015: 59) argues in his study on bureaucratic influence in US policymaking, “Information not provided by one entity will assuredly be supplied by another as organized interests, federal bureaucracies, and policy makers engage in the struggle to define the contours of debate.” Instead, bureaucracies compete with other organizations in the provision of policy-relevant information to elected officials.

This constellation – multiple providers of policy-relevant information and a strictly limited capacity for attention on the side of decision-makers – is even more pronounced in multilateral treaty systems. Here, treaty secretariats compete with a multitude of domestic bureaucracies with strongly varying interests and preferences, other international organizations, scientific or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), to name just the most active participants in global policy debates. In order to become influential, international secretariats need to actively compete for the attention of negotiators rather than trying to operate invisibly and underneath their radar. Moreover, due to negotiators’ attention limits, international secretariats are more likely to attract the attention of national delegations if their problem definitions and policy preferences coincide with those brought forward by other organizations such as NGOs or scientific organizations.

Recent studies in the fields of international relations and international public administration have implicitly taken this attention-seeking character of international secretariats into account by focusing on their cognitive influence on international policy outputs (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009). On the one hand, Depledge (2007) shows that treaty secretariats may provide policy-relevant information to negotiators by closely cooperating with the chairs or presidency of multilateral negotiations. On the other hand, Jinnah (2014) analyzes how treaty secretariats position themselves at the center of transnational communication flows that surround official multilateral negotiations, thereby providing policy-relevant information to negotiators from the outside (see also Jörgens, Kolleck, and Saerbeck 2016). In a similar vein, Abbott and colleagues (Abbott and Snidal 2010; Abbott et al. 2015) conceive of international public administrations (IPAs) as “orchestrators.” Rather than trying to adopt and implement binding intergovernmental treaties, international organizations and their bureaucracies acting as orchestrators follow a complementary strategy of “reaching out to private actors and institutions, collaborating with them, and supporting and shaping their activities” in order to achieve their regulatory goals and purposes (Abbott and Snidal 2010: 315). Both approaches are similar to our notion of attention-seeking bureaucracies in that

they expect IPAs to actively engage in issue-specific policy discourses within and beyond the intergovernmental decision-making that stands at the core of international organizations or multilateral negotiations.

However, studies of international organizations as orchestrators do not always draw a clear distinction between the broader international organization and the IPA as the permanent administrative body within it. In particular, they often fail to demonstrate that the outreach to private or subnational actors that characterizes orchestration is an autonomous initiative of the international bureaucracy and not mandated or encouraged by the international organization's member state governments. If international bureaucracies mostly act in line with their principals' preferences, that is, if their international organization's plenary or council back their efforts to orchestrate the individual actions of a wide range of transnational actors, then the distinction between international organization and IPA agency becomes blurred. By focusing on international treaty secretariats, that is, international bureaucracies that are not an integrative part of a broader international organization, we hope to be better able to explore the strategies that IPAs employ to provide policy-relevant information to decision-makers.

In the following, we describe two potential pathways through which international treaty secretariats may attract the attention of the official parties to multilateral negotiations, that is, supplying policy-relevant information to negotiators and building external support for their preferred policy outputs.

When looking at these two pathways of influence, one could easily be reminded of lobbying strategies that NGOs or business organizations might use to shape the political process according to their political goals. In some ways, these strategies may also resemble those of nation-states, who also build alliances with other authoritative actors in order to further their political goals. So what is the distinctively bureaucratic element of such attention-seeking behavior? In fact, there is an important distinction between the influencing strategies that state and nonstate stakeholders on the one hand may use and the attention-seeking strategy of IPAs on the other. IPAs employ this strategy based on their bureaucratic authority, which is the most important source of their influence. The bureaucratic authority IPAs enjoy sets them apart from other actors, since it helps their "voice be heard, recognized, and believed. This right to speak credibly is central to the way authority produces effects" (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 20). Bureaucracies can be seen as the embodiment of rational-legal authority, which is a general and impersonal form of ruling that relies on legalities, procedures, and rules that offer order, classification, and a division of labor (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). Apart from this rational-legal foundation, IPAs furthermore enjoy legitimate authority due to parties' delegation of tasks to them, the shared norms or the "morality" that they defend, and their distinctive expertise, which can include an institutional memory concerning the treaty

convention and technical and scientific, administrative and procedural, and normative and diplomatic knowledge (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Bauer 2006; Busch and Liese 2017; Herold et al. 2021; Jinnah 2014; Littoz-Monnet 2017; Weber 2018; Wit et al. 2020). The effectiveness of bureaucratic authority based on these sources may further be enhanced by an IPA's display of leadership. Apart from the rational-legal authority of bureaucracies, Weberian social science points out the importance of charismatic leadership that is deliberately used to enhance a bureaucracy's authority and thereby leeway of action. The leadership component extends the concept of bureaucratic authority and adds a political element that goes beyond the mere technocratic role of a bureaucracy (Bauer 2006; Weber 2018; see also Section 2.3). We argue that attention-seeking treaty secretariats indeed make use of their bureaucratic authority understood as an entrepreneurial stance vis-à-vis their principals (Green 2014: 33; Well et al. 2020: 108).

Seeking Attention from the Inside: Treaty Secretariats' Cooperation with Chairpersons of Multilateral Negotiations

The first pathway has been described in detail by Depledge (2007), who argues that treaty secretariats and chairpersons of multilateral negotiations are endowed with complementary resources, that is, political authority in the case of the chairperson and policy-relevant expertise as well as a certain distance to national governments and their domestically rooted preferences in the case of the secretariat. By combining their respective resources, secretariats and chairpersons can have considerable influence on the outcomes of multilateral negotiations. The secretariat assists the chairpersons in observing the lines of conflict that emerge between national delegations and propose compromises capable of overcoming policy divides and bringing negotiations to a successful end. Often this can be done through a reframing of the policy problem at stake or by bringing in new policy solutions that are more acceptable to reluctant negotiation parties than previously debated ones. Due to their expertise and their permanent monitoring activities, secretariats can provide valuable information to the chairs. Furthermore, due to their mandate as neutral and impartial actors, secretariats often refrain from claiming credit for their input. Chairs are free to use the input provided by secretariats in any way they intend. By taking on the ideas provided by the secretariat as their own, chairs endow them with the legitimacy needed to be heard by other negotiators.

Secretariats gain a privileged channel of communication to negotiators. By communicating with the chairs of convention bodies, who again directly address the negotiating parties, secretariats can significantly increase the probability that they are heard by negotiators, albeit in an indirect way. As Depledge (2007: 62) summarizes, "Chairpersons and secretariats are ... locked into a mutually interdependent

relationship: the Chairperson often relies on the secretariat to provide the intellectual resources needed for him/her to exercise effective leadership, while the secretariat depends on an able Chairperson to provide the veil of legitimacy needed for it to input productively into the negotiation process.” This symbiotic relationship does not mean that the negotiating parties are not aware of the secretariat’s policy-shaping role in this process. In a large-scale survey we conducted in 2015 and 2016 among the participants of UNFCCC and CBD Conference of the Parties (COPs) (see also Chapter 9), we found that the two secretariats were trusted as providers of not only procedural information but also policy-related expertise.

Different variations of “supplying information from the inside” into the negotiation process are conceivable. These variations can be understood as subcategories of the internal pathway to gain influence described here. For example, when supplying policy-relevant information directly to chairs, a presidency, or parties, secretariats also contribute to *finding compromises* between opposing views. Moreover, it may be less important to supply additional information at a given time during or between negotiations than to *translate* the content of information into policy-relevant knowledge products, options for negotiation texts, or tactics. Information can be translated or applied to a political problem in such a way that it reflects the preferences of the secretariat. Such a translation activity goes beyond the pure passing on of information but can be as seen as shaping assumptions as bases for the actions of policymakers (Bijker and Latour 1988). Translation actions in the negotiation facilitation can therefore shape both the policy options and the policy discourses that give negotiations a certain character or direction. Another, similar, possibility is for secretariat staff to propose an *issue linkage*, that is, propose to look closely at a causal connection between one issue of the respective treaty, such as climate change or biodiversity, and an issue that is outside the realm of the treaty, such as health or security (Hall 2016: 6; Jinnah 2014: 67). Translation and issue linkage are forms of normative influence in that they can shape procedures, frame issues, and define participation (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009). Finally, treaty secretariats may even go so far as to initiate the *production of information* they want to share with parties, for example, by commissioning certain studies.

Building Support from the Outside: Treaty Secretariats as Transnational Knowledge Brokers

Multilateral environmental agreements are characterized by a multisectoral and a multiactor network structure. They can be described as “a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional, and local – as the result of a broad process of institutional creation and decisional re-allocation” (Marks 1993: 392). They belong to the system

of global environmental governance, which is marked by increasing complexity, polycentricity, and institutional fragmentation (Raustiala and Victor 2004; Zelli and van Asselt 2013). These dynamics are also driven by a proliferation of international institutions and treaties, all of which are managed by IPAs (Wit et al. 2020). Based on the phenomenon of multi-level reinforcement, which was first discussed with regard to the European Union (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007), Ostrom (2010: 552) claims that the multilevel and multiactor systems of global climate governance propose important benefits in terms of fostering innovation, learning about policy alternatives, and achieving “more effective, equitable and sustainable outcomes at multiple scales.” Thus, as Jänicke (2017) points out, it is a system which offers an opportunity structure in which skilled strategic action would allow an actor to mobilize support for ambitious policy objectives at different levels of governance and by a broad range of actors. One dimension of this opportunity structure is the emergence of governance voids, which can result in shifting actor constellations and rules of policymaking (Hajer 2003). Secretariats are well suited to fill such governance gaps, since their “unique position in governance networks ... allows them to operate in this political space” (Jinnah 2014: 48).

Attention-seeking treaty secretariats can strategically use this multilevel structure to help advance negotiations by acting as knowledge brokers that link broader transnational policy discourses to specific negotiation items. By linking actors that were disconnected before, this strategy may also lead to a form of issue linkage, that is, to a connection of a specific negotiation item with the broader policy concern of an external actor (Hall 2016: 6; Jinnah 2014: 67). The fact that IPAs can draw on their network position for their authority results from the diversified environmental governance architecture, where networks between organizations and actor types are increasingly important for effective governance (Jordan et al. 2015; Zelli 2018). Secretariat staff build up a dense web of relationships within and beyond their treaties and contribute to organizational learning (Kolleck et al. 2017; Varone, Ingold, and Fischer 2019). A similar role of bureaucracy has been observed at the national level by Fernandez and Gould (1994) in a study of the US health policy domain. This study finds that “occupants of ... ‘brokerage positions’ will be influential in policymaking to the degree that they facilitate communication among actors who would not otherwise interact” (Fernandez and Gould 1994: 1482). In a similar vein, Carpenter (2001) identifies organizational centrality, in this case defined as close ties with a large number of public and private organizations in a policy network, as one of the key factors that enable public administrations and hence treaty secretariats to play a brokerage role in issue-specific policy discourses. In a comparative study of three US federal bureaucracies, he shows that bureaucratic autonomy and influence increase with their centrality in broader issue-specific actor and communication networks. Providing linkages and knowledge sources (and even knowledge

themselves), public authorities can act as intermediaries and hence knowledge brokers to promote issues and ensure cooperation in a specific issue discussed under a given framework (Christopoulos and Ingold 2015). In particular, in situations of pending stalemate in multilateral negotiations, secretariats can try to bring a new dynamic into the negotiation process by extending the policy debate to external actors who share the secretariat's general preference of a positive negotiation outcome as well as its specific problem perceptions and policy preferences. By deliberately extending issue-specific policy debates beyond the inner circle of official parties to multilateral negotiations (i.e., national delegations), we expect secretariats to try to build transnational support for the policy issues at stake, thereby raising pressure from the outside on national governments to continue and successfully conclude negotiations.² An important precondition for this second strategy is a strong embeddedness and centrality of international secretariats in the broader transnational policy networks that surround treaty negotiations. In the engagement with external actors for the purpose of attention-seeking, bureaucratic leadership particularly at the executive level becomes important. Biermann et al. (2009: 58) conceptualize "strong leadership" as the behavior of the leader of an international bureaucracy that follows a style of leadership that is "charismatic, visionary, and popular, as well as flexible and reflexive" (see also Chapter 5). Leaders' flexibility and openness to change and the ability to adapt their goals, international processes, and the organizational structure to perceived external challenges in learning processes are also considered to be essential for strong leadership in international bureaucracies (Biermann et al. 2009; Hall and Woods 2018).

In sum, we argue that convention secretariats are likely to employ a dual strategy to directly and indirectly draw the attention of negotiators to their own policy-specific knowledge and information. Convention secretariats may act either *directly and internally* via the chairpersons, presidents, or parties of multilateral negotiations or *indirectly and externally* via the broader transnational policy network that has evolved around the respective treaty. They may also opt for a combination of both strategies. The following case study of the activities of the CBD and the UNFCCC secretariats explores these potential pathways.

4.3 The Secretariats of the UNFCCC and of the CBD

In order to better understand the role of international treaty secretariats in issue-specific multilateral negotiations, how they interact with and whether they attract the attention of member states (parties to the convention) and nonparty stakeholders,

² The underlying logic of this strategy is similar to what Keck and Sikkink (1999: 93) in their work on transnational advocacy networks describe as the "boomerang pattern of influence," that is, a strategy where "NGOs may directly seek international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside."

this section follows an inductive and exploratory approach. Methodologically, we drew on twenty-one qualitative semistructured expert interviews with staff of the UNFCCC and CBD Secretariats from different hierarchical levels and analyzed documents of UNFCCC and CBD negotiations using qualitative content analysis. Furthermore, we drew on our participant observations of these negotiations between 2014 and 2022. Interviews with the UNFCCC Secretariat are marked “1–7A” and those with the CBD Secretariat “1–14B” throughout the analysis. Relevant documents include statements issued by the secretariats, party submissions, published papers, and interviews related to the multilateral treaty conferences. These documents were analyzed as representative material of what the secretariat supports to be its key message and mode of interaction with other actors. Semistructured interviews were chosen as an adequate tool for conducting expert interviews, since they can detect both specific and context-related knowledge and thereby address both the practical and discursive consciousness of the interviewees (Meuser and Nagel 2009). Specific knowledge relates to an expert’s own actions concerning the policy process in the CBD and the UNFCCC, while context-related knowledge refers to the actions of others, such as stakeholders active in the wider context of the CBD and the UNFCCC. Interviewees were queried, among others, about the role and activities of the secretariat during and between negotiations as well as their relationship to the respective chairpersons, party delegates, and nonparty stakeholders and their motivation for being engaged in the multilateral negotiations.³ Since interviewees naturally report their own perceptions of events, validating these with participant observations and document analysis was an important additional step (Creswell 2009). The interviews were transcribed, anonymized, and combined with the collected documents. The qualitative data gathered from the documents and interviews was analyzed using inductive techniques of qualitative content analysis following Mayring and Frenzel (2014). The process of coding followed the rules of qualitative content analysis. Codes were related to the way the international treaty secretariats report to interact with other stakeholders and to shape the global agenda concerning the CBD and the UNFCCC.

The following section analyzes the biodiversity and the climate secretariats’ roles within the multilateral negotiations and their use of interaction strategies. Firstly, we find direct attention-seeking strategies, which rely on the internal cooperation between the secretariats and the chairpersons, COP presidency, or party delegates. Secondly, we find indirect attention-seeking strategies, which secretariats employ by engaging with a wide range of actors in the broader transnational policy debates surrounding the formal climate and biodiversity negotiations.

³ The analysis of expert interviews focuses on thematic units, meaning text extracts with similar topics, which are scattered over the interviews. The comparability of the interviews is ensured by the commonly shared context of the experts, as well as by the interview guidelines (Meuser and Nagel 2009: 35).

Direct Attention-Seeking within Multilateral Negotiations

UNFCCC

The climate secretariat originally has a very specific and rather technocratic mandate to support the UNFCCC negotiations, which are “party-driven” (A1–A5, A7; UN 1992b). Climate negotiations tend to be contentious and have in the past at certain times been on the verge of collapsing, while at the same time being under the pressure of delivering an ambitious result considering the potential for irreversible and catastrophic change (Depledge 2005: 20; Kinley 2017). Given this situation – highly politicized, stalling negotiations in the context of high political expectations to deliver an ambitious result – the climate secretariat has in the past drawn attention to its ability to perform tasks that go beyond its classical role of acting “like a secretary” in the background (1A, 6A, 7A; Well et al. 2020). In 2021, former executive secretaries and senior staff of the climate secretariat published a journal article entitled “Beyond Good Intentions, to Urgent Action: Former UNFCCC Leaders Take Stock of Thirty Years of International Climate Change Negotiations.” One of their key messages aims to drive the attention of policymakers toward what they, according to their experience as former executive staff, deem necessary: “‘Business as usual’ in climate change negotiations will mean failure to avoid dangerous climate change. Fuller engagement by leaders is crucial to ensuring an all-of-government approach. The UNFCCC process should address its unwieldiness and act in line with the urgency of the issue” (Kinley et al. 2021: 593). Although this was published by a group of former executive secretaries, it is in line with the increasingly vocal and attention-seeking role the climate secretariat assumes.

This section will sketch the evolution of the climate secretariat’s attention-seeking behavior in the context of the negotiations leading up to the Paris Agreement in 2015 and during the “post-Paris” years. In this section we aim to strengthen our argument that the climate secretariat not only is the organizational backbone to the negotiation process but increasingly draws attention to its problem-solving strategies and substantive preferences, thereby contributing to agenda-setting, policy-drafting, and reaching consensus among states. Such actions can be directed to the conference presidency, chairpersons, or delegates directly.

Crafting the Paris Agreement

When trying to explain what enabled the negotiation of the Paris Agreement at COP21 in 2015, studies point to factors such as civil society mobilization (Jacobs 2016), great power politics (Milkoreit 2019), leadership (Eckersley 2020), and institutional design (Allan et al. 2021) but also to the careful management and the “diplomatic process and entrepreneurial leadership by host governments” as

well as to their “timing, pacing, sequencing and coordination of sessions, as well as the strategic rhetoric” (Dimitrov 2016: 9). While these actors and factors have been credited for the successful negotiations, it is worthwhile to also take into the account the contribution of the climate secretariat, despite its technocratic mandate. Allan et al. (2021: 25) identify certain entrepreneurial actors that were crucial for finalizing the Paris Agreement. Apart from the role of the COP presidency and states with political clout, they point to the entrepreneurial role played by the secretariat:

The strategies of specific actors in the negotiations ... proved crucial to securing the final components of the deal: the 1.5°C target and the ratchet-up mechanism. These were key demands of vulnerable countries, and crucial for agreement. Without their sign-on, a Copenhagen-level fiasco may have occurred. However, others played an important role in steering parties toward common ground. Here, therefore, we highlight the entrepreneurship of several actors for the overall design: the French COP Presidency and the UNFCCC Secretariat, US and Chinese diplomats, and those in the High-Ambition Coalition.

(Allan et al. 2021: 15)

This entrepreneurial role of the climate secretariat is also corroborated by interviews with secretariat staff. One member of the secretariat’s staff describes its role during negotiations by way of comparison: “The UNFCCC is very different from other processes. If you look at the Security Council, it is the Parties who bring the text and ... negotiate around that. ... In the Climate Change Convention, ... the secretariat plays a big role ... [in] preparing all the drafts” (1A). Relying on their expertise and experience, the climate secretariat acts as an intermediary between parties’ interests on the one hand and the chairs’ and presidency’s organizational tasks, which include compiling and presenting a draft decision text reflecting these positions on the other hand (1A, 3A, 7A). To this end, secretariat staff seek their attention by offering procedural advice as well as substantive information and highlight possible areas of compromise or “landing zones,” that is, the likeliest compromise on core issues, all of which help parties when drafting decision texts (see also Allan et al. 2021: 16). Secretariat staff were able to form trustful personal relations and to gain the attention of delegates, as one member of staff recalls: “Because of the personal relationships that were built during the process, at this working level you stop seeing people as the guy from France, the guy from Brazil, but we are just the guys that are trying to ... draft a text. ... I would sit with the people, not with the countries” (1A; similarly 3A, 7A). Such personal relations also enable the secretariat to foster the trust of parties into the UN multilateral process: “Trust breaks down for many reasons. We try to bring people together, if governments walk out of a session because of loss of trust in the process or each other. Usually, the secretariat tries to meet with them, ... and create a frame where people talk to each other again” (4A).

What is more, in cases of technical or highly politicized issue areas, such as climate change mitigation, the negotiations may be “so complicated that chairs do not have any other option but to go along with the drafts they receive” by the secretariat (1A). Usually, such a secretariat-prepared text would be tabled by the chair, thereby combining the secretariat’s policy-relevant expertise with the chair’s political authority, who can together gain considerable influence on how negotiations develop. However, the following example shows that the climate secretariat is able to play this role on its own. The negotiations leading to the Paris Agreement combined low levels of trust between negotiation parties and a high degree of politicization and technicality of the agenda items, leading to long and barely readable draft decisions, containing multiple unresolved issues and options (1A, 7A; Dimitrov 2016). In this situation, “the visions were so stark, that you didn’t have a possibility to work on a text tabled by any party” and the “trust was so bad, that not even the chairs were asked to do it” (1A; see also Allan et al. 2021: 16). When referring to a section of the text that was later included into the Paris Agreement, this staff member reports that “[t]he decision was entirely drafted by us” (1A). This account shows that the secretariat was able to directly contribute to the final text of the Paris Agreement, having drawn attention to its relevant expertise and earned the trust of parties to assist in this way beforehand.

While this may not be the usual course of how negotiations are organized as it exceeds the designated role that the climate secretariat has in multilateral negotiations, this example does show that circumstances such as high politicization and technicality and low trust between states have been conducive for the climate secretariat as an attention-seeking bureaucracy. It gained the attention of chairpersons, the conference presidency, and negotiation parties by reducing the complexity of technical negotiations, synthesizing positions, and offering a line of compromise. It was then possible to feed procedural advice, substantive information, and even draft text into the process. Such an attention-seeking behavior enabled the climate secretariat not only to contribute to the successful completion of negotiations but also to leave a fingerprint on the outcome of the final text, as in the case of the Paris Agreement.

Supporting the Post-Paris Architecture

While this type of direct attention-seeking before and after COP21 could be observed by means of participant observation and expert interviews, it was a behavior that stayed within the confines of the relationship between parties and the secretariat and was not openly displayed beyond this professional environment. However, since 2017, the secretariat has published annual reports, in which it reflects on its changing role vis-à-vis parties and nonparty stakeholders, which is marked by a focus on implementation and a stance that acknowledges a more visible role for

itself: “While the secretariat in its early years focused on facilitating intergovernmental climate negotiations, today it supports a complex architecture that serves to advance the implementation of the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement” (UNFCCC 2020: 8). In the currently (as of January 2022) available reports of 2017 to 2020, it reports on its own activities during the year in relation to important negotiation achievements as well as its support for implementation and capacity-building.⁴ It also sheds light on how it supports parties through translation of information into policy-relevant advice, by proposing or supporting issue linkages and by providing guidance to parties. For example, in its 2019 annual report, the secretariat reports to have “launched efforts to help Parties prepare to implement the enhanced transparency framework” (UNFCCC 2020: 15) established under the Paris Agreement, which provides guidance to countries on how to report progress on their climate change mitigation, adaptation, and relevant support to or from other countries. The support by the secretariat included providing technical support on the implementation of the enhanced transparency framework, designing institutional arrangements to support it, providing guidance on nationally determined contributions, and producing detailed expert training materials on national greenhouse gas inventories (UNFCCC 2020). This support potentially has a far-reaching impact on how parties implement the enhanced transparency framework, since it helps to turn the relevant provisions in Article 13 of the Paris Agreement into national policy tools. The secretariat openly acknowledges this: “The secretariat plays a crucial role in putting into practice the transparency and accountability arrangements for climate change reporting” (UNFCCC 2020: 8). Similarly, the secretariat reports to support parties on a wide range of processes related to adaptation, stepping in when needed: “[I]n the face of decreasing financial resources, the secretariat facilitated the [Adaptation] Committee’s communication and outreach activities” (UNFCCC 2020: 17).

While this emphasis on implementation and capacity-building is one important dimension of the role of the climate secretariat since the Paris Agreement has come into effect, a second important development is issue linkage between climate change and other policy areas. As explained earlier, issue linkage can be an element of direct attention-seeking and normative influence. Jörgens, Kolleck, and Saerbeck (2016) described the role of the climate secretariat for supporting the link between gender and climate change. A more recent example of issue linkage is the secretariat activities in the area of climate and security. Since 2007, states have increasingly discussed the link between climate and security at the United Nations Security Council (Abdenur 2021). Although it has not been an agenda item or prominent angle in the context of UNFCCC negotiations, discussions on it

⁴ These can be found at <https://unfccc.int/annualreport>

have increased recently during official side events, pointing out the different security implications of climate change, such as risks for social stability (e.g., Climate Diplomacy 2018). At COP25 in Madrid, the climate secretariat hosted a side event entitled “Dialogue on climate-related risks to social stability: law and governance approaches” (UNFCCC 2019; participant observation at COP25). By hosting this as a secretariat-sponsored event and providing a framing on climate and security “from the inside,” the secretariat drove the attention of delegates to the link of climate and social stability and provided support to considering the effects of climate change from this perspective. It invited the chair of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice as well as actors who favor the angle of climate-related risks to social stability, such as the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Secretariat, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights Secretariat, and representatives of Ghana and Germany (both founding members of the Group of Friends on Climate and Security in the Security Council) (Federal Foreign Office 2018; participant observation at COP25). This is an example of the climate secretariat’s open support for the link between climate and security, which is still not an agenda item under the UNFCCC and therefore not mandated, but is certainly in line with highlighting the “planetary emergency” that climate change poses (see, e.g., UNFCCC 2020: 6).

Summarizing, we observe that the direct attention-seeking behavior could be observed in the run-up to the Paris Agreement and has since become more pronounced, public, and part of a broader communication and engagement strategy, blending into the indirect attention-seeking of all stakeholders. This will be dealt with in depth in the next subsection.

CBD

The biodiversity secretariat seeks the attention of parties directly throughout the whole policy cycle: It contributes to agenda-setting by alerting parties to new policy issues or possible linkages; it provides input into the negotiation process by seeking attention for its analysis of lines of compromise during policy-drafting; and it supports parties in the implementation of decisions by providing capacity-building. The following section will lay out how the interviews substantiate these findings.

In the case of ocean governance, for example, the biodiversity secretariat actively seeks the attention of parties in order to put the issue on the agenda and create a mandate for its own activities through COP decisions. For example, when certain parties showed interest in aspects of ocean governance, such as ocean acidification and marine mining, the secretariat responded to this initial interest by trying “to make it an issue” at a larger scale. Secretariat staff tried to “find a way for an issue to gain attraction at policy level, and ... find an excuse to help a country ... so that

the issue rises, and finally the COP will reapprove the importance and maybe even request the secretariat to do more” (10B, 11B). The role of the secretariat in this strategy is to highlight the global implications and benefits of specific topics, such as the role of a healthy ocean for many dimensions of sustainable development, as well as to “see issues in perspective, to connect relevant partners.” If this strategy of translation and agenda-setting is successful, the secretariat may have created an own role for the issue in question: “Once they are in, we try to serve them” (10B, similarly 3B). Secretariat staff also reported helping parties and nonstate actors in framing ocean-related topics, in order to create a fit with national debates and contexts, thereby also promoting certain frames, such as looking at ocean areas from different continents as a whole. One staff member formulated this approach as “Forget your box and see the environment as a whole” (10B).

While the climate secretariat cannot attract the attention of specific parties, for example, by organizing workshops that target only one or few parties, the biodiversity secretariat can organize national workshops on specific issues if parties express a special concern for these topics, such as for the issue of marine mining. Sensitive to the worries of specific parties, secretariat staff assisted with the provision of an impact assessment and the invitation of experts and stakeholders for this issue, thereby drawing attention to its expertise, network, and convening power. According to several interviewees, such activities can pave the way for outputs that help to advance the negotiations, such as the compilation of national long-term visions for all stakeholders (1B, 6B, 7B, 10B). In this sense, the biodiversity secretariat can benefit from a wider mandate than the climate secretariat to attract the attention of specific parties and support them according to their needs. We will describe the biodiversity secretariat’s mandate in more detail here.

In terms of policy-drafting and cooperation with chairpersons, the biodiversity secretariat is similar to the climate secretariat. It is also tasked with providing logistical and procedural support in negotiations (Art. 24 of CBD). Nevertheless, it actively contributes to negotiations by pointing out the benefits of mutual cooperation, suggests substantive or procedural solutions to negotiation deadlock, and shows parties what they would miss out on or maybe even lose control over if they do not cooperate (1B, 3B, 6B, 10B). To reach an agreement in negotiations, the secretariat “create[d] a fear of being left out” (10B) until parties decided to cooperate. One member of staff reported attracting especially the attention of those parties that occupy veto positions or otherwise block progress in negotiations: “The most difficult they are, the most helpful I am,” following the credo that “going backwards is no option” (3B).

Seeking the attention of chairpersons was also key, for example by providing a “choreography” of meetings, which included not only background information on the positions of delegations and potential pitfalls concerning specific agenda items

but also suggestions on how to navigate such pitfalls and opposing interests (1B, 9B, 5B). By providing such procedural advice, the biodiversity secretariat actively sought to feed its own policy preferences into the negotiations and build compromise. A member of staff would not “go [into negotiations] with a blank page, but make[s] suggestions how to frame, how to make it work” (3B). In particular, if agreement among negotiators is hard to achieve, the secretariat “give[s] parties options what they could agree on” (3B). “You incorporate ... as much as you can” (1B) while ensuring that the suggested policy options “reflect a balance of [voiced] views” (1B, 3B, 5B).

While the biodiversity secretariat has no mandate for implementation, it is able to assist and support parties in implementing decisions and working on their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans by providing capacity development: “I think we can say without hesitation that the countries do get a lot of help from the CBD staff” (2B, similarly 3B, 7B, 8B, 10B). Especially parties from least developed countries, small island countries, and indigenous and local communities are supported frequently with the goal of empowering them to effectively play their role in the negotiation and implementation process: “We need to build everyone’s capacity at all levels” (3B). Its role in capacity development and in assisting the implementation of decisions is a further avenue for the biodiversity secretariat to seek attention for its expertise and policy suggestions.

Indirect Attention-Seeking via the Policy Network

UNFCCC

Directly seeking the attention of parties to the UNFCCC is viable for the climate secretariat with regard to concrete negotiation topics and processes. It does so by adopting a strong role in policy-drafting, organizing negotiation sessions, and building trust, as pointed out earlier. However, when wishing to attract the attention of parties regarding broader perspectives on combatting and adapting to climate change, such as connecting climate change to economic and societal questions, the climate secretariat attracts the attention of parties in an indirect way, by conveying its messages through the extensive transnational policy network that has evolved around the UNFCCC. The climate secretariat holds a central position in the relevant issue-specific information flows and transnational cooperation networks, enabling it to act as a broker of information between actors outside the formal negotiations, such as NGOs, think tanks, research institutions, private sector organizations, international organizations, and the parties themselves (Saerbeck et al. 2020). Using this central network position, the climate secretariat can provide substantive and procedural information to well-connected stakeholders, resulting in an excellent reach of its messaging (Saerbeck et al. 2020; 1A, 3A, 4A, 6A). By

gathering, synthesizing, processing, and disseminating policy-relevant information that went beyond the negotiation of specific decision drafts to a wide range of different stakeholders, the climate secretariat attempted to connect broader policy discourses with specific negotiation items.

Giving a Sense of Direction in the Run-Up to the Paris Agreement

Using this network position, the secretariat aimed to change the “narrative” of how climate action could and should be viewed (6A) prior to COP21. Staff members wanted to demonstrate that the negotiation process “was part of a bigger transformation going on” (6A). The secretariat aimed to streamline the policy discourse, to make it more coherent and forward-looking, because “people weren’t really getting it, ordinary citizens, many governments, particularly the negotiators ... were all running in different directions,” as one senior member of staff remembers, adding, “have you ever seen the Monty Python video of the Olympics for people that have no sense of direction, then you know exactly what I am talking about” (6A). It provided orientation for example by directing attention to successful climate policies already in place before COP21. Giving such a “sense of direction” was the goal of a communication strategy that aimed at attracting the attention of parties indirectly by targeting prominent and well-connected societal and political actors. The positive message of this communication strategy was introduced into the “political landscape of the year,” including G20 and G7 meetings, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) meetings, and even meetings of religious groups in order to mainstream this message into different policy fields (6A; G7 Germany 2015; G20 Australia 2014; Lagarde 2014; Mou 2015; World Bank 2015). To this end, the secretariat partnered with important stakeholders and public figures or organizations for them to “carry” and “amplify [the] message” of “how well cities are doing on climate change, ... how big corporations like Unilever are greening their supply chains,” to name two examples (6A).

In line with this strategy, the executive secretary incumbent from 2010 to 2016, Christiana Figueres, sought the attention of parties by starting her climate diplomacy campaign ahead of the negotiations of COP21. One indirect way to do this was by thanking cities, faith groups, companies, investors, and other nonparty stakeholders publicly for going ahead with innovative climate activities while at the same time asking for more ambitious actions (6A). Another one was to ask prominent individuals to speak out about climate action, including a meeting with the Pope to discuss how climate change could figure prominently in his encyclical “*Laudato si*” (6A; King 2014). She reached a multitude of actors and also addressed parties “through her social media account, she would thank India for saying they would invest in solar. She would thank ... Johannesburg, for committing to a certain target on climate change,” thereby drawing attention to “all the

benefits that come with climate change [policies], all the positive outcomes that can come by a low-carbon transition” (6A). Questions that were not officially on the negotiation table but that were nonetheless crucial in achieving emission reductions could be included into the policy debate (3A, 2A, 4A, 5A, 6A). For example, “Momentum for Change” was initiated by the climate secretariat in 2013 to connect different economic and societal sectors to climate change action by publishing information on “lighthouse activities” of climate action and low-carbon development and by awarding the UN Global Climate Action Awards annually (UNFCCC, 2014; see also Chapter 3). A recent strand of literature describes initiatives by the climate secretariat to include nonparty stakeholders, such as Momentum for Change, the Non-state Climate Action Zone for Climate Action, the Lima–Paris Action Agenda, the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action, or Action for Climate Empowerment, as orchestration (Hale 2016; Thew, Middlemiss, and Paavola 2021; see also Chapter 3).

The goal of such an indirect attention-seeking behavior via the transnational policy network was twofold: First, ideas and information were distributed through an additional, powerful channel, thereby building transnational support for climate action and raising pressure on national governments to agree on ambitious climate policies from the outside. Second, through this informal channel that was independent of narrowly phrased agenda items and a legalistic negotiation logic, fresh ideas could be circulated. Looking back at COP21, one former senior official of the climate secretariat noted in 2016 that “policy announcements and initiatives made outside of the formal negotiations were also spectacular in scale and scope, suggesting that a new sustainable growth model is underway” and that nonstate actors in the Paris Agreement “are increasingly becoming the engine of both mitigation and adaptation action. This is helping to define a ‘new normal’” (Kinley 2017: 4). Through its strategy of engaging and empowering nonparty stakeholders and conveying its own policy preferences through this network (2A, 3A, 4A, 6A), the climate secretariat has arguably contributed to the necessary “cognitive change” that enabled the Paris Agreement (Dimitrov 2016: 1). It ensured that those “persuasive arguments about the economic benefits of climate action” that “altered preferences in favor of policy commitments at both national and international levels” (Dimitrov 2016: 1) found their way into the policy debate and onto the agenda.

Executive Leadership and Legitimacy Concerns

The extent of indirect attention-seeking and influence-seeking behavior of the climate secretariat varies over time and according to the political context of global climate governance. In 2009, Bauer, Busch, and Siebenhüner found the autonomy and influence-seeking behavior of the climate secretariat to be extremely limited, if existing at all: “That staff at all levels have internalized the expectations of parties

and the resulting lack of leadership further explains the limitation of its influence. In fact, the secretariat has accepted the parties' definitions of boundaries and 'has very rarely attempted to exercise open substantive leadership by brokering agreements among parties'" (Bauer, Busch and Siebenhüner 2009: 179). This description stands in stark contrast to the leadership displayed by the executive secretary in particular before COP21. Figueres (2013: 538) highlighted in an article: "The only way to regain energy security, stabilize water and food availability, and avoid the worst effects of climate change is to accelerate the economic tipping point towards low-carbon growth, towards the point where low-carbon living is the norm and not the novelty," thereby sketching her vision of how national climate policies should be spelled out. Thinking back to her first press conference in 2009, she reflects on how it was possible to achieve a global climate change agreement in an interview in 2016: "Impossible is not a fact, it's an attitude. ... And I decided right then and there that I was going to change my attitude and I was going to help the world change its attitude on climate change" (Greene 2016). These statements show the departure from an attention-avoiding and neutral stance toward an attention-seeking and outspoken behavior, by which the secretariat deliberately stretched and surpassed the parties' definition of boundaries. In addition, Figueres' ability to adapt the goals and organizational processes of the UNFCCC secretariat to the challenges she identified and her aptitude in translating this into an effective strategy for engaging with a wide network of different actors made her leadership flexible, reflexive, and visionary. This kind of executive bureaucratic leadership was an important element of the attention-seeking activities of the secretariat especially vis-à-vis external actors in the run-up to and follow-up of the Paris Agreement.

Until today, we can observe different examples and varying degrees of attention-seeking behavior of the climate secretariat. While tracing this development in detail lies outside the scope of this empirical section, it is plausible that the initial attention-seeking behavior originated in the "fiasco-like" COP15 in 2009, which was "perceived to be constrained by the lumbering UNFCCC process that was limiting, rather than enabling climate action in a timely and responsive manner" (Dubash and Rajamani 2010; see also Figueres 2013). This "hurt the legitimacy of the UNFCCC" (Allan et al. 2021: 19) and the trust into the climate secretariat was lower than before COP15 (4A; Sommerer et al. 2022: 95, 177). As typical for a bureaucracy, it is likely that the climate secretariat sought the attention of parties and nonparty stakeholders also for the stake of self-preservation, by drawing attention to itself as an actor legitimized by visible policy outputs, for example, by assuming the role of an orchestrator with regard to nonstate climate action (Sommerer et al. 2022: 177).

This section has shown that, so far, the culmination of the climate secretariat's indirect attention-seeking behavior is the described effort leading to the Paris

Agreement. Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement the secretariat has continuously sought the attention of citizens and policymakers (Mederake et al. 2021; Saerbeck et al. 2020) and invested into a targeted communication strategy, increasingly online and via social media channels (UNFCCC 2020). Engaging with youth stakeholders represented by prominent persons such as Greta Thunberg fitted especially well into the strategy of including nonparty stakeholders as an integral pillar of the post-2015 climate regime (Thew, Middlemiss, and Paavola 2021). Instead of acting invisibly or from behind the scenes, part of the “new normal” of international climate administration is the climate secretariat’s aim to garner trust into its work by indirectly seeking the attention of parties and nonparty stakeholders through its policy network.

CBD Issue Linkages: Connecting with Relevant Policies

Since the biodiversity secretariat has the mandate to play a coordinating role, or that of an “overlap manager” in the biodiversity regime (Jinnah 2014: 73), seeking the attention of policymakers via both the intergovernmental and the transnational policy network, that is, via other international organizations and nongovernmental stakeholders, is a natural option for the biodiversity secretariat. The objectives of the CBD are biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of its components, and equitable sharing of its benefits (UN 1992a: Art. 1). These objectives overlap with a multitude of other multilateral environmental agreements that form the global biodiversity regime (Jinnah 2014: 68; Raustiala and Victor 2004: 277). With regard to engaging with other international bodies, the biodiversity secretariat has the mandate to actively seek the attention of international entities that overlap with these objectives (Jinnah 2014: 73). The CBD convention text states that the secretariat’s functions shall be, inter alia, “to coordinate with other relevant international bodies and, in particular to enter into such administrative and contractual arrangements as may be required for the effective discharge of its functions” (UN 1992a: Art. 24[d]). It furthermore asks of parties to “contact, through the Secretariat, the executive bodies of conventions dealing with matters covered by this Convention with a view to establishing appropriate forms of cooperation with them” (UN 1992a: Art. 23, 4[h]).

Our analysis shows that the CBD Secretariat seeks attention in the transnational policy debates on biodiversity to increase the general weight of its arguments, build issue-specific coalitions with other stakeholders, and, in the long run, shape parties’ preferences on substantive issues, including by issue linkage (1B, 3B, 6B, 8B, 13B). This includes liaising with international organizations on overlapping issues and linking the respective biodiversity issue to those of the broader policy concerns of other organizations. Such overlapping issues between the CBD and the UNFCCC are especially relevant, for example, forests, oceans, blue carbon (i.e., carbon stored in marine ecosystems), gender equality, and geoengineering

(1B, 9B, 10B, 13B, 14B; van Asselt 2011). Also, in the case of the causal relationship between climate change and biodiversity itself, the biodiversity secretariat deployed “an aggressive marketing campaign,” in order to draw parties’ attention to biodiversity conservation as a climate adaptation strategy (Jinnah 2014: 94; see also 13B). The UNFCCC has recently put an emphasis on “nature-based solutions,” which reflects the link between the two conventions and recognizes “the interlinked global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss” and “the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including forests, the ocean and the cryosphere, and the protection of biodiversity” (UNFCCC 2021).

Other international organizations and, by extension, policy communities the biodiversity secretariat collaborates with include the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Environment Program, the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, and the World Meteorological Organization (7B, 8B, 9B, 10B, 13B, 14B). In order to liaise with the two other Rio Conventions, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the UNFCCC, the biodiversity secretariat is very active in the so-called Joint Liaison Group (13B). This is an institutionalized mechanism through which the executive heads and other members of staff of the three Rio Conventions meet to discuss and draw attention to overlapping issues between them (SCBD 2006). The CBD is furthermore deeply intertwined with the development, agricultural, and trade regimes, which are some of the most responsible sectors for biodiversity loss, as well as with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Miller Smallwood et al. 2022: 48–49). Reaching out to organizations in these adjacent but also nonenvironmental policy fields provided the biodiversity secretariat with ample opportunity to link biodiversity to different issues and bring these connections to the attention of state actors. Framing biodiversity issues in the light of a connection to a different policy field may also attract the attention of actors outside of the biodiversity community and thereby inform and influence the public discourse. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically brought the connection between biodiversity and human health into focus, as the incumbent executive secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema highlighted in her opening statement for COP15 in 2021: “Now more than ever, we are witnessing a deep shift of awareness of the interconnected biodiversity, climate and health emergencies that we face. The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of the connection between human health, the health of species and our ecosystems.” (SCBD 2021a)

An important avenue of reaching biodiversity goals is to mainstream them into other sectors and nonenvironmental policies, for example, by linking biodiversity and business practices (1B, 12B; SCBD 2016). Building on the interest of

parties, the biodiversity secretariat launched several business-related events from 2005 on, which have become more numerous and prominent in recent years and “acted as a catalyst for larger discussions on business engagement issues and COP business decisions” (SCBD 2022a), such as the *Business and the 2010 Biodiversity Challenge*, the *Business and Biodiversity Forum*, the *Global Partnership for Business and Biodiversity*, and the *Business and Biodiversity Week* in 2021 (12B; Hickmann and Elsässer 2020; SCBD 2022a). Through coordinating and collaborating with companies, business associations, and civil society actors, the secretariat indirectly sought the attention of parties to bring the linkage between biodiversity and business into the spotlight (12B). Parties became gradually more interested and asked the secretariat at COP10 to establish a forum for them to interact with businesses and other stakeholders, which led the secretariat to launch the *Global Partnership on Business and Biodiversity* (SCBD 2010). In further decisions, the COP asked the secretariat to expand this work, including by liaising with other relevant organizations and by providing relevant capacity-building, tools, and guidance (SCBD 2021b). These activities are now listed under the umbrella of the *Business Engagement Programme* run by the secretariat and funded by the European Union, thereby further formalizing this issue linkage (SCBD 2022b).

Nonstate Actor Engagement: Broadening the Discourse

The CBD furthermore reaches out to an array of nonstate actors, in order to support their participation in the policy process and create support for ambitious negotiation outcomes from the outside (1B, 3B, 6B, 8B, 10B, 11B, 12B, 14B). The CBD has a long history of engagement with stakeholders and stands out in this respect compared to other organizations in global environmental governance (Miller Smallwood et al. 2022). Nonstate actors are often more supportive of ambitious biodiversity policies than national delegations and can be key partners for implementation and accountability in the CBD (10B; see also Miller Smallwood et al. 2022: 57; Ulloa 2022). Therefore, the biodiversity secretariat builds transnational support for biodiversity topics by opening debates on certain agenda items to include broader concerns represented by civil society. Particular emphasis is placed on the cooperation with indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs), which may be viewed as “elders of the convention” (3B), which speaks to their sincere commitment to biodiversity conservation, excellent organization and knowledge of the negotiation process, dedication to cooperation, and, in many cases, low turnover rates (as opposed to national delegates, who have higher turnover rates) (3B, 10B). Target 18 of the 2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets states that by 2020 traditional knowledge, innovations, and practices are to be respected and protected, and fully integrated and reflected in the implementation of the CBD (SCBD 2010). This makes IPLCs a key grouping of stakeholders through

which the secretariat can advocate for an ambitious outcome of negotiations (1B, 3B, 10B). The CBD Secretariat also strives to empower regional actors, religious groups, research institutions, and universities to effectively participate in negotiations and other CBD events (3B, 8B, 10B). As described in the previous section, secretarial outreach activities furthermore include the private sector.

Such a strategic use of its embeddedness in broader policy discourses is in line with the findings of other studies that point out IPAs' potential roles as knowledge brokers or orchestrators (Abbott et al. 2015). Our findings add on to this since we see a particular emphasis on their agenda-setting role in instances of multilateral policy formulation. Our explorative study indicates that the secretariat of the CBD seeks the attention of a wide range of stakeholders outside of the convention on specific issues discussed under the framework of the CBD. It is the hub of a widespread stakeholder network, allowing secretarial staff to act as a knowledge brokers and enabling it to drive negotiations forward from the outside (see also Hickmann and Elsässer 2020; Mederake et al. 2021). In its increasing integration of nonstate actors into the CBD process, the secretariat follows a broader trend in global environmental and sustainability governance of collaborating with transnational actors (Kok and Ludwig 2022; Pattberg, Widerberg, and Kok 2019).

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we developed the contours of a heuristic framework for modeling the role and social interactions of international treaty secretariats with regard to issue-specific negotiations of multilateral treaty conferences. We drew on an explorative empirical study to illustrate the plausibility of our model. Overall, the empirical observations are in line with the theoretical framework outlined in the beginning. They show that international secretariats regularly act according to a logic of attention-seeking. Rather than withholding policy-relevant information from their principals or forming covert alliances with selected states, they act openly with the aim of increasing policymakers' awareness of their problem definitions and policy proposals. Seeking the attention of policymakers directly and internally as well as indirectly and externally proves to be a potent strategy of progress in the climate and the biodiversity regimes, confirming that bureaucratic behavior can alter knowledge and belief systems, thereby enabling political change (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). Attention-seeking international bureaucracies contribute to blurring the line between international politics and bureaucracy. Both the climate and the biodiversity secretariats successfully compete with other organizations, indeed with a whole industry of knowledge providers, in the provision of policy-relevant information to national bureaucracies

and their political leadership. Among these organizations are other international organizations that are mandated to work on related issue areas as well as an array of actors from civil society and the private sector. And unlike other actors in global environmental governance, they can use their bureaucratic authority to this end. Both secretariats act as agenda-setters, policy entrepreneurs, and policy brokers, thereby furthering and shaping the negotiations in the respective conventions and including actors outside of the conventions into the policy debate. The climate secretariat exploits its narrow mandate by seeking attention for its policy solutions in negotiations and by rallying support for climate action in the transnational network, for which its central network position is key. The biodiversity secretariat has a slightly more lenient mandate and can also form alliances with individual or groups of parties and stakeholders. With a strong role in capacity development, it is also able to leave a mark on the policy implementation phase, albeit indirectly.

Our findings are also in line with empirical studies on the autonomy and influence of bureaucracies at the domestic level of the United States (Carpenter 2001; Workman 2015). We therefore argue that conceptualizing public administrations as attention-seeking actors can provide a fruitful complement to theories of delegation and oversight when studying the autonomy and influence of domestic bureaucracies.

Analyzing the role of bureaucracies at earlier stages of the policy process, especially at the stages of problem definition, agenda-setting, and policy formulation, requires different parameters than at the implementation stage. Whereas during implementation processes, bureaucracies may gain influence by withholding expert knowledge from their principals, this mechanism is less important at the stages of problem definition and policy formulation. It is not policy-relevant information that is scarce at this stage of the policy process but policymakers' capacity to pay attention to the great amount of information that is fed into the policy process by a multitude of actors. Consequently, scholars studying bureaucratic influence in domestic agenda-setting and policy formulation could gain new insights by conceiving of bureaucracies as attention-seeking organizations, that is, as partially autonomous actors competing with other public and private organizations to supply policy-relevant information to decision-makers. By focusing on a type of bureaucracy whose main tasks are related to the stages of agenda-setting and policy formulation, we described and empirically illustrated two potential pathways through which public administrations may attempt to feed their policy-related knowledge and preferences into the policy process, despite their limited mandates and the comparatively strong control exerted by multiple principals of IPAs.

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