



CONTRIBUTION

APRIL
2011

WWF Contribution to public consultation on the EU Position for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

The EU is preparing its priorities and joint position to take to the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. This UN Conference follows on 20 years later from the famous Rio 1992 where the Rio principles were adopted and the three UN conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification were agreed. The themes of the 2012 Rio Conference are "the green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development" and "international governance for sustainable development".

WWF's priorities for sustainable development and environmental protection worldwide helped shape the first Rio Conference and we have continued ever since to press governments to live up to their international commitments. We are pushing the EU as a self-styled leader in the field of sustainable development to come up with ambitious solutions to the many interlinked global challenges now facing people and the planet.

The EU organised a public consultation for Rio+20 to which WWF has contributed its ideas. The background text and questions are taken directly from the EU consultation and WWF's responses are in "red".

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2009, the United Nations General Assembly decided to organise a United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at the highest possible level, to take place in 2012. This Summit ("UNCSD") should be seen in the context of related previous UN summits, in Stockholm (1972), Rio de Janeiro (1992) and Johannesburg (2002).

The aim of the Summit will be to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, by assessing progress to date, identifying remaining gaps in the implementation of past commitments and addressing new and emerging challenges. The Summit's focus will be on two major, intertwined themes: "a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication" and "the institutional framework for sustainable development".

The EU has a strong interest in both UNCSD themes. As part of its key 2020 objectives, the EU wants to move towards a sustainable, resource-efficient and low-carbon economy and the Summit offers an opportunity to pursue this objective at global level. UNCSD also offers a platform to move forward the EU's long-standing agenda to improve global governance.

The Commission will publish, towards the middle of 2011, a Communication containing the proposed EU position for the Summit. This Communication will be the basis for discussions with the other EU Institutions, to arrive at an agreed EU position.

This public consultation serves to provide the Commission with initial views from stakeholders. These views will be taken into account in the Communication on the EU position and in subsequent discussions with the other EU Institutions.

In this connection please note that the European Economic and Social Committee will be organising an all-day hearing for civil society participants on 23 March.

For further information, see: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.sdo-events>.

For further details about the UNCSD preparatory process, including official statements, background material, etc. please see: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/>

A. PROGRESS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

Introduction

UNCSD aims to review the implementation of outcomes of past summits on sustainable development and to identify remaining and new challenges.

Following publication of the groundbreaking report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, the UN held a Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or 'Earth Summit') in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The Summit endorsed an understanding of “development” that supports socio-economic progress while at the same time preventing the continued deterioration of the environment. It also laid the foundation for a global partnership between developing and industrialized countries to help the former implement the sustainable development model.

Ten years later, at the August 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, governments reviewed progress in implementing the commitments made at Rio. While progress had been made since 1992, the review also showed dissatisfaction at the actual rate of implementation and it expressed concern about the continuing deterioration of the global environment. The Johannesburg Summit reconfirmed a commitment to sustainable development, underscored the importance of multilateralism and emphasized the need for implementation.

The past two decades have thus shown a mixed picture. On the one hand, the twenty years since Rio have witnessed a number of positive trends, most notably in terms of income growth, access to education, and improved access to healthcare and drinking water. In addition, important steps have already been taken by countries, regions and at global level, creating institutions, introducing far-reaching legislation and investing considerable public and private resources to tackle environmental problems.

At the same time, however, considerable implementation gaps and challenges remain. Around 1.4 billion people still live in extreme poverty and one sixth of the world's population is undernourished. Many environmental challenges have not been solved and have actually become more acute. The overall footprint of the developed – and increasingly also emerging – economies on the rest of the world through resource depletion and related environmental impacts, remains unsustainably high. Existing international environmental governance structures are fragmented, weak and too slow in delivering the necessary results.

Predicted future socio-economic trends will not make it easier to address these challenges. In a business-as-usual scenario, further economic growth, the bulk of which will take place in emerging economies, will continue to lift people out of poverty, but will at the same time increase the use of natural resources and environmental degradation.

QUESTIONS

- 1. What do you consider to have been the main achievements of past Sustainable Development Summits (Rio 1992, Johannesburg 2002)? What are the remaining challenges? What concrete lessons can be learned from these previous Summits, e.g. in terms of “do’s and don’ts”?**

WWF Asks:

These intergovernmental Summits have produced numerous and valuable agreements: now implementation is critical, including plans for implementation at a national or regional level. New concepts to address existing or new drivers of “unsustainable” development can be added but they should not replace existing globally agreed plans from Rio and Johannesburg.

A remaining challenge is to tie together the environment, development, poverty elimination and climate change agendas. The Rio 1992 Summit promoted this integration as its main rationale and the Johannesburg Summit tried again to put an integrated and sustainable development pathway on the international political agenda. Too often, sustainable development is perceived only as an environmental concept to be pursued through environmental treaties and by environmental ministers.

Rio+20 should promote “equitable and sustainable development” which can bring about long term poverty reduction and a decent quality of life for all without undermining the natural resource base and without further environmental degradation.

Rio in 2012 also provides a timely opportunity to contribute to the intergovernmental discussion on the post 2015 MDG priorities including future targets to address the drivers of poverty and environmental degradation, the promotion of equity and good governance as well as addressing the current deficits.

- 2. To what extent have EU policies contributed to global sustainable development? What have been the EU's main achievements in this respect and what are the major remaining challenges?**

WWF Asks:

Sustainable development has been enshrined in the EU Treaty since 1997 and remains a fundamental objective of the Lisbon Treaty. Sustainable development requires safeguarding the earth’s capacity to support life on earth and implies profound changes in thinking and in economic and social structures.

The EU Sustainable Development Strategy has failed to set the vision and agenda for other EU policies and is rarely paramount in objective setting. The “Cardiff process” on integrating the environment into all EU policies has been dropped. The key objectives and guiding principles for sustainable development adopted by the European Council in June 2006 continue to be relevant and valid: it would be useful to remind all EU institutions of their existence.

Sustainable development must be to the forefront in all EU processes and policies, including the current EU2020 strategy, if the EU is to be consistent domestically with its international aspirations. There should also put more emphasis on the EU’s accountability mechanisms for policy coherence for development.

Work on alternative indicators such as “GDP and beyond” in 2009 has stalled although the EU has recognised that GDP does not quantify the quality of growth, equity, environmental costs or the status of the natural environment.

3. What new developments and trends should be taken into account in an updated sustainable development agenda in the context of UNCSO (for instance globalisation, the economic and financial crisis, the increased demands for food and energy, the emergence of new economic and political powers and a changing geopolitical balance etc.)?

WWF Asks:

Existing challenges such as biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, water scarcity, overfishing and climate change have become more pressing and are directly related to the challenges of food, water and energy security.

Rockström, et al. (2009) proposes nine planetary boundaries all of which are threatened by human pressures: climate change; ocean acidification; ozone depletion; aerosol loading; biogeochemical flows (nitrogen and phosphorus); global freshwater use; land-system change; biodiversity loss; and chemical pollution.

The UK government's Foresight Report looks at the pressures on the Global Food system which is consuming the world's natural resources at an unsustainable rate and failing the poorest. The report suggests that "nothing less is required than a redesign of the whole food system to bring sustainability to the fore".

The financial and economic crisis offers a real opportunity to re-think the current financial and economic systems, to consider the real value of natural and human capital and to regulate the financial system in such a way that it can make a justifiable contribution to sustainable development, global public goods and climate change actions.

The changing geopolitical balance also provides an opportunity for traditional "leaders" in sustainable development to form new alliances, collaborative ventures and to share different approaches.

B. GREEN ECONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION

Introduction

"Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication" is the first main theme that UNCSO will focus on. The choice for this theme reflects the growing awareness around the globe that to respond to the major challenges that the world faces today current economic models need changing. What is needed is an economy that while securing development and growth, also improves human well-being, provides decent jobs, tackles persistent poverty and prevents significant environmental degradation and risks (e.g. biodiversity loss, climate change, exposure to hazardous substances) and unsustainable use of natural resources.)

Such a green economy demands, among other things, that future growth be pursued on the basis of a more efficient use of (limited) natural capital and reliance on new, cleaner sources of growth. Green economy is an essential stepping stone towards eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development. Development towards a green economy would be accelerated by the coordinated use of a number of instruments, fiscal, economic, regulatory and others.

The EU itself is already taking concrete steps towards a greener economy. One of the key objectives of the EU 2020 strategy is to move towards sustainable growth, by promoting a greener, more resource-efficient and low-carbon economy. The Strategy puts forward the "Resource efficient Europe" flagship initiative whose aim is inter alia to help decouple economic growth from the use of resources, increase the use of renewable energy sources, modernise transport systems and promote energy efficiency.

UNCSD can play a key role in recognising the importance of greening the economy as an appropriate response strategy to the seemingly conflicting demands for economic growth and development, providing more and better jobs and preserving a healthy environment. In addition, it can be used as a platform to promote and agree at global level on the use of a number of policies and instruments to further the greening of the economy.

QUESTIONS

4. Which specific action or policy measure under the heading of green economy holds the biggest potential for concrete and measurable results? Which elements should be maximized to maximize the contribution of a green economy to poverty eradication? Which aspects should be brought to the fore in relation to job creation and swift transitions in the labour markets?

WWF Asks:

The concept of green economy is not a replacement for equitable and sustainable development. Proposals for a green economy must not place the costs of transition on parts of the world that are already disadvantaged. The social pillar of sustainable development has to remain equally important as the environmental pillar in order to meet peoples' needs now – and in the future – within a resource and carbon-constrained world. Therefore a green economy should include both well-being and environmental stability.

Access to renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture and natural resource management have the potential to provide decent work, to benefit local economies and to support the role of women.

The EU's Resource Efficiency flagship initiative is an important step forward but will not be enough in terms of reducing the EU's footprint. The EU should aim for an overall reduction in consumption levels as well as the efficiency in use. Plans for resource efficiency must go beyond energy to include all raw materials, water, nutrient cycles and other life support systems.

To move towards a green economy globally, we must consider global resource use and a fairer distribution of natural assets to satisfy basic human needs. Greening the economy requires policy reform at all levels, both within countries and globally. Prices will have to include environmental and other external costs if they are to steer public and private investment in the right direction. To achieve this, several initiatives can be taken involving a mix of regulatory, market-based, financial and/or information tools. Furthermore, investments in education and training are necessary to ensure appropriate skills in the green economy, and adequate support to the workforce is needed in order to secure swift transitions in the labour markets. Also, barriers that stand in the way of a green economy need to be removed. In addition, schemes and indicators to measure progress towards a green economy need to be introduced.

5. What should be the concrete deliverables of UNCSD. (e.g. legally binding agreements on specific issues; the use of taxes and tradable permits; performance-based subsidies; labelling schemes etc) and areas (e.g. reducing environmentally-harmful subsidies, beyond GDP schemes etc)? Which specific commitments, objectives and time bound targets should be adopted in relation to them? In addition, what type of deliverables would you suggest to ensure socially just transitions to the green economy?

WWF Asks:

Governments have already made numerous pledges in various fora and treaties; what is needed now is concrete ways to implementation.

Governments should share their own perspectives and plans for practical approaches to a green economy.

There is unlikely to be a one-size fits-all model. The involvement of stakeholders in the development of such plans, the local perspective and the national context will provide the building blocks. Green economy policies

will not necessarily result in positive and equitable outcomes, therefore green economy policies will be designed according to the national context and with explicit consideration of their impacts on different social groups.

For example, WWF is working with governments and stakeholders in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei to turn a political commitment for the sustainable management of the shared natural resources of Borneo into a reality using a green economy approach. This involves a roadmap for agriculture, renewable energy, community-based conservation initiatives, tourism and sustainable forest management and palm oil production. The "green economy" roadmap is being developed to support the wider national goals of the three governments for economic development, poverty reduction and energy and food security.

In addition to cross cutting legislation or economic instruments, greening the economy may require a focus on particular sectors too. The 2002 Johannesburg launched two EU-backed initiatives in the areas of water and energy. Ten years on from Johannesburg it would be an appropriate time to consider whether renewing or revising these initiatives is appropriate. Other sectors that may be considered in the green economy context are agriculture, chemicals, forests, soils, marine, food, etc.

6. Should UNCSO launch new sector-specific initiatives? If so, in which sectors should efforts be concentrated and what should be proposed concretely?

WWF Asks:

At WSSD, some countries proposed a target to substantially increase the global share of renewable energy but this could not be agreed. It is timely to re-address the issue, focusing on a green economy, energy poverty and the need for adequate, affordable, reliable, safe and environmentally sustainable energy services to support economic and human development. A target might be:

To achieve universal and equitable access to modern energy services by 2030 and a global shift to 100 per cent renewable energy by 2050.

A WWF/Ecofys study (2011) demonstrates that with technologies available today, by 2050 we can meet all of the world's energy needs with renewables. As well as contributing towards climate change goals, this target could also bring modern energy to the 1.4 billion without and create tens of millions of jobs.

Agriculture, fisheries and water resources are other areas where efforts should be concentrated. For example in the fisheries sector, governments should look to the strengthening of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and the introduction of good practices in terms of institutions, science, enforcement and management.

Progress should be made on a set of indicators for equitable and sustainable development that are globally relevant and globally acceptable. Public, private and public-private investments will be crucial in determining whether economies remain locked-into traditional growth paths, or whether they can embark on a low-resource growth trajectory. It would therefore seem important for UNCSO to pay attention to the way financial resources are invested in the world's economy. In developing countries, "Official Development Assistance" is part of that picture (as it can for instance be used to invest in resource efficient technologies and practices for instance in energy production, agriculture, or water management).

7. What should be the contribution of public money, in particular Official Development Assistance, to progress towards a green economy?

WWF Asks:

The use of ODA is appropriate for supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals targets and commitments from other UN intergovernmental processes on sustainable development (as already agreed by the Development Assistance Committee of OECD). Any other uses of ODA must be agreed by the international community, through the Monterrey Process, the MDG Review Process and the UN Development Forum..

One of the most important ways that public money in the form of ODA can promote sustainable development is by mainstreaming the cross-cutting issues of environmental sustainability, gender equity and human rights

in all policies and programmes. The new strategy for the integration of the environment into EU Development Cooperation, anticipated during 2011, will be a valuable contribution from the EU in Rio.

Europe should re-evaluate public money allocated for Fisheries Partnership Agreements where the distribution of benefits are unclear, either in terms of local development and livelihoods or in positive changes towards sustainable fisheries.

There is potential to lever additional public money through the agreement and implementation of a financial transaction tax. Ideally this would be a levy imposed on the financial sector globally and earmarked for domestically and internationally agreed green, equitable and sustainable development actions.

Because of its nature and volume, increasing attention should also be paid to private investment and public-private investment. UNCSO might play a role in creating stable, positive investment conditions, amongst others by pursuing a regulatory environment conducive to investment in a green economy and by proposing innovative financing schemes.

8. How can the Summit promote a positive role of private and public-private investment, e.g. through innovative financing schemes?

WWF Asks:

Transparency of the commercial exploitation of natural resources can be enhanced through initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative or the EU's Forest Law, Governance and Trade Initiative. These models could be promoted by the EU as global environmental governance models to be adopted at UN level.

The EU should also tackle capital flight and corporate tax avoidance where significant amounts of revenue from the extraction of natural resources are lost to the national budgets. The EU could champion the creation of a global multilateral information exchange and a country by country financial reporting standing for multinational enterprises.

Governments should not overlook the role and value of small and medium sized enterprises to stimulate sustainable development at the local level – perhaps in the context of local Agenda 21s.

In terms of innovative sources, a global tax on financial transactions could provide revenue for sustainable development. The EU could make a start on an EU-wide tax earmarked for environmental goods and services, social protection, poverty eradication and climate change mitigation and adaptation globally and in Europe.

9. Would there be merit in UNCSO promoting or reinforcing specific actions by the private sector, taking account of existing initiatives such as the “Global Compact”? What form should such commitments take?

WWF Asks:

It is important first of all to review the partnerships established and announced for the WSSD partnerships initiative before promoting any new ones or focusing on a specific sector. Which partnerships have worked and why? How has the private sector taken forward innovative ideas which are beyond “business as usual” and beyond legal requirements? Which partnerships did not deliver any specific and additional benefits for sustainable development?

Some examples of private sector commitments that go beyond business as usual and which have the potential to promote change are:

- The Carbon Disclosure Project
- The Equator Principles
- The Marine Stewardship Council
- the Consumer Goods Forum, an association of more than 400 consumer goods companies and retailers announced their commitment in Cancun to achieving zero net deforestation by 2020.
- Initiatives such as these and the UN Global Compact are valuable as long as there is proper and regular monitoring of the commitments by companies and the companies are held to account. Similarly, the OECD guidelines for Multinational enterprises are only effective if governments regularly monitor the activities of companies and take action in the case of non-compliance. A complaints mechanism for third parties helps to promote accountability.

10. What other elements should the EU consider in its position on green economy for UNCS D?

WWF Asks:

WWF's Living Planet Report shows that we are currently using 50% more natural resources than the earth can sustain. The EU and other high income regions are using five times the amount of natural resources than those of low income countries.

The EU must show solid commitment to green economy, reducing its footprint and taking sustainable development actions at home. For example, by making commitments to a minimum 30% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020, developing a road map for 80-95% domestic greenhouse gas reductions by 2050, adopting additional and legally binding renewable energy and energy efficiency targets. To set the stage, the EU requires a 2014-2020 Budget which demonstrates smart investments for sustainable development and where environment and climate considerations are mainstreamed throughout.

In its commitment to building a green economy the EU needs to look at a wide range of environmental resources – beyond carbon – and establish objectives based on the need to respect environmental limits as a whole. The EU should scrutinize its consumption of resources from the rest of the world and set out plans to reduce and manage. Green chemistry approaches and design for the environment needs to be integrated in policies and pollution prevention programmes.

C. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The second theme for UNCS D is "the institutional framework for sustainable development". Both to facilitate a transition towards a greener economy and as an issue in its own right, UNCS D can help to accelerate progress in reforming governance structures.

Challenges lie in two areas. Firstly, international environmental governance: the system of international treaties and institutions dealing with a range of environmental topics that has emerged over the last 40 years. Secondly, governance for sustainable development: the international activities to steer policy comprehensively across all the component elements of sustainable development.

QUESTIONS

The current global environmental governance system has developed over the last 40 years, not least as a result of decisions taken at Rio+20's predecessor summits. A very significant number of international agreements have been concluded, steering policy making and delivering results in a wide variety of environmental and sustainable development domains. However, as a result of this long period of incremental expansion, the present international environmental governance is fragmented and weak, misses a strong central node and takes too little account of the changing balance of power in the world.

It should be possible to make efficiency gains, for instance by merging conventions by sector, by creating synergies in the area of science for policy making, or by reviewing the overall efficiency or indeed added value of institutions and treaties put in place. Reforms are being discussed in a ministerial-level process led by UNEP but progress is slow.

11. How should the EU pursue improvement of international environmental governance? Which areas should be targeted? Is strengthening UNEP a necessary element of stronger international environmental governance?

WWF Asks:

The present system of international governance is not fit for purpose, it is inadequate and fragmented and is failing to deliver the urgent and decisive changes that we need. Coherence must be reinforced across agencies, not just the one UN approach at the country level but critically at headquarters level. The overall aim should be to improve the integration of environmental and social issues into economic decision making.

Ideally the EU should promote the creation of a strong UN body for the environment – a Specialised Agency – that would be responsible for norm, policy setting and policy implementation. This body should be responsible for all environmental programmes within the UN System and for coordination and liaison with Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

However, if world economic bodies (IMF, World Bank, WTO, G20, etc) continue failing to integrate sustainability considerations into economic decision-making then a new UN body will remain largely inadequate and ineffective.

Considering sustainable development as an overarching objective of the global community, begs the question whether the current governance structures for sustainable development are sufficiently strong to steer policy decisions. At present the UN Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Sustainable Development play their respective roles in providing guidance but they are arguably under-resourced and not sufficiently effective in coordinating efforts of relevant other UN bodies.

12. Should the EU have the ambition to help create a new institution within the UN system dealing with sustainable development or, alternatively, should there be stronger coordination of existing UN bodies?

WWF Asks:

In order to better integrate the environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainable development (and their respective communities), the UN and governments should improve cohesion between the Rio+, MDGs, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Monterrey Financing for Development and International Environmental Governance processes.

The EU needs to ensure that Rio+20 is an opportunity to re-link the poverty, biodiversity and climate change agendas. Well-managed natural resources can increase resilience to climate change and improve the lives of poor people. Climate change impacts play out through changes in the environment, such as new patterns in the water cycle. Climate change also exacerbates other stresses such as environmental degradation and pollution. Ecosystems are most resilient when they are intact, healthy and naturally diverse; as such they can help buffer some of the impacts of climate change and help build the resilience of the poor. The links between climate change, poverty and biodiversity and ecosystems needs to be recognised at the Rio 2012 conference – as currently the three issues are treated separately.

13. What other elements should the EU consider in its position for UNCSD on the institutional framework for sustainable development, such as enhanced stakeholder involvement, more effective financial support for governance and capacity building?

WWF Asks:

The EU should support formal representation of civil society in the UN body for the environment and promote the establishment of a sustainable funding mechanism to provide increased, stable and predictable long term finance (providing that the coherence and coordination gaps in the current system are addressed).

The EU as a regional political and governance bloc could set an example of cross-sectoral integration for sustainable development by the establishment of an inter-institutional body for sustainable development where an EU Sustainable Development Strategy is developed, monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. Such a process would be multi-sectoral and multistakeholder to involve finance, trade, security, health, energy, agriculture, fisheries, employment, transport, etc.

The EU should be developing its positions on a 'beyond 2015' framework for sustainable development goals which will deliver on the MDGs and the Millennium Declaration. Sustainable development needs to be the underpinning narrative for a post 2015 framework integrating climate change, ecosystem services and natural resources. This will ensure that results are long lasting, sustainable and reduce poverty for the long term.

At the same time Rio+20 should also explore the possibilities for creating an innovative platform for fostering collaboration across government, business, and civil society.

For further information:

Sally Nicholson

EU Development and
International Relations
WWF European Policy Office

E-mail: snicholson@wwf.eu

Tel: +32 2 740 0937

Mobile: +32 492 591 401

