

**PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE EU POSITION FOR THE 2012  
UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT**

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**Do you agree to the listing of the name of your organisation in the report that the Commission will draw up on the results of this public consultation? (Tick the appropriate box)**

YES

NO

## 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<sup>1</sup>. 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

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64/236

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"?**

### **Answer:**

The RIO Summit of 1992 put the environmental problems and the idea of a Sustainable Development on the political agenda and mobilized civil society, local authorities and states around the need of changing the present models of production and consumption in

order to ensure a future for Humanity and the Biosphere.

Nevertheless, the incapacity of dealing and putting into practice a Sustainable Development strategy at world level is responsible for the maintenance, and sometimes the increasing, of the existent problems by the time of RIO 92: lasting reality of poverty, and even growth of extreme poverty in the less developed countries, increasing of food dependency, deepening of social and economic inequalities, reduction of biodiversity, unbearable pressure on ecosystems, more and more visible climate changes and world warming.

Lesson to keep in mind: it is absolutely necessary to build the principles and the strategy for Sustainable Development into the macroeconomic policies and strategies and, in order to achieve that goal, it is fundamental to democratize the governance in depth, at world, national, regional and local level.

- 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?**

**Answer:**

The European Commission and the Member States have shown a worrying political schizophrenia: they propose strategies, programmes and measures in tune with the idea of Sustainable Development and, in parallel – on behalf of competitiveness, economic growth and free competition – they impose strategies, programmes and measures clearly oriented in the opposite direction. Anyway the real interests at stake are revealed by the fact that much more significant means and much more powerful mechanisms are channelled into the second component.

Being so it is not surprising that the European footprint remains unsustainable high. As the model of production, distribution and consumption has not visibly changed there is no reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and no reduction on resources consumption. Not to mention the ever growing levels of social and economic inequalities, among individuals, communities and countries.

- 3. What new developments and trends should be taken into account in an updated sustainable development agenda in the context of UNCSD (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.)?**

**Answer:**

In relation to Sustainable Development the problems to be faced today are not different from those already present by the time of the 92 Rio Summit, but some of them are even more acute and pressing nowadays, given the financial crisis, the political instability, the rapid depletion of natural resources and the increasing difficulties on energy, water and food supply.

The main problems to be addressed can be summarized as follow:

- . Climate change and loss of biodiversity each day more present and pressing;
- . Extra burdens on natural resources given the rapid growth of emerging economies, the environmental degradation in less developed countries and the incapacity of developed countries to change their models of production and consumption;
- . Increase on political, social and economic inequalities, rendering the world very unfair, unbalanced and insecure.

All these problems become more present and pressing in a situation of continual growth of world population.

On the other hand the fact that the developed countries didn't keep their promises of assisting the less developed countries in moving towards more sustainable societies erodes the attractiveness and mobilization power of Sustainable Development ideal.

## **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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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<sup>2</sup> See for more details: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)

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 on 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 emphasised to maximise 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?**

#### **Answer:**

First of all it is absolutely needed to internalise in the prices environmental and social costs, knowing that this fundamental alteration will bring about a massive change on production, distribution and consumption models.

The public powers have to invest in sustainable infrastructures (in terms of energy, collective transport, water and waste management...), to support research on sustainable technologies, to promote local consumption (for instance, imposing social and environmental clauses in public procurements and favouring the adoption of local currencies), to facilitate the transition from the present industrial agribusiness to a more environmental friendly production system, in which the family agriculture and the small scale processing will have a central role to play. There will be no place for the private appropriation of genetic material or for the promotion of GMO; at same time, moving towards organic agriculture and animal breeding and to support sustainable forestry practices will be a major goal for the society.

The investment in sustainable infrastructures and the transition for a new food production model as well as the effort to guarantee the isolation of existing buildings and the promotion of eco-building will be a major source of job creation. The re-localisation of production and consumption will significantly contribute to poverty eradication in the less developed countries.

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?**

**Answer:**

It is much necessary that the next Summit delivers binding agreements on reducing rates of CO2 emissions and on increasing rates of renewable energies and also that it establishes the principles and the technical and political mechanisms under which those processes can be monitored and controlled.

The Summit has to guarantee that developed countries agree on specific levels of assistance (financial and technological) to the less developed countries in order to help them in moving to more sustainable development models.

Equally important is that the RIO+20 achieves the international acceptance of the need for moving beyond GDP to wellbeing indicators, for interdicting the private appropriation of genetic material (namely seeds) and for strengthening the obligation of precaution principle observation.

The Summit has to aim at changing the present rules of world trade, proscribing all the subsidies that counteract food sovereignty and rethinking the actual legal frame for patents.

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 UNCSD launch new sector-specific initiatives? If so, in which sectors should efforts be concentrated and what should be proposed concretely?**

**Answer:**

It seems much needed a specific initiative in the area of Oceans and marine life preservation and governance: the pressure on marine ecosystems due namely to fishing excess, submarine oil exploitation and indiscriminate pollution has to be monitored, controlled and drastically reduced.

It would be advisable a specific initiative in the area of food sovereignty, linking a new

production paradigm centred on small size agricultural units and an emphasis on organic and environmental friendly production, an option for re-localising food production, an attempt to strengthen fair trade and a progressive change on the logic and rules of World Trade Organization.

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?**

**Answer:**

The Official Development Assistance should be oriented to help the less developed countries in defining and implementing their own way to Sustainable Development, not imposing on them the models and technological solutions created by the developed countries or even the emerging economies. To succeed that purpose a major attention has to be dedicated to the conception, testing and implementation of appropriate technologies and in parallel to technological transference from developed countries to less developed ones whenever possible and agreed by the beneficiaries, keeping in mind the permanent need of adaptation and adjustments. An equal effort has to be put in relation to qualification of people (researchers, experts, operators, users) in LDC. In both processes – creation and appropriation of technologies and training of human resources – developed countries have to ensure financial support to the less developed countries.

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?**



**Answer:**

The Summit should play a role in creating conditions for a large acceptance of the need for and the benefits resulting from the Tobin tax application. The funds created by this mean could be channelled into financing the transition for a greener economy and a sustainable development model, especially in the less developed countries. At the same time this measure would contribute to the extremely needed regulation of the financial markets.

The Summit can promote and popularize varied and imaginative schemes of sponsorship by private corporations of processes aiming at sustainable development. In doing so, the summit will also contribute to the integration of sustainability responsibilities in corporate social responsibility.

**9. Would there be merit in UNCSD 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?**

**Answer:**

The Global Compact Initiative mainly involves big corporations. Of course there is an important role to be played by them but it would be much needed to mobilize the Small and Medium Enterprises too. Nor UN neither one of its bodies can reach them directly but it is possible to approach, to promote and to encourage experiences and movements all over the world that count on the involvement of SME in local and regional processes oriented towards sustainable development and participatory democracy. This option will open to the understanding of how SME serve the communities and territories they are associated with and how they are interconnected with other actors also implied in the same experiences and movements.

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

**Answer:**

The EU can and should make a strong contribution to RIO+20 Summit through defining and implementing the green economy within Europe and through guaranteeing official assistance and transfer of technology to help developing countries in achieving transition into sustainable development models.

In order to implement green economy within Europe, the European Commission and the Member States have to acknowledge, to promote (through social and political recognition and through financial support) and also to disseminate the best ideas and practices, in terms of sustainable production and consumption, green fiscal instruments, sustainable development and wellbeing indicators, etc.

## **C. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Introduction***

The second theme for UNCSD is "the institutional framework for sustainable development". Both to facilitate a transition towards a greener economy and as an issue in its own right, UNCSD 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<sup>3</sup> 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?**

#### **Answer:**

Following its tradition EU can and should propose and promote a large and deep participation of civil society in the process of achieving Sustainable Development at European, national, regional and local levels. By doing so Europe will pursue this main goal within its territory and will provide examples and models of governance that can be useful and inspiring at international level.

In parallel EU can promote the integration of sustainability responsibilities into corporate social responsibility, improving and enlarging its conceptual and for-action framework.

<sup>3</sup> See for more details: <http://www.unep.org/environmentalgovernance/>

Equally important it would be to integrate the European Sustainable Development Strategy in the European Strategy 2020, overcoming a fragmented and sectoral approach to sustainable development.

On the other side, it seems clearly necessary to strengthen UNEP but the possibility of creating a World Environmental Organisation has to be pondered in order to avoid multiplying the UN bodies without assuring the transversal coordination among them.

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?**

**Answer:**

The multiplication of UN bodies doesn't ensure the coordination among them: in practice this option can produce the opposite result. What really matters is to guarantee that Sustainable Development is integrated into the key agencies: UN (ensuring that its goals are transversal to all bodies) but also the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO. Such integration will demand to rethink and to reorganize those agencies putting them at the service of humankind and life at large instead of being instruments of the big corporations and financial markets.

It is equally important to underline the need for strengthening UNEP and its capacity of preserving the environment.

**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?**

**Answer:**

European Union needs to be a more coherent reality – in political, social and economic terms – in order to play a key role at the Summit. Without an intrinsic change in that direction UE will lose the capacity to furnish new ideas and the credibility to mobilize citizens, civil society organizations or states around them. How can Europe ensure a generous financial support for governance and capacity building if there is no common European position in relation to the financing of UN and its bodies?

EU can and should mobilize the European civil society for a deep engagement in the preparation of the Summit, in the event and in the subsequent dynamics.

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