

Special event
Second Committee, 65th Session of the General Assembly
“Advancing Sustainable Development: What Should Rio+20 Achieve?”
Friday, 29 October 2010

Background

The concept of sustainable development is like a bridge. It seeks to bring together not only the three domains — economic, social and environmental — but also developed and developing countries, Governments, businesses and civil society, scientific knowledge and public policy, the city and the countryside, and present and future generations. It has also created the awareness that the environment and development are not two separate agendas, but two faces of the same agenda. Development is the midwife of sustainability, just as sustainability is the life support system for development.

In order to secure a renewed political commitment for sustainable development, Member States decided at the 64th session of the General Assembly to organize, in Brazil in 2012, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD)¹. The Conference is to assess progress and remaining gaps in implementation of commitments made at major summits on sustainable development. It is also supposed to address new and emerging challenges. The two themes of the Conference are: green economy in the context of sustainable development, and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

To guide the preparatory process, a 10-member Bureau co-chaired by Permanent Representatives from Antigua and Barbuda and Republic of Korea has been elected at the First Preparatory Committee meeting held from 17 – 19 May 2010. Other Vice-Chairs are from Argentina, Botswana, Croatia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Italy, Pakistan and the USA. Brazil is a member ex-officio.

To support preparation for the Conference, the UN Secretary-General has nominated the Under-Secretary-General of Economic and Social Affairs as the Secretary-General of the Conference with the dedicated Secretariat at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. System-wide coordination in support of the preparatory process is pursued through the Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs², supported by the UN Development Group³ and Environmental Management Group⁴.

Objective of Conference: Renewing political commitment

The political outcome of the Conference will determine its legacy. Will it be an occasion to reinforce political resolve to tackle the main sustainable development challenges facing the international community? What concrete outcomes should we be working for?

¹ Resolution A/64/236

² See ECESA website <http://www.un.org/en/development/other/ecesa.shtml>

³ See UNDG website <http://www.undg.org/>

⁴ See EWG website <http://www.ewg.org/>

Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication

Green economy is a term which has generated much interest of late, particularly following the financial crisis and global recession and the “green stimulus” packages assembled by a number of governments. Also, in the run-up to Copenhagen, many countries developed plans and policies to promote low-carbon development, which can be encompassed by the term “green economy” or “green growth”.

The concept is used in several senses, to refer e.g. to promotion of structural change towards less energy-, resource- and pollution-intensive sectors, as well as to broad policies designed to shift all economic activities onto a more resource- and energy-efficient and less environmentally damaging foundation. Opinions differ on whether the economic adjustments involved will be gradual and small-scale or more transformational.

The newness of the concept means that many are still uncertain about how to interpret it and what its implications are for their own countries. Many countries have experience with policies which could be given a “green economy” label (e.g., eco-taxation, investments in green infrastructure, sustainable procurement, etc.). Some have pursued them more comprehensively and ambitiously than others.

- Does green economy offer a useful framework for capturing synergies among the three pillars of sustainable development, or are the trade-offs more apparent?
- What are the benefits, costs and risks of pursuing a green economy, green growth path?

Institutional framework for sustainable development

There exists a dense network of institutions and instruments related to sustainable development at the international, regional, national and local levels. The UNCED/Rio Conference marked the culmination of a fertile period in the development of institutions responding to concerns about sustainable development. UNCED saw the adoption of a number of crucial agreements, including the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, and the UNFCCC. It also created new international institutions, among them the Commission for Sustainable Development, tasked with the follow-up to UNCED.

The rise in social and economic interconnectedness (globalization), the failure to make adequate progress in eradicating poverty, and the impacts of global environmental change are some of the key drivers behind demands for strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development. An effective and equitable framework would provide a way of ensuring adequate progress in the social, economic and environmental dimensions. Maximizing outcomes along more than one dimension is a challenging exercise. The response has been to advocate an integrated approach to strategy formulation and policy making – evaluating options in accordance with the three dimensions of sustainable development – and benefiting from multi-stakeholder engagement.

Some questions to be considered vis-à-vis the institutional framework for sustainable development include:

- What functions are existing intergovernmental bodies and processes currently performing well, and where are the major shortcomings?
- Where are the major gaps in the institutional architecture?
- How can the links between various intergovernmental bodies and processes be strengthened and made more effective?

Preparatory process

The Earth Summit in Rio and the World Summit in Johannesburg introduced important advances in the engagement of civil society in international decision making on sustainable development. Carrying on that tradition, multistakeholder engagement of Major Groups will be critical in the preparations for Rio + 20 and in maximizing the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Moderator:

Mr. Muhammad Aslam Chaudhry, Chief, Global Policy Branch
Division for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Speakers:

Professor Rehman Sobhan, Center for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh – *Poverty eradication and Sustainable Development*

Dr. Soogil Young, Chairman, Presidential Committee on Green Growth, Republic of Korea – *Green economy in the context of sustainable development*

Prof. Adil Najam, Frederick S. Pardee Professor of Global Public Policy, Boston University – *Institutional framework for sustainable development*

Mr. Felix Michael Dodds, Stakeholder Forum – *Stakeholder engagement in the UNCSD Preparatory Process*

Biographies of the Speakers

Professor Rehman Sobhan has served as a Professor of Economics, Dhaka University, Member, Bangladesh Planning Commission, Director General, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Visiting Fellow, Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford, Member, of the Advisory Council of the President of Bangladesh, Founder and Executive Chairman, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Executive Director, South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS), Visiting Scholar, Initiative for Policy Dialogue, Columbia University, Senior Research Fellow, Ash Institute of Democratic Governance, Harvard University and is currently Chairman, CPD. Professor Sobhan has held a number of important professional positions which include President, Bangladesh Economic Association, Member, U.N. Committee for Development Planning, Member, Governing Council of the U.N. University, Tokyo, Member of the Board of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, Member of the Executive Committee of the International Economic Association, Member of the Group of Eminent Persons appointed by the SAARC Heads of State to review the future of SAARC and Chairman of the Board of Grameen Bank. He is currently a member of the Board of SACEPS, and Chairman of the Pratichi Trust (Bangladesh) set up by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen. He has published a large number of books, research monographs and articles published in professional journals, relating to the political economy of development, public enterprise and privatization, foreign aid, petropolitics, agrarian reform, regional cooperation in South Asia, democracy and governance. His latest work, *Challenging the Injustice of Poverty: Agendas for Inclusive Development in South Asia*, has just been released by Sage Publications.

A senior Korean developmental economist, **Dr. Soogil Young** has been President of the National Strategy Institute (NSI), an independent think tank on economic reform and national governance, in Seoul, since March 2006. Dr. Young has been a member of the Presidential Committee on Green Growth since its establishment in February 2009. He was appointed as the Civilian Chairman of the committee by President Lee Myung-bak on July 13, 2010. He co-chairs the committee with the Prime Minister. He is the

founding Chairman of the Green Investment Forum Korea, and runs a CEO Course for Green Business and Growth at NSI. He has also just accepted the invitation to serve as a member of the Green Growth Council being launched by The Monday Morning in Copenhagen with support from the Danish government. He also serves on the High-level Advisory Committee for the Financial Services Commission. He worked during the 1980s-1990s at four governmental think tanks, including as a senior fellow for the Korea Development Institute (KDI), President of the Korea Transport Institute (KOTI), and President of the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP). He served as Korea's Ambassador to the OECD in Paris during 1998-2000 where he concurrently served as Chairman of the Advisory Board on the OECD Development Centre. Dr. Young has been active on many blue-ribbon commissions for the Korean government on economic policy issues, including three Presidential Commissions, playing a key role in a number of Korea's epochal economic reforms since the early 1980s. In particular, he was the leading architect of Korea's 5-year program of unilateral import liberalization and 5-year tariff reform and reduction program toward the 8% 'central rate' in the mid-1980s. He also served as the coordinator of the secret preparatory work for the 'Presidential Emergency Decree on Real-Name Financial Transactions' introduced in August, 1993, that served as the foundation for all subsequent economic and political reforms undertaken by the then-President Kim Young-sam. Dr. Young has been participating actively in numerous international forums and conferences on trade, development and international economic relations, including in the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC). He founded PECC's Trade Policy Forum in the 1980s and also PECC's Finance Forum in the 2000s. Since 2007, Dr. Young has been serving as Chairman of the Korea National Committee on Pacific Economic Cooperation (KOPEC). Dr. Young has written extensively on trade, development and cooperation in Asia-Pacific with focus on the challenges facing Korea. Recently, Dr. Young co-edited *Labor Mobility in the Asia-Pacific Region* (ISEAS Singapore, 2008) and *Competition among Financial Centres in Asia-Pacific* (ISEAS Singapore, 2009). Since 2009, he has been co-chairing the 'Asian G20 Roundtable' with Prof. Peter Drysdale of Australia. His current research interests focus on climate change, development, and global governance. Born in Seoul in 1943,

Dr. Young earned B.Sc. in chemical engineering from Seoul National University and Ph.D. in economics from the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, the United States.

Professor Adil Najam is the Frederick S. Pardee Professor of Global Public Policy at Boston University. He also serves as the Director of the Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future and a Professor of International Relations and of Geography and Environment. He has served as a Convening and Lead Author for the Third and Fourth Assessment Reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). He now serves as a Convening Lead Author for the Fifth IPCC on sustainable development and climate change. In 2008 Prof. Najam also serves on the United Nations Committee on Development Policy (UN CDP). In 2009 he was awarded one of Pakistan's highest civil awards, the Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Star of Excellence) medal by the President of Pakistan. Prof. Najam has written extensively on global sustainable development policy, and particularly on the role of developing countries in it. This includes his 2007 book "Global Environmental Governance: A Reform Agenda" and subsequent work on institutional reform for sustainable development and international environmental governance. Prof. Najam has also taught at MIT, University of Massachusetts and at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. He is a past winner of MIT's Goodwin Medal for Effective Teaching, the Fletcher School Paddock Teaching Award, and the Stein Rokan Award of the International Political Science Association, the ARNOVA Emerging Scholar Award, and the Pakistan Television Medal for Outstanding Achievement.

Mr. Felix Dodds is the Executive Director of Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future. He has been active at the UN since 1990 attending the World Summits of Rio Earth Summit, Habitat II, Rio+5, Beijing+5, Copenhagen+5, World Summit on Sustainable Development. He has also been to all the UN Commissions for Sustainable Development and many UNEP Governing Councils. He has set up three global NGO coalitions for UN Conferences, Summits and Commissions these are the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (1993), the UN Habitat II (1995) the WHO Health and Environment Conference (1999). He co-chaired the NGO Coalition at the UN

Commission on Sustainable Development from 1997 to 2001. He introduced Stakeholder Dialogues in 1996 through the UN General Assembly in November 1996 for Rio+5 and helped run some of the most successful ones at Bonn Water (2001) and Bonn Energy (2004). From 1985-1987 he was the chair of the UK Liberal Parties youth wing. From 1997-2001 he co-chaired the UN Commission on Sustainable Development NGO Steering Committee and has been a part of the Green Globe Task Force that advised the UK Foreign Minister on sustainable development issues from 1996-2005. He has written or edited a number of books. He is also a regular contributor to the BBC web site and enjoys blogging from Film Festivals. He is at present on the Advisory Boards for: The Collaborative Institute for Climate Oceans and Security, The Bonn 2011 Water and the Green Economy Conference and the International Council for Scientific Union's Conference in 2012 - conference Planet under pressure: new knowledge towards solutions. He has been advisor to the UK, Danish Governments and the European Commission.