

Side event of the Second Committee
“Advancing Sustainable Development: What Should Rio+20 Achieve?”
Friday, 29 October 2010

Summary of the meeting

The Chair of the Second Committee, H.E. Ms. Enkhtsetseg Ochir, in her introductory remarks reminded the audience that the Member States have decided to hold the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in 2012 in order to secure a renewed political commitment for sustainable development. She added that the Conference will assess progress and remaining gaps in implementation of commitments made at major summits on sustainable development in addition to addressing new and emerging challenges.

Professor Rehman Sobhan examined the linkages between poverty eradication and sustainable development. He argued that social inequities in the societies impede progress on sustainable development. In this regard, he mentioned that lack of access to water and energy, inequitable land ownership and individual instead of collective ownership of minerals are all sources of inequity and poverty. The issue of inequality could be addressed by making local population part of the decision making processes. The decision making processes and accompanied institutional arrangements should ensure equitable distribution of resources. Failure to achieve sustainable development has implications which go beyond resource depletion and threatens social order and democratic institutions.

Dr. Soogil Young¹ underlined that green economy is a useful framework for capturing synergies among three pillars of sustainable development. He argued that there is no readily available or one-size-fits-all policy package for green growth development. Green growth policies may differ from country to country, and be tailored to the unique local circumstances and conditions. Also, green growth requires technological development and commercialization of new technologies. Incentives can play an important role in encouraging the private sector to follow green growth models. For a green growth strategy to be successful, a coherent vision as well as political leadership and commitment is needed. He underlined that leapfrogging the grey/brown economies is important, and so is learning from the past mistakes by correcting them through new set of green growth policies. Reforming existing institutional environment will be important for promoting green growth. He cited a number of examples of how green growth works in the Republic of Korea.

Professor Adil Najam reflecting on the state of current institutional framework for sustainable development mentioned that institutions are being asked to deliver on more functions than they were originally established for. By and large, institutions have performed reasonably well, but reforms are needed to enable these institutions to meet additional demands placed on them. While reforming the institutions, due attention should be paid to address the problems of system inertia, institutional fiefdoms, global vs. national priorities and lack of leadership. Enhancing coherence and complementarities should be an important feature of the reform process. Rio+20 needs to push for a less cluttered system and it may be accomplished in incremental steps: having less treaty bodies than we have now, strengthening of UNEP, and revitalizing CSD as implementation and review forum for sustainable development. There is also a link between the green economy and institutional framework since green economy will need institutions to advance its agenda forward.

¹ Please see Dr. Young's presentation and power point

Felix Dodds² presented stakeholders perspectives on possible ways to bridge the gaps in implementing sustainable development. These, for example, included: establishment of a framework convention on corporate accountability developed from the new ISO 26000; a global convention on Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration – access to information, public participation and environmental justice; and a global framework convention on Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on the Precautionary Principle. Such measures will allow addressing issues like nano technology, geo engineering and cloning. He emphasized the need to re-launch local Agenda 21 programs around the concept of green economy for which local authorities can play an important role. Industries should be encouraged to adopt green technologies, including greening of the work place. He reminded the need to recognize inter-generational responsibilities by enabling the young people to have green, post-carbon economy during their lifetimes. With regard to the institutional framework for sustainable development, he called for transforming the Trusteeship Council into Sustainable Development Council.

In the ensuing discussion³, some delegations considered the green economy to be a useful framework to ensure synergies among three pillars of sustainable development. Others mentioned that the discussion on green economy needs to be result of a transparent multilateral process that takes into account capacity of developing countries. A clear perspective is needed to avoid fears about green protectionism policies. Its adoption needs to be supported through investment flows and technology transfer, among other things. It was noted that investment in green economy leads to improved human well-being and social equity, but investments do not happen automatically, an appropriate mix of national policy reforms and strategic international policies are necessary to help attract these investments. Importance of private sector engagement and international cooperation in technology development and transfer was emphasized. Several delegations underscored the need to take stock of what has worked and what has not at the UNCSD in 2012, including ways to address the critical implementation gaps.

Regarding the institutional framework for sustainable development, it was noted that sustainable development governance is fragmented. Problems exist in the form of duplication of functions and lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities among institutions. To overcome these problems, strengthening the role of ECOSOC was emphasized. Other suggestions included: (i) strengthening coordination between environmental and developmental agencies in the UN system, (ii) addressing all three pillars of sustainable development, especially the social pillar with reference to poverty eradication; and (iii) enhancing institutional coherence especially in ECOSOC where various functional commissions come together.

Concerns of small island developing States (SIDS), especially Pacific SIDS were underlined and, in this context, it was stated that Barbados Plan of Action was the expression of the first global partnership after Rio Summit in 1992. It was mentioned that at the High-level review of Mauritius strategy, Secretary-General has been mandated to review how coherence among the UN system could be further improved for addressing the SIDS related challenges. Crucial influence of climate change on SIDS was also mentioned.

² See Mr. Dodd's presentation and power point presentation

³ The floor was taken by the European Union, Brazil, UNEP, IPU, Japan, Italy, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Federated States of Micronesia and Argentina