



Sustainable Development Governance

And a Sustainable Development Board

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ABOUT SDG2012

Sdg2012 is Stakeholder Forum's Programme on Sustainable Development Governance towards the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (UNCSD), also known as 'Rio+20' and 'Earth Summit 2012'. The programme consists of the following activities:

- **Thought Leadership** – writing and commissioning think pieces on issues relating to sustainable development governance, to stimulate and inform discussion on this issue towards Rio+20
- **Sustainable Development Governance 2012 Network (SDG2012 Network)** – co-ordinating a multi-stakeholder network of experts to produce and peer review think pieces, discuss and exchange on issues relating to the institutional framework for sustainable development, and align with policy positions where appropriate
- **Information and Resources** – publishing informative guides and briefings and hosting an online clearing-house of information and updates on international environmental and sustainable development governance – 'SDG dossier'
- **Submissions** – making official submissions to the Rio+20 process based on think pieces and dialogue.

ABOUT STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Stakeholder Forum is an international organisation working to advance sustainable development and promote stakeholder democracy at a global level. Our work aims to enhance open, accountable and participatory international decision-making on sustainable development.

Stakeholder Forum works across four key areas: Global Policy and Advocacy; Stakeholder Engagement; Media and Communications; and Capacity Building. Our SDG2012 programme sits within our work on Global Policy and Advocacy.

MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to provide feedback on this paper, get involved in Stakeholder Forum's SDG2012 programme, or put yourself forward to write a paper, please contact Farooq Ullah, Head of Policy and Advocacy at Stakeholder Forum– fullah@stakeholderforum.org

For more information on SDG2012 please visit www.stakeholderforum.org and www.earthsummit2012.org

Pursuing a more sustainable global future in this millennium is less a matter of cost than of conscience, commitment, and cooperation. Humanity, greater in number and more economically active with each passing day, is increasingly playing havoc with Earth's natural systems. Our actions are giving rise to a multitude of critical threats: the degradation of soils, water and the marine resources essential to food production; health-endangering air and water pollution; global climate change that is likely to disrupt weather patterns and raise sea levels everywhere; the loss of habitats, and species and genetic resources which are damaging both ecosystems and the services they provide.

Despite some progress over the last two decades, the state of human development remains at an unacceptable level. For example, more than 50 countries are poorer today than they were in 1990. Almost two billion people live on less than \$2 a day, one billion lack access to clean water, and more than two billion lack access to basic sanitation. The poor are also the most vulnerable to environmental degradation. They depend on natural resources—soil, water, fisheries, forests—for their sustenance and they suffer disproportionately from poor environmental conditions. By 2025, if current trends are not reversed, nearly two-thirds of the world's population will also live in water-scarce areas.

This sorry state of the planet and of sustainable development is not because of lack of international attention. In fact, since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the response of the international community to the challenges of environment and sustainable development included four international summits, four ministerial conferences, three international conventions, two protocols, and a new financial entity—the Global Environment Facility (GEF). In Rio, world leaders made a number of significant commitments for the pursuit of sustainable development. The Rio Declaration contained specific reference to the need for integrating environment into economic development thinking and planning. The Conventions on

(1) This paper is based in part on the findings and recommendations of the High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence and its report "Delivering as One" (2007).

Biodiversity and Climate Change were opened for signature, negotiations for the Desertification Convention were launched, and the GEF was recognized as the funding mechanism for the global environment. At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted in order to, among others, eradicate extreme poverty

and hunger, achieve universal primary education, and ensure environmental sustainability. In March 2002, finance and development cooperation ministers met in Monterey, Mexico, at the International Conference on Financing for Development. A number of commitments on additional finance from donor countries were made in order to achieve the MDGs. And, in late August 2002, world leaders gathered again, this time in Johannesburg, to review and renew the commitment to sustainable development, and adopted a Plan of Implementation.

On the face of it, these are remarkable achievements. However, despite all of the high-powered gatherings, agreements and commitments, little progress has been achieved in improving the environment and in pursuing sustainable development. Global environmental trends continue to be negative and the promise of significant financial resources to address the challenges of environment and development has not materialized. The gap between rich and poor within and between countries continues to widen; more than 90 million people are added to our global village every year, mostly in developing countries; one person in three still lacks adequate fresh water; greenhouse gases are steadily increasing; ecosystems that are critical for human survival continue to be undermined; and land degradation threatens food security and livelihoods, especially in Africa. It is ironic that as the evidence for environmental degradation becomes more convincing, the political will for action becomes weaker or lacking.

We face a changing world where global change is unprecedented in its scope, speed and scale. Globalization makes multilateralism indispensable, and the United Nations (UN) must be at its heart. Addressing the global challenges of the 21st century cannot be done without the UN with its universal values and representativeness. However, the UN has been seen by some to fail in delivering the vision and mission expected from it, especially in the area of sustainable development. At the initiative of Secretary-General Kofi Annan the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment was established in 2006 to consider how the UN system can most effectively respond to the global development, environment and humanitarian challenges of the 21st century.

The Panel concluded that, while the General Assembly has adopted sustainable development as part of the overarching framework of UN activities, the international community is still falling short in implementation and needs to improve the institutional framework for sustainable development. Governments and international institutions continue to treat development, human health and environmental degradation as standalone threats and the Commission on

Sustainable Development (CSD) has not been effective in ensuring that the promise of integrating environment and development is fulfilled. The Commission's mandate has been broadened and its focus on environment alone has contributed to overlaps and unclear division of labor.

The Panel recommended that the status of sustainable development should be elevated within the UN institutional architecture and in country activities and that the UN system must strive for greater integration, efficiency and coordination of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It called for the Economic and Social Council to establish a "sustainable development segment" and to reform the CSD by focusing on implementation, including approaches for integrating environment and social concerns into economic planning, and for identifying and sharing best practice. It also called for a Sustainable Development Board to provide oversight, ensure coordination, and monitor the performance of global activities.

Economic and Social Council

The General Assembly is the highest intergovernmental body for formulating policy on economic, social and related matters. The Economic and Social Council is the main body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on these subjects. The Council's mandate has been far greater than its exercise of it. Despite many attempts to strengthen its role, the Council continues to lack effectiveness and influence.

The High-level Panel believed that much can be done to improve the Council within its current mandate and recommended that a Global Leaders Forum be established. The Forum would:

- Provide leadership and guidance to the international community on development and global public goods issues.
- Develop a long-term strategic policy framework to secure consistency in the policy goals of the major international organizations.
- Promote consensus-building among Governments on integrated solutions for global economic, social and environmental issues.

The Forum would comprise the leaders of half its members, rotating on the basis of equitable geographic representation, with the participation of the executive heads of the major

international economic and financial institutions. Its meetings would be preceded by a preparatory meeting of ministers for foreign affairs and economic, social and related ministers.

Sustainable Development Board

A new governance mechanism is needed to provide oversight and be responsible for operational coherence and coordination, and system-wide implementation of policies. In that regard, the Panel recommended the establishment of a Sustainable Development Board that reports to the economic and Social Council. The role and mandate of the Board should mainly be:

- Endorse “one country programs” and approve related allocations.
- Maintain a strategic overview of the system.
- Review the implementation of global analytical and normative work of the UN in sustainable development activities.
- Oversee the management of the funding mechanism for the MDGs.
- Review the performance of the resident coordinator system.
- Commission periodic strategic reviews of “one country programs.”
- Consider and act on independent evaluation and audit findings.

The Board would comprise a subset of member states on the basis of equitable geographic representation. The Board would convene at the ministerial level when required and would invite independent experts, senior officials of international financial institutions and NGOs to participate in discussions and to inform the Board’s decision-making when necessary.

It has been 4 ½ years since the High-level Panel released its report “Delivering as One.” While some of the Panel’s recommendations in the areas of “one country program,” gender equality and business practice have been implemented, none of the recommendations related to environment and sustainable development have been implemented. It is simply a case of lacking political will. For the last 20 years, Governments have not made the environment and sustainable development a priority for action despite the accumulating evidence on environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and increased poverty and hunger. As the international community comes together again in Rio in June, 2012, the interconnected crises of the last few years—energy, food, water and climate, for example—

should provide an impetus for a new vision and thinking on global sustainability. That also should be a high priority on the agenda of the non-governmental community as they press governments for action.

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