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**Governing Council
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**Twenty-sixth session of the Governing Council/
Global Ministerial Environment Forum**
Nairobi, 21–24 February 2011
Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Policy issues: emerging policy issues

Background paper for the ministerial consultations

Discussion paper presented by the Executive Director

**Contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the preparatory
process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development**

Summary

The present paper has been prepared to provide a succinct background briefing for ministers on the overarching theme of the ministerial consultations to take place at the twenty-sixth session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum: “Contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development”. It is intended to stimulate discussion during the ministerial consultations.

* UNEP/GC.26/1.

Introduction

1. Discussions during the ministerial consultations to be held during the twenty-sixth session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum will focus on the contribution of UNEP to the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Under this overarching theme, two interlinked topics will be discussed: “Benefits, challenges and risks associated with a transition to a green economy”, and “International environmental governance”. Discussions will build upon the ministerial consultations held at the twenty-fifth session and the eleventh special session of the Council/Forum, as reflected in the President’s summaries of those consultations.¹
2. The discussions will provide the world’s environment ministers with the opportunity:
 - (a) To obtain an update on the status of preparations by the international community for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in Brazil in 2012, and actions that have been initiated by UNEP to contribute to the preparatory process for the Conference;
 - (b) To consider the contribution of UNEP to the Conference, in particular with regard to its focus on the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development;
 - (c) To discuss the green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development and new findings on pathways towards sustainable development via the transition to a green economy;
 - (d) To discuss which institutional reforms in the United Nations system are required for strengthening international environmental governance in the context of sustainable development.
3. Two other background papers (UNEP/GC.26/17/Add.1 and Add.2) provide specific information on themes I and II of the ministerial consultations. The present paper should be considered in conjunction with them.

I. Genesis of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

4. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development will mark the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (held from 5 to 16 June 1972 in Stockholm) and the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (held from 3 to 14 June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). The outcome of the former included a declaration, an action plan and a series of recommendations, including one on the creation of UNEP – a decision formalized by the General Assembly in its resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972.
5. Following the 1987 publication of the report entitled “Our Common Future” by the World Commission on Environment and Development (commonly referred to as the “Brundtland Commission”), the General Assembly, in its resolution 44/228 of 22 December 1989, decided to convene the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, accepted the offer of the Government of Brazil to act as host to the Conference and, among other things, requested UNEP to contribute fully to the Conference’s preparations. The Conference’s principal outputs were the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,² Agenda 21³ and the non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity were also opened for signature during the Conference.
6. As per its resolution 47/190 of 22 December 1992, by which it endorsed the Conference outcomes, the Assembly met five years later, at its nineteenth special session, to review the

1 A/64/25, annex II and A/65/25, annex II. The President’s summaries are a reflection of the interactive dialogue that occurred among the ministers and other heads of delegation attending the twenty-fifth session and the eleventh special session of the Council/Forum. They reflect the ideas presented and discussed rather than a consensus view of all points raised by participants.

2 *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: Resolutions adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex I.

3 *Ibid.*, resolution 1, annex II.

implementation of Agenda 21. By its resolution S-19/2, it adopted the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21.

7. Subsequently, it adopted resolution 55/199 of 20 December 2000, in which it decided to organize in 2002 a summit-level 10-year review of the progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development, accepted the offer of the Government of South Africa to host the event and invited UNEP and other relevant organizations to participate fully in the review. The World Summit on Sustainable Development took place from 26 August to 4 September 2002 and resulted in the adoption of two main documents: the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation⁴ and the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development.⁵

8. Almost 20 years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, progress has been slow in achieving internationally agreed goals, and challenges remain in integrating the three pillars of sustainable development, particularly in the context of the current global crises. The environment, including the climate and biodiversity, is increasingly under stress, but the necessary enabling environment, funds and technology to protect it through sustainable development have not been forthcoming at the expected pace. The financing arrangements for climate change remain under discussion and the Doha Development Round of talks under the World Trade Organization, aimed at lowering trade barriers around the world and permitting free trade between countries of varying prosperity, needs to be finalized.

9. Aware of the importance of making progress towards sustainability, and to mark the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the General Assembly decided, by its resolution 64/236 of 24 December 2009, to organize in 2012 the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at the highest possible level, and accepted the offer of the Government of Brazil to host it.

10. It further decided that the Conference's objectives would be to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development and addressing new and emerging challenges. The focus of the Conference would be on a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

11. In the Nusa Dua Declaration, adopted by the Governing Council in decision SS.XI/9, Governments made clear their commitment to UNEP playing an active role in the Conference. They welcomed the decision to organize the Conference and supported and encouraged the active and effective participation of UNEP in the preparatory process.

12. By its resolution 65/162 of 20 December 2010, the General Assembly welcomed the Nusa Dua Declaration as a contribution to the Conference, and called for the active and effective participation of UNEP in the preparatory process for the Conference. It also invited UNEP to contribute, notably by providing ideas and proposals reflecting its competencies, experiences and lessons learned, to the preparatory process, and stressed the need to enhance the policy relevance of the fifth Global Environment Outlook report by, among other things, identifying policy options for speeding up achievement of internationally agreed goals and for informing global and regional processes and meetings where progress towards those goals would be discussed, including the Conference on Sustainable Development.

II. Organization of the Conference, preparatory process and calendar

13. A dedicated website has been set up for the Conference, on which all information of relevance to the preparatory process can be found (www.uncsd2012.org).

14. The Secretary-General has designated Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as the Secretary-General of the Conference. A dedicated secretariat has been established, with staff drawn from the Division for Sustainable Development and seconded from other United Nations entities. The Secretary-General of the Conference will be supported by two executive coordinators.

4 *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August–4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

5 *Ibid.*, resolution 1, annex.

15. The United Nations Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs has been expanded and designated by the Secretary-General of the Conference as the main coordinating mechanism for the Conference within the United Nations system. It includes the Secretariat, regional commissions, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, convention secretariats, international financial institutions, regional development banks and the World Trade Organization, who are all called upon to provide support for the preparatory process.

16. The Secretariat, in addition to the heads of the United Nations Development Programme and UNEP in their capacity as chairs of the United Nations Development Group and the Environment Management Group, respectively, have also agreed to cooperate to support the Conference preparations.

17. An 11-member bureau has been appointed, with 10 elected members (two from each region) and Brazil as an ex officio member. It is chaired jointly by Mr. Park In-kook, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, and Mr. John Ashe, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations. The other members represent Argentina, Botswana, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Italy, Pakistan and the United States of America (which will split its term with Canada).

18. In its resolution 64/236, the General Assembly established a preparatory committee to carry out the preparations for the Conference and decided that it would meet three times. The first session took place from 17 to 19 May 2010 in New York. The Assembly further decided that the preparatory process would include regional preparatory meetings to be held in 2011.

19. In addition, at its first session, the Preparatory Committee agreed to hold three additional open-ended informal intersessional meetings, each of two days' duration.⁶ The calendar for the preparatory process is presented below.

First meeting of the Preparatory Committee	17–19 May 2010
First open-ended informal intersessional meeting	10 and 11 January 2011
Second meeting of the Preparatory Committee	7–9 March 2011
Second open-ended informal intersessional meeting	14 and 15 November 2011
Third open-ended informal intersessional meeting	Dates to be defined
Third meeting of the Preparatory Committee (back-to-back with the Conference)	May 2012 (dates to be defined)

20. The annex to the present paper provides an overview of the calendar for the preparatory process and its milestones, together with the milestones for the work of UNEP in response to the demands of the preparatory process and initiatives that contribute to the Conference's core themes and objectives.

III. Arrangements by which the United Nations Environment Programme will contribute to the Conference

21. The Executive Director of UNEP has put mechanisms in place for the engagement of UNEP in the preparatory process. Two lead managers have been accorded the responsibility of organizing the overall process.

22. An interdivisional coordinating team has been established as the main mechanism for coordinating the engagement of UNEP. The team comprises one representative from each division and will be responsible for ensuring substantive and timely inputs to the preparatory process and effective and continuous liaison throughout the UNEP secretariat. The Secretariat of the Governing Bodies (intergovernmental relations), the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch (relationship with major groups) and the Environment Management Group (inter-agency relations) also form part of the team. The lead managers and the team meet monthly. The team is also responsible for proposing and implementing a process for engaging the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements.

23. Given the Conference's central focus on the topics of governance and the green economy, UNEP has established task teams for both the green economy and international environmental governance to coordinate the UNEP contributions to the preparatory process. The lead responsibility for convening the teams lies with the directors of the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics and the Division of Environmental Law and Conventions, respectively.

⁶ This recommendation was confirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 65/152 of 20 December 2010.

24. A green economy task team was convened in September 2010 and its 15 members have held monthly meetings, chaired by the Director of the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics since then. The team has devised a workplan and calendar of key events related to the green economy and the Conference for the coming 18 months. It has considered proposed outcomes for the Conference and involved managers from all regional and other offices in planning for the event. It provides regular updates to the senior management team and the Executive Director. The work of UNEP on sustainable consumption and production and the International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management also forms part of the contribution to the Conference⁷ and will be channelled through the team.

25. Engagement with major groups and stakeholders will play a key role in the UNEP contribution to the preparatory process. The Major Groups Facilitating Committee guides and supports the overall engagement of UNEP with major groups and stakeholders. In cooperation with the Facilitating Committee, UNEP has established a major groups advisory group on international environmental governance, which has contributed to the work of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance. UNEP will organize thematic consultations on the green economy, international environmental governance and remaining gaps in the implementation of internationally agreed goals with major groups and stakeholders that will feed directly into the Conference.

26. The fifth Global Environmental Outlook report will also constitute an important contribution to the Conference. The report is a global environmental assessment launched in response to a mandate from the Governing Council.⁸ Its scope, objectives and process were subsequently agreed upon at a global intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder consultation, held in Nairobi from 29 to 31 March 2010, in accordance with the mandate from the Governing Council. Member States decided to work together on this science-policy interface process, which is aimed at the assessment of environmental change in relation to progress in meeting internationally agreed goals and efforts to accelerate their achievement. The agreement reached during the global consultation requests consideration of synergies between the themes of the Conference, such as a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

IV. Contributions of the United Nations Environment Programme to the preparatory process

27. UNEP is fully engaged in the preparatory process, in particular through its continuing work on the green economy and international environmental governance. Its experience and leadership in these areas have enabled it to make substantive contributions to the preparatory process. UNEP has contributed in all the areas identified by the secretariat of the Conference: expanded Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs meetings; preparatory process for the reports of the Secretary-General and other documents; technical inputs on the themes and objectives; staff secondments; direct support for regional preparations; developing initiatives that relate their mandates to Conference themes and objectives; and developing initiatives to feed into the preparatory process or to be launched at the Conference.

28. UNEP has seconded a senior staff member to the Conference secretariat, which is based in New York. In addition to carrying out normal secretariat duties the staff member will lead the secretariat team in devising an institutional framework for sustainable development.

29. In addition, UNEP made substantive contributions to the development of the Secretary-General's report to the Preparatory Committee at its second session (A/CONF.216/PC/7), particularly on the two themes of the Conference.

30. UNEP supports cooperation and coordination throughout the United Nations system in the organization of the Conference and in the development of substantive contributions to the preparatory process. It is engaged in the expanded Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs and is actively promoting inter-agency cooperation through the Environment Management Group. The issue management group on supporting the transition to a green economy, which is led by the Environment Management Group in close coordination with the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, is an example of such an approach. The issue management group is developing an

⁷ A special ministerial lunch on UNEP and the nineteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development will be held during the ministerial consultations of the twenty-sixth session.

⁸ Section III of Governing Council decision 25/2.

inter-agency report on the green economy, providing an overview of relevant United Nations agency activities and approaches. The report is expected to be launched in July 2011.

31. UNEP is working with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in the development of a report on the benefits, challenges and risks of a transition to a green economy. The three bodies also convened an ad hoc expert meeting on the trade and sustainable development implications of the green economy in Geneva on 7 and 8 October 2010.

32. UNEP is in the final stages of preparation of its green economy report, entitled "Moving Towards a Green Economy", to be presented at the twenty-sixth session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum and at the second session of the Preparatory Committee, in March 2011. The report examines in detail the challenges and opportunities presented by a transition to a green economy, and the policy and enabling conditions required to facilitate the move to a lower-carbon, more resource-efficient economy. The experience of UNEP in supporting the development and implementation of similar policies at the country level, promoting resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production, provides further insight into the conditions and capacity-building support required for the successful implementation of and transition to sustainable development.

33. The UNEP International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management has published three in-depth scientific assessment reports on the sustainable management of natural resources and mitigation of environmental impacts. The Panel is due to publish its report on decoupling resource use and environmental degradation from economic growth by March 2011, discussing the technological potential and policy options in relation to decoupling in various sectors. During the biennium 2012–2013, the Panel will publish 10 assessment reports that will discuss environmental sustainability and the use of natural resources critical to poverty eradication, in addition to analysing the benefits, risks and trade-offs of various low-carbon technologies from the full life-cycle perspective. The Panel is also contributing to the report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability,⁹ which is due to be published by late 2011.

34. The Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance established by Governing Council decision SS.XI/1 has identified potential system-wide functions and responses for strengthening international environmental governance and has also considered the form-related aspects of broader institutional reform of international environmental governance. The Consultative Group's work will form the basis for contributions to the work of the Preparatory Committee at its second session.

35. The Consultative Group's work builds upon that of an earlier consultative group of ministers or their high-level representatives (established by Governing Council decision 25/4), known as the "Belgrade Process", which resulted in the identification of some objectives and functions of an international environmental governance system and the development of a set of options for improving international environmental governance, which was presented to the Governing Council at its eleventh special session.

36. UNEP organized two global intersectoral consultations with major groups and stakeholders on international environmental governance and the green economy in October 2010, in addition to six regional consultations dedicated to those subjects and others. Further consultations are foreseen for 2011, beginning with the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders' Forum in February 2011, immediately prior to the twenty-sixth session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. Additional consultations will be held on the same topics at the regional level from September to December 2011. All these consultations will feed into the work of the Preparatory Committee at its second session and into the open-ended informal intersessional meetings. UNEP is closely coordinating its activities with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and other United Nations agencies.

37. UNEP will provide a summary for policymakers of the fifth Global Environment Outlook report to feed into the Preparatory Committee's work at its third session. It is intended that the summary will have been negotiated and endorsed successfully through an intergovernmental consultation (in accordance with the mandate for the report) prior to the meeting. Following endorsement of the summary, UNEP will be in a position to publish and launch the report at the Conference.

9 www.un.org/wcm/content/site/climatechange/pages/gsp.

38. UNEP is also partnering with the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi and other key stakeholders to organize in 2011 a first-of-its-kind summit entitled “Eye on Earth”. It is envisaged that the summit will bring together Governments, United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and private-sector corporations to establish a global environmental information network and a federated system of systems to share environmental data and information. It is also envisaged that a set of guidelines will be approved at the summit and presented at the Conference for formal endorsement.

39. UNEP is working with the regional economic commissions and ministerial forums to support regional mobilization for the Conference and its preparatory processes. In Africa, UNEP is a member of the steering committee for the African regional preparations for the Conference, whose secretariat is hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and will coordinate the preparation of a regional report on the green economy. UNEP is also fully engaged with the Commission and other United Nations partners in the preparation of a report on managing Africa’s natural resource base for sustainable development.

40. In Asia and the Pacific, UNEP participated in the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, held in October 2010 in Astana. It is in contact with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific regarding the preparations for the Conference and also plans to give briefings to the relevant subregional ministerial forums. Furthermore, key findings from the joint UNEP, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and Asian Development Bank report entitled “Green Growth, Resources and Resilience: Environmental Sustainability in Asia and the Pacific”, fed into the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development and will be an important regional input to the Conference preparatory process.

41. In Europe, UNEP is working closely with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which coordinates the preparations for the Conference in that region. UNEP is making an active and substantive contribution to the preparation of the Seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, to take place in Astana from 21 to 23 September 2011, which is expected to contribute to the Conference preparatory process and has the green economy as one of its major themes. Among other means, UNEP will support the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe secretariat by providing substantive inputs to a policy paper on the green economy.

42. In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNEP worked with the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean in the organization of regional consultations before the first intersessional meeting for the Conference, held on 10 and 11 January 2011. UNEP made presentations on the green economy, international environmental governance and the institutional framework for sustainable development. UNEP has been requested by Governments and major groups to participate in and support regional and subregional discussions on the Conference issues.

43. In North America, UNEP is working with major groups on the themes of the Conference and is in close contact with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In West Asia, UNEP is in contact with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia and has agreed to cooperate in the development of preparatory work in the region.

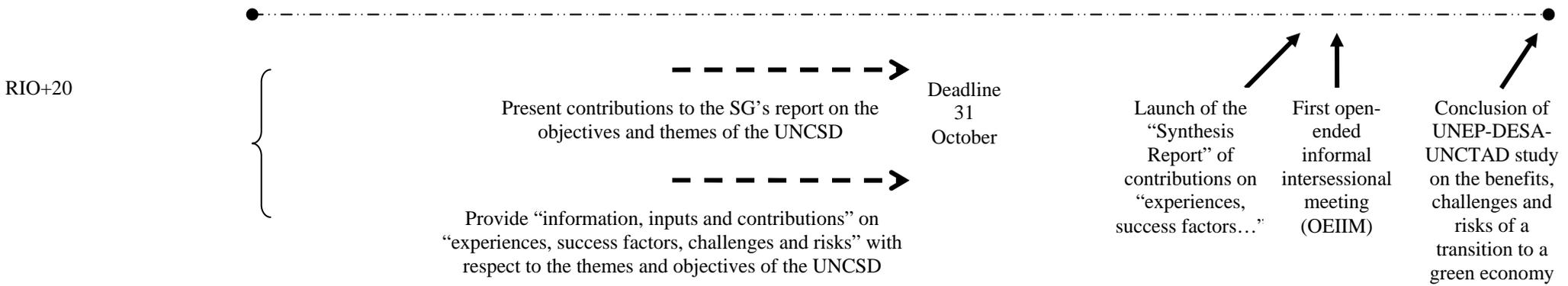
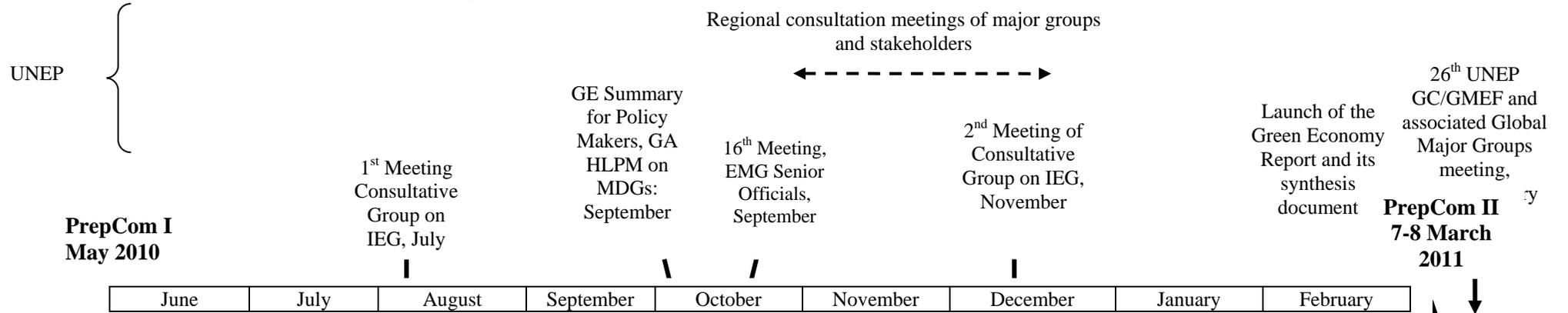
V. Sustaining the contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the preparatory process

44. Key questions in relation to sustaining and improving the contribution of UNEP to the preparatory process for the Conference include:

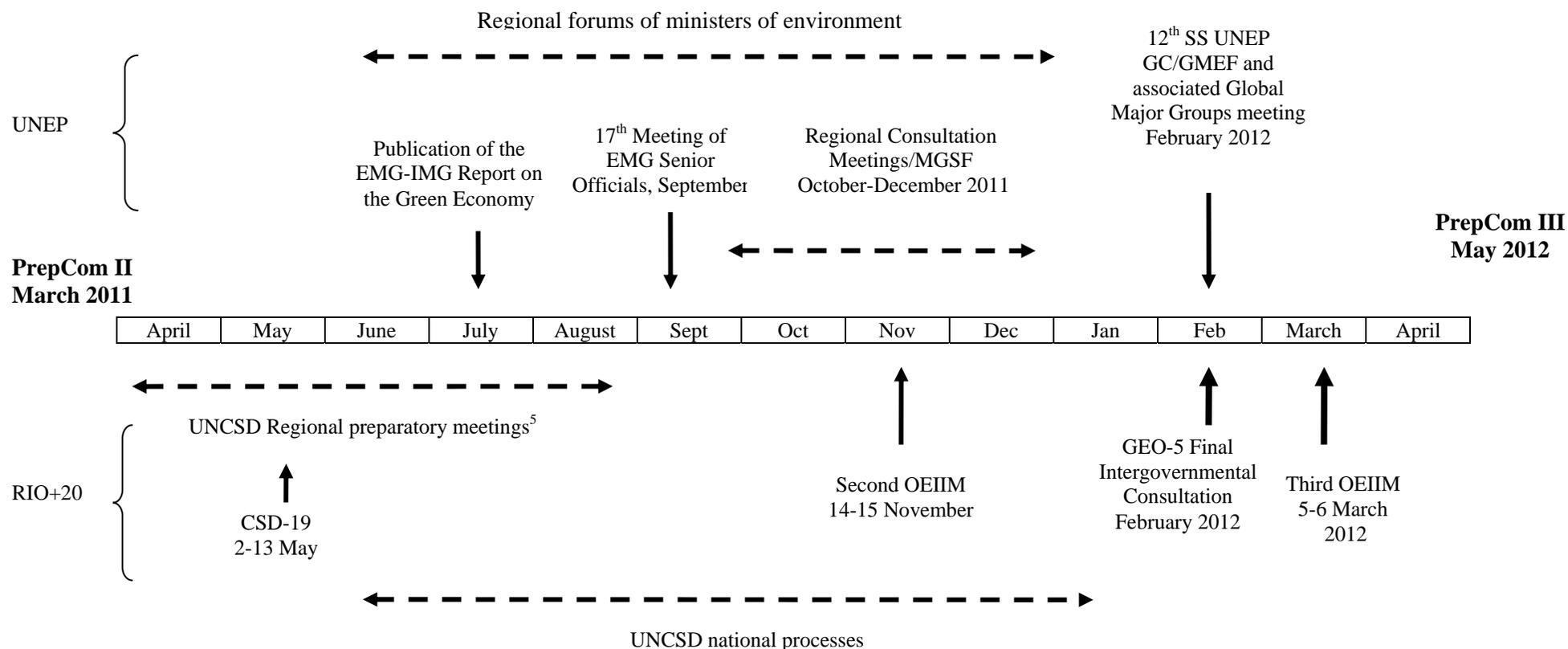
- (a) How can UNEP support ministers’ engagement in the process so as to ensure specific outcomes in relation to the objectives and themes of the Conference, in particular with regard to strengthening international environmental governance as a key contribution to the institutional framework for sustainable development and towards a transition to a fair green economy?
- (b) How can ministers and the Global Ministerial Environment Forum provide strategic direction to UNEP and to the preparatory process itself?
- (c) How can UNEP best engage at the regional and country levels to support the preparatory process of the Conference?

Annex

Milestones to the second session of the Preparatory Commission for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development



Milestones to the third session of the Preparatory Commission for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development ¹⁰



¹⁰ The dates of the third open-ended informal intersessional meeting and the regional preparatory meetings are pending confirmation.