

UNEP/GCSS.XII/L.3



Distr.: Limited 22 February 2012 English only



Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme

Twelfth special session of the Governing Council/ Global Ministerial Environment Forum Nairobi, 20–22 February 2012

> Ministerial consultations of the twelfth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the United Nations Environment Programme

President's summary

The annex to the present note sets out a summary by the President of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the ministerial consultations held during the twelfth special session. The summary is presented as submitted, without formal editing.

Annex

President's summary of the discussions by ministers and other heads of delegations at the 12th Special Session of the UNEP GC/GMEF

- 1. The UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) is the United Nations high-level environment policy forum. It brings the world's environment ministers together to "review important and emerging policy issues in the field of the environment".
- 2. The GC/GMEF provides broad policy advice and guidance with the aim, among others, of promoting international cooperation in the field of the environment.
- 3. The twelfth special session of the Council/Forum was held from 20-22 February 2012, at the United Nations Office in Nairobi, Kenya. The ministerial consultations during the twelfth special session focussed on emerging policy issues under the overall theme of "The environmental agenda in the changing world: from Stockholm (1972) to Rio (2012)". The session also provided the opportunity to mark the 40th Anniversary of UNEP.
- 4. The twelfth special session of the Council/Forum included:
 - a high-level symposium entitled "Environmental challenges and global responses in 2012":
 - parallel ministerial round-table discussions on the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication;
 - parallel ministerial round-table discussions on the institutional framework for sustainable development; and
 - a discussion on "Rio+20 and beyond: responding to the challenges".
- 5. In addition, the twelfth special session of the Council/Forum included:
 - a dialogue with former Executive Directors of UNEP entitled "1972-2012. A Review of the Evolution of Global Environmental Policy and Institutional Architecture";
 - a dialogue with the UNCSD secretariat and members of the Bureau on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20); and
 - a discussion on the report of the UN Secretary-General High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, "Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing".
- 6. The consultations were informed by three papers prepared as background for the participants, the GEO5 Summary for Policy Makers, as well as the outcome of the 13th Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum.
- 7. This President's summary identifies some of the main challenges and opportunities that were discussed by ministers and other heads of delegations with respect to the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.
- 8. The President's summary is a reflection of the interactive dialogue that occurred between the ministers and other heads of delegations attending the twelfth session of the Council/Forum. It reflects the ideas presented and discussed rather than a consensus view of participants, hence it is not a negotiated document.

Overarching Theme: The environmental agenda in a changing world: from Stockholm (1972) to Rio (2012)

Environmental Change and Global Responses

- 9. This first session of the ministerial consultations, entitled "Environmental Change and Global Responses in 2012", provided an opportunity for structured dialogue and reflection on the current state of the environment with regard to internationally agreed goals, metrics for sustainable development, and preliminary action-oriented proposals to inform the subsequent sessions on the themes of the "green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication" and the "institutional framework for sustainable development".
- 10. In opening remarks, ministers and their delegations were informed that all evidence pointed to continuing environmental deterioration, including an unprecedented rate of biodiversity loss, and that

greenhouse gas emissions remained the most significant risk to sustainable development. To be successful, UNCSD would therefore need to focus on priority issues across the most critical sectors, including water, agriculture and energy, and agree on concrete steps forward in terms of the policies that are needed.

- 11. Delegations then heard a presentation on key findings and recommendations presented in the "Summary for Policy Makers" of the Fifth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-5), which was released as a prelude to the full report. The Summary, which was negotiated and endorsed by the governments that were present on 31 January 2012, warns of the continued deterioration in the state of the global environment, pointing out that internationally agreed goals have only been partially met. It calls for policies that focus on the underlying drivers of environmental change, rather than solely concentrating on reducing environmental pressures or symptoms.
- 12. Recommendations of the summary include the use of timely and accurate data to inform decision-making; reversal of policies that generate unsustainable outcomes; the creation of incentives to advance sustainable practices; urgent, and cooperative action by governments to meet internationally agreed goals; strengthening access to information; and the engagement of civil society, the private sector and other relevant actors in policy-making processes. The Summary also includes examples of policies and practices that can be scaled up in all regions to help countries meet internationally agreed goals.

"You cannot control what you cannot measure: there is a need for consistent time-series data and assessment".

- 13. The ensuing panel discussion, which sought to extend these presentations and link the messages to the upcoming UNCSD, addressed such issues as bridging the data gap and improving access to information, key requirements for supporting the establishment of more effective environmental goals, and how to adapt the current model for economic growth to realize sustainable development. Panellists proposed sustainability as a social value, noting that democracy was a prerequisite to sustainable development, and called for an inclusive green economy approach. On access to information, they argued that availability and access to data was critical for decision-making and priority-setting, but noted that information was currently fragmented across a wide array of sources. There was therefore a need for institutional cooperation to bridge the data gap and share information using the latest technologies, tools and platforms. One such tool is the new global public information service Eye on the Earth, launched in Abu Dhabi in December 2011, which aims to build a dynamic global source of information through the integration of disparate data sources, supported by a network of networks. International and national institutions, as well as the private sector, were encouraged to join the new service.
- 14. It was also noted that data needed to be generated in a transparent way and on a timely basis, and made available to those who needed it most. The UNCSD could support this through enhanced and intensified capacity-building, including widespread dissemination of best practices and assistance to countries for implementing them. Capacity-building efforts, however, should not only reflect global and national issues, but also acknowledge local contexts and specificities. The UNCSD should also call for increased investments in education, research and knowledge-generation.

Green Economy in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication

Major points raised

- 15. The upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development ("Rio+20") provides a once in a generation opportunity to discuss and deliver an action-oriented outcome on green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.
- 16. A green economy is viewed as a pathway or tool to achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication and decent job creation, by increasing resource efficiency, supporting the shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns, and facilitating low carbon development. These efforts will need to be tailored to the specific national and local circumstances.
- 17. The challenges to a green economy transition are varied and many, especially in developing counties. But the potential opportunities for integrating the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development through the green economy approach are considerable.
- 18. Realizing opportunities and overcoming the challenges requires the participation of all stakeholders, locally tailored initiatives, and international support for developing countries in the areas

of financing, technology, and capacity building. Most importantly, a green economy must be pro-poor, inclusive, and socially equitable, generating benefits for all within planetary boundaries.

Challenges

- 19. The first and foremost challenge that governments, major groups and other stakeholders face is to have a better understanding of the green economy approach to sustainable development and poverty eradication. There are also concerns over unrestrained market and private sector control of natural resources or the risk of trade protectionism in the name of green economy. These concerns, if unaddressed or addressed in an unsatisfactory manner, will prevent the uptake of this approach. Greater efforts are needed to have open dialogues among governments, major groups and other stakeholders, beyond environmental circles, on the way to Rio+20 and beyond. This includes more public awareness-raising and localized definitions, examples and best practices of a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.
- 20. In many developing countries, especially least developed countries, where there is already interest and commitment to apply the green economy approach, major challenges include the lack of financial resources to invest in a green economy transition, the lack of access to appropriate and affordable technologies, the lack of access, especially by land-locked and mountainous countries, to external markets for their environmentally friendly products, and the lack of institutional capacity.
- 21. At the policy level, the most significant challenge is for governments to provide a level playing field through appropriate and reliable regulatory frameworks, reform of fiscal policy such as subsidies and taxes, and stimulation of green investment. But this is not easy, as there are powerful vested interests that benefit from the status quo. Without substantial political will, green economy efforts may not survive these interests. In such cases, significant resources would continue to flow into inefficient, inequitable and unsustainable use of natural resources, reducing the resources available for poverty reduction, education or health.

"It is not a question of whether we can afford a green economy, but whether we can afford not to have one".

- 22. Another major policy challenge is to ensure a fair, just and socially inclusive green economy transition. The green economy approach will necessarily involve the transformation of economic structure, which will create winners and losers. If there is a lack of proactive labour policy and social protection, there would be strong resistance to a green economy transition. More important, it would defeat one of the major objectives of greening the economy to improve human well-being and social equity.
- 23. These challenges to the implementation of the green economy approach, however, must be overcome in order to address the much larger developmental and environmental challenges such as persistent poverty, food security, high unemployment and poor quality of jobs, unsustainable natural resource use, and climate change and its impacts on developing countries.

Opportunities

- 24. The green economy approach is expected to bring benefits not only in environmental terms, but also in social and economic terms. Investing in renewable energies and the greening of the construction sector, for example, is shown to have the potential to create new jobs and new markets while improving health benefits and reducing climate change risks and impacts. Improved ecosystems, energy security, and sustainable agriculture are also important, especially for poverty reduction in developing countries. Many of the activities under the green economy approach can provide new opportunities for women to become key players in local economy, especially in the energy, land management and water sectors.
- 25. One particular opportunity the green economy approach can offer is the support for the shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns (SCP). By encouraging the redirection of investment into related activities, the green economy approach helps reinforce the case for this shift to SCP with not only environmental justification, but also social and economic justification.

"What is needed is the political will to act and to act now."

26. Redirecting investment is possible. There are country examples of collecting environmental and natural resource taxes, reforming subsidy and tax policies, with the aim to ensure that the revenue collected is used for green and sustainable initiatives, and redirecting public funds into environmental investments in the form of loans and credits. There are also experiences of swapping debt for environmental spending and using public procurement to incentivize the green economy transition by the business sector.

27. Rio+20 is a historical opportunity for all stakeholders to strengthen governance at both national and international levels, cultivate shared objectives and take collective actions. The involvement of key actors and coordinated action is important to ensure that the green economy is socially inclusive and engaging governments at all levels, civil society and the private sector. In addition, the discussions on green economy roadmaps, national green economy strategies, sustainable development goals (SDGs), the development of a knowledge-sharing platform, the creation of an institutional framework, and a compendium of commitments, are important in the run-up to Rio+20. These activities and consultation processes are providing the space for all stakeholders including the United Nations system, Breton Woods Institutions, and other organizations to explore new ways of working together.

Key points

- 28. Green economy is a pathway to achieving fair, equitable and sustainable development as well as poverty eradication. For green economy to work, however, it must respect the Rio principles and other important concepts, including social and environmental justice among and within countries. In addition, each country should have its own green economy models tailored to different national and local development aspirations, priorities, circumstances and stages of technological development.
- 29. A green economy transition requires first and foremost a participatory process in which all stakeholders government at the national and local level, businesses, civil society, local communities, small agricultural producers, women, youth are fully empowered and engaged in setting goals and targets, defining policies and instruments, and taking action to shift to sustainable consumption and production. The major groups and stakeholders, especially women and youth, are an asset in designing enabling conditions for achieving sustainable development.

"To succeed in a green economy we will need green heads (for action), green hearts (for commitment) and green hands (for action)".

- 30. In addition, there is a need for strategies and policies to be comprehensive and undertaken across government agencies. It is important to focus on removing barriers to a green economy transition and aligning existing policies, budgets and investments across sectors.
- 31. The international community has the obligation to support developing countries in their green economy transition. The support is needed in the area of financial resources, clean technologies, public awareness, peace building, capacity building, including skills training, and the development of institutional and regulatory frameworks. In addition, the international community should resist trade protectionism and conditionality on development assistance disguised as green economy measures. It should provide support in market access allowing green goods and services to expand in volume. On technology, it is important to recognize the role of indigenous knowledge and technology such as those found in mountain and agricultural communities, culture and ethics in fostering sustainable behaviours.
- 32. UNEP has an important role in providing much needed international support to developing counties, such as the sharing of lessons, knowledge, best practices and operational models of a green economy across sectors and levels of society. Another major area of support is to facilitate the setting of goals based on existing international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals. Targets for gender mainstreaming should also be concluded. This also includes the work to better measure wellbeing, progress and prosperity beyond GDP, covering all three pillars of sustainability.

"We need to make sure the future we want is the future we get".

33. Rio+20 must be an event of hope and action and not merely a statement of aspirations. It should be bold and urgently deliver a strong framework for action with measurable goals and indicators, providing the foundation for an adaptable, flexible and customized approach to achieving a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development

Major points raised

- 34. While recognizing UNEP's contribution to sustainable development, there is overwhelming support that urgent change is needed to the current system of international environmental governance (IEG). Incremental reform has been too slow and has not addressed the nature or the severity of environmental issues facing the world, but there remain questions as to the exact architecture of a reformed environmental governance system.
- 35. The way in which sustainable development has been addressed after Rio 1992 has been inadequate. Many multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) have been agreed and programmes

have been established, but there is a lack of financial resources, adequate monitoring and review mechanisms to support implementation.

- 36. Strengthening of the environmental component of the institutional framework for sustainable development found broad support. From the views expressed by those governments participating, many supported the establishment of a specialized agency for the environment. Others supported the strengthening of UNEP but felt that changing UNEP to a specialized agency could weaken it.
- 37. There was general agreement that "time is not on our side". Rio+20 must take quick and immediate action to respond to the current environmental crisis. Delegates stressed that there should be a clear decision on the institutional framework for sustainable development and international environmental governance.

Challenges

"There is a crying need to put some order into international environmental governance."

- 38. The current system of international environmental governance is fragmented, weak and incoherent; it lacks leadership and is characterized by an inefficient use of resources.
- 39. In a world of scarce resources, a strengthened structure for the environment needs to combine different sources of financing. There is an urgent need to create a stronger link between global environmental policy and global environmental financing.
- 40. There is agreement that sustainable governance needs to be strengthened, but participants expressed uncertainty about how the three pillars could best be integrated and balanced. There was concern that each of the three pillars of sustainable development should be given equal strength.

Opportunities

"The window of opportunity only opens once in a while. Today we find ourselves far short of what is needed".

- 41. Reform of the system should address the current shortcomings and may include: an anchor organization with universal membership; improving the science-policy interface; providing guidance to, and coordination of, MEAs; enhance synergies among MEA clusters to increase their effectiveness and efficiency; developing a UN system-wide strategy for the environment, which sets priorities, decides on the division of labour and assigns roles to relevant actors in the system, and links private investment and public policy. The establishment of a system of assessed contributions for the IEG anchor institution would increases the total volume of available resources.
- 42. Synergies among MEAs offer an opportunity to realize more efficient use of resources and to more effectively address environmental issues inter alia (EU) at the national and international levels and in delivering on the ground. In addition to administrative savings, governments should also look at opportunities for programmatic synergies, which can bring even greater benefits. A strengthened UNEP could focus on supporting MEA implementation at the national level through the UNDAF process, assist MEAs in accessing GEF finance, and enable biodiversity related and other MEAs to use IPBES capacity building mechanisms for their parties.
- 43. Rio+20 represents a unique window of opportunity to strengthen UNEP through better capacity-building and sustained funding. An important measure for securing sufficient, predictable and coherent funding is establishing a stronger link between global environmental policy making and financing.
- 44. Local authorities are already closely involved in issues relating to sustainable development, therefore their enhanced participation in global policy making and implementation of international decisions at the local level can substantially enhance sustainable development.
- 45. An opportunity to incorporate human rights and enhance the principles of equity in institutional framework for sustainable development could be through the creation of an ombudsperson for future generations both at the international and national level equipped with sufficient resources to fulfil her role.
- 46. There is a need for improving participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in decision-making processes and national implementation, with a view to improving accountability and transparency as one key issue for sustainable development. This could be achieved through a global instrument implementing Principle 10 of the Rio Convention and through the reform of the governance of existing bodies.

Key points

"The time for action has come now".

- 47. It was suggested that at Rio+20, we should take a decision on international environmental governance and the institutional framework for sustainable development.
- 48. There is a need to promptly put in place a strengthened international environmental governance system, with a strong mandate and political visibility, able to fulfil the key functions that are needed to address the environmental challenges that our world faces today.
- 49. In order to preserve the environment for current and future generations, it is necessary to transcend national interests and select what is best for the global community.

Rio+20 and beyond: Responding to the Challenges

Key Points

- 50. All three pillars of sustainable development are intertwined like the three dimensional, double helix structure of DNA, and environment is a key integrating link. Sustainable development must integrate the three pillars into one agenda with strong bonds such that it does not break down.
- 51. Environment ministers alone cannot implement the sustainable development agenda. There is a high need to engage with finance, planning and development ministries and persuade them that an inclusive green economy is economic development.
- 52. A smooth transition to a green economy will lead to smart development that includes safeguards to protect vulnerable communities and to ensure a socially inclusive growth.
- 53. Our collective measure of wealth must go beyond GDP to include environmental and social dimensions to more accurately capture human well-being.
- 54. A new institutional infrastructure should be based on functional needs. We must take a fresh look at the role of civil society. We need to move out of our comfort zone and better engage the private sector in decision making processes.
- 55. UNEP must be strengthened, including through universal membership and sustainable financing.
- 56. We need to remove our mental "square brackets" in Rio+20 so we can take advantage of the opportunities to move forward on sustainable development of the entire planet for all people in an equitable way.
- 57. It is a fundamentally different world from the one of 1992. New interconnectivity technologies allow us to tap into knowledge and imagination of a wider and broader set of actors. In Rio, governments must commit to robust accountability, including by establishing concrete monitoring mechanisms, such as an early warning system that will alert us to problems in implementation. Decision making must be more transparent.

Appendices: reports from the symposium on "Environmental change and global responses in 2012", the panel discussion and the roundtables on green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development, the panel discussion and roundtables on the institutional framework on sustainable development and other related events

to be inserted