

Moving forward from Rio

Remarks by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) at European Environmental Bureau's Annual Conference Brussels, 1 October 2012



Honourable Delegates,

Thank you for inviting me to address the Annual Conference of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB).

May I also thank the European Commission and member states for their continued and long term support to UNEP and very positive engagement in the Rio+20 process—not least in the area of an Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development and UNEP's work on taking forward the inclusive Green Economy.

As we meet here in Brussels, governments are meeting in New York for the 67th session of the UN General Assembly under the Presidency of Vuk Jeremic of Serbia.

Before them are the outcomes of the Rio+20 Summit which were adopted by the UN General

Assembly 66.

These are now subject to a variety of processes, some which should conclude by December and others such as the development of a set of Sustainable Development Goals and the reform of Economic and Social Council that will take perhaps two or so years.

We all share to a greater or lesser degree a sense of frustration that Rio+20 did not deliver all of the opportunities that it could have done.

But I believe that many here also share a sense of optimism that if the decisions taken by Heads of State in June are vigorously and determinedly implemented with a sense of urgency, we may see a new, perhaps more intelligent, response to the implementation of sustainable development in a world of now over seven billion people.

UNEP is already moving forward on the outcomes in partnership with governments, colleagues in the UN system, civil society, local authorities and business in those areas that are ripe for fast action.

Some actions, including as they relate to the strengthening and upgrading of UNEP including universal membership and strengthened resources can in many ways only be taken forward when hopefully the 67th session of the UNGA adopts the relevant resolutions.

2020 Chemicals Target

At Rio+20, governments re-affirmed their commitment to the 2020 target on the sound management of chemicals that was originally set at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

I mention this because perhaps this may have not been upper most in some peoples' minds today when considering the outcome of Rio+20—but it should be.

Two weeks ago, UNEP hosted the 3rd session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management.

Here governments, industry and NGOs took stock of what has-- and what has not-- been achieved and at the end renewed commitment to the Quick Start Programme (QSP) of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management for which UNEP serves as the secretariat.

Specifically, delegates agreed to extend the life of the QSP's trust fund and we look forward to additional financial contributions aimed at assisting developing countries realize their ambition in terms of sound chemicals management.

In support of SAICM; the 2020 target; the transition towards an inclusive Green Economy and the strengthening of the science policy interface, UNEP released the Global Chemicals Outlook in advance of the chemicals conference.

It provided Green Economy-style analysis on the costs to economies of inaction in respect to chemicals.

For example it underlined that the estimated costs of poisoning from pesticides in sub-Saharan Africa now exceeds the total annual overseas development aid given to the region for basic health services, excluding HIV/AIDS.

Between 2005 and 2020, the accumulated cost of illness and injury linked to pesticides in small scale farming in sub-Saharan Africa could reach USD \$90 billion.

Spotlighted too where sound management has and is paying dividends.

Indonesia introduced as early as the 1990s an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme that helped farmers to reduce the use of pesticides by over 50 per cent and increase yields by approximately 10 per cent

Economic gains from implementing the country's 2001-2020 national IPM programme are estimated to be equivalent to 3.65 per cent of Indonesia's GDP in 2000

Predicted benefits over a 19-year-period include the avoidance of over 20,000 cases of acute poisonings among rice farmers, a total accumulated GDP gain equivalent to 22 per cent of Indonesia's GDP in 2000, and an increase in household income by up to 5 per cent.

It is important in the many potentially transformational outcomes of Rio+20 not to lose sight of the many other commitments that have been agreed over the past four decades since the Stockholm UN Conference on the Human Environment that also gave birth to the Environment Programme of the UN—UNEP in short.

Rio+20 was not about some new shiny coins, but about polishing many old all too often neglected ones and above all finding more holistic, intelligent ways of recalibrating sustainable

development in order to finally start truly implementing it.

Honourable delegates,

Green Economy

As you know Rio+20 gave the green light to multilateral work on the inclusive Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

It was decided that it represent an important tool for achieving a sustainable century.

In many ways what Rio+20 did in respect to UNEP was to provide a license to respond to interests of countries to develop the concept of an inclusive the Green Economy further and to respond in partnership with others to specific country requests and needs.

In some countries the issue of how a Green Economy can accelerate and scale-up poverty eradication will be paramount.

In others, for example countries in the European Union, Japan and North America, the Green Economy will and indeed is manifesting itself in ways that reflect their national imperatives in terms of resource efficiency for example and decoupling economic growth from environmental footprints.

So in short the inclusive Green Economy will express itself as series of nationally led processes and an exchange of ideas across the international community where nations learn from one another in order to realize sustainable development.

In the spirit of our theme here today, UNEP is already taking forward this issue. For example we have just launched the Partnership for Action on a Green Economy

It is building upon and indeed will expand upon the existing green economy advisory services that are supporting over 20 developing countries across sectors of relevance to them—be it agriculture, transport or the built environment.

New elements of PAGE include improved capacity building, increased sharing of UNEP's expertise with interested countries, green economy policy development and scientifically-rigorous analysis.

The partnership is with the International Labour Organization which is evolving national initiatives on green jobs and indeed tomorrow morning an event of the ILO and UNEP takes place in the European Parliament on green employment opportunities.

UNEP is also looking to engage with other UN agencies including the UN Industrial Development Organization and their green industries initiative.

This is important, because UNEP may have initiated the idea and provided a great deal of analysis on what a transition to such an economy can look like, but we cannot and would not wish to implement all its aspects on the ground.

Above all, we are the environmental programme of the UN and a way of catalyzing a UN-system wide response to the challenges and opportunities of our time.

So PAGE is essentially a supportive framework for UNEP to continue and to scale-up the provision of knowledge and expertise and engage in partnerships like the Global Green Knowledge Platform.

10 Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production

In Rio Heads of States gave the go ahead for the 10 Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production and requested UNEP to act as Secretariat of the 10YFP.

UNEP has also been asked to establish and administer a Trust Fund to support Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) implementation in developing countries.

Currently we are in many ways putting in place the institutional architecture to take the 10YFP forward including: --Developing the Global SCP Clearinghouse-- This will be the information platform of the 10YFP to exchange knowledge, expertise, tools and build networks and establish open or private working works around specific SCP themes.

The pre-launching of the Clearinghouse is planned in mid-November during the UN General Assembly.

Consultations for developing countries and launching the 10YFP programmes -- we are planning to start a consultation process with governments and major groups on what they envision as a 10YFP "Programme", what they expect from the programmes and how they could contribute

National Focal Points -- The 10YFP requires identification of national focal point. The Secretariat will be sending a letter to all governments requesting nomination of these focal points.

10YFP Branding and communication strategy—the 10YFP for SCP does not exactly trip of the tongue for most people!! Sometimes the importance of connecting with the public and others as a recipe for success is forgotten in a bureaucracy.

So we are at an advanced stage of producing a communication strategy, including development of logos and an attractive, understandable and accessible website.

The outcomes of Rio+20 have also provided an opportunity to reflect on the links and mutually supportive aspects of SCP and the inclusive Green Economy in order to ensure we do not duplicate efforts.

In short, and for historical, political and perhaps ideological reasons there has been a firewall between these two areas which rationally makes little sense.

The International Resource Panel, supported by the EC and other country partners, is looking to develop the scientific analysis on decoupling food production and consumption from food waste and food loss.

Agri-food is one of the sectors under the 10YFP for SCP and an area that resonates across continents, countries and communities not least as a result of evidence that 30 or 40 percent of food is wasted or lost around the globe.

In order to galvanize action and engage the public and business on SCP, UNEP is planning to soon launch an international campaign on food waste dovetailing with existing initiatives by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization on food loss in developing nations.

We consider such a campaign can also support ideas and directions under the decision at Rio+20 to develop a suite of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—considering the way this issue unites farmers and consumers, supply chains and supermarkets, hoteliers and restaurants North and South.

Food waste and food loss is a food security issues and for many a moral one -- given the fact that every apple or sheaf of wheat wasted or lost also represents a waste of chemicals, fertilizers, land, water and energy, this is very much an environmental sustainability theme too.

UNEP would be delighted to secure your support for this, from financial support to expertise and ideas.

Massively reducing food waste and food loss is a very emblematic example of how globally, nationally and regionally societies can boost resource efficiency while also tackling food security.

EC Environment Commissioner Janez Potocnik should be applauded for the establishment of the Resource Efficiency Transition Platform of which UNEP is part and which supports the ambitious Horizon 2020 initiative.

Managing waste in all its forms is very much part of this transition as are improvements in the management of food including goals to, by 2020 drive a 20%

reduction in the food chain's resource inputs and an aim that disposal of edible food waste should have been halved in the EU by the same date.

Honourable delegates,

Sustainable Development Goals

the SDGs do represent a real opportunity of uniting the agendas of developing countries with the responsibilities and impacts of developed ones.

In short, the SDGs can be a global framework that could make every nation accountable on how collectively as a group of over 190 countries we all move forward to deliver a sustainable

century.

But I would not underestimate the challenge of delivering meaningful SDGs by 2015 to compliment the Millennium Development Goals—a challenge that is more political perhaps than practical.

I am sure that the EC's set of similar goals, developed just before Rio+20, can provide some interesting and intellectual direction to the discussions in New York over the coming months and next few years.

The UN System Task Team on the Post 2-15 Development Agenda has been requested to provide support to the open ended working group of member states on the SDGs and UNEP has been requested to contribute.

There are many areas where I consider UNEP to have a unique valued-added here, not least in the systematic assessment of achieving internationally agreed goals as a result of our work on, for example, the Global Environment Outlook-5 report unveiled just before Rio+20. Other areas include green economy indicators, looking beyond Gross Domestic product as a measure of wealth and ecosystems through, for example, The

Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity.

UNEP is, along with many other UN bodies and the World Bank, working closely with the UN Statistical Commission to identify new approaches for measuring progress.

The Statistical Commission's work is drawing on a range of assessments and pilot projects ongoing across the globe.

Inclusive Wealth, which is based on the World Bank's Adjusted Net Saving indicator, is developing a more inclusive indicator of national wealth, covering not only produced capital, human capital, and natural capital, but also critical ecosystems

UNEP and the UN University's International Human Development Programme at Rio+20 presented findings from an Inclusive Wealth Index (IWI) looking at several countries including

Brazil.

Other pathways towards a new indicator include:-

The EU effort to go "Beyond GDP" - launched in November 2007 with the aim of coming up with a broader set of macro-level indexes other than GDP and provide information on how economic growth affects its own foundation (stock of all assets)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Public Procurement

There were many other positive outcomes from Rio+20.

During the summit over 30 governments and institutions including Brazil, Denmark, Switzerland and UNEP announced a new global International Sustainable Public Procurement Initiative (SPPI) aimed at scaling-up the level of public spending flowing into goods and services that maximize environmental and social benefits.

Studies indicate that sustainable public procurement, which represents between 15 and 25 per cent of GDP, offers a tremendous opportunity towards green innovation and sustainability.

This initiative compliments and supports the EC's pioneering and rapidly evolving Green Public Procurement initiative currently now moving into areas such as procurement of waste water infrastructure.

Perhaps I can mention just one more in detail where we are also 'moving forward'.

Corporate Sustainability Reporting

What has become known as the 'Group of Friends of paragraph 47' represents an enormous opportunity to build greater transparency of companies' environmental, social and governance foot prints.

And in doing so generate increased possibilities for, for example, pension funds to choose—you may say reward—and thus invest in those companies reaching for far higher sustainability standards.

Not for sentimental reasons but for bottom line ones—there is increasing evidence that companies who adopt higher environmental, social and governance policies are actually better managed and represent a lower risk and a higher return over the medium to long term. UNEP through its UNEP Finance Initiative and relationship with the Global Reporting Initiative has been supporting corporate sustainability reporting since the Rio Earth Summit of 1992.

It has delivered progress—Bloomberg estimates that around 25 per cent of the companies it surveys incorporate varying levels of sustainability reporting alongside financial accounts: But 75 per cent do not.

Rio+20 has given fresh impetus and energy towards bringing more companies on board as a result of the announcement by Brazil, Denmark, France and South

Africa to take up this challenge.

With the support of UNEP and the Global Reporting Initiative, these Group of Friends of paragraph 47 aim to bring more nations on board and deliver a road map by the end of this year.

Only last week the UNEP Deputy Executive Director Amina Mohamed was in India as part of Moving forward from Rio.

The event was part of a review and a discourse towards a new and more ambitious and inclusive set of corporate reporting standards called G4 developed by GRI and scheduled for launch in May 2013.

I am sure these standards will support the ambitions of companies North and South, small and large to be part of this new momentum on corporate sustainability reporting.

Meanwhile UNEP has initiated and is finalising a joint project in cooperation with the Global Reporting Initiative which will raise awareness and build capacity in developing countries.

The project looks to also partner with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and, the UN Global Compact. The project would build upon the efforts of the Group of Friends and beyond.

UNEP

As for UNEP and the outcome by heads of state calling for it to be strengthened and upgraded, again we will have to in many ways wait for the final decisions in New York.

But I get a sense that there is a positive aura around this issue among member states and indeed support not only for the issue of universal membership but also for increased resources from the UN regular budget.

When UNEP was established 40 years ago, its share of that regular budget was around 1.15 per cent—today it is 0.27 per cent.

Returning UNEP's share of the regular budget to the levels of the early 1970s seems to be a rational way of proceeding and my sense is that many support this direction.

UNEP is also in deep reflection on how to work with governments to elevate the role and the relationship of major groups with the UNEP secretariat and the UNEP Governing Council. Honourable delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

In Conclusion

Rio+20 may seem remote to those eking out an existence, surviving floods and droughts, fighting daily to find a morsel of food for themselves and their families.

Yet it did mark to my mind a fresh sense of understanding that sustainable development without environmental and social improvements is unsustainable.

Indeed perhaps the false tradeoffs between economic development and environmental and social sustainability could, as a result of Rio+20, be consigned to the history books.

UNEP looks forward to continue to work closely with the EC, the member states of the European Union and this Continent's institutions like the EEB, the private sector and civil

society as we take Rio+20 into the implementation phase.

Moving forward from Rio is one of the themes here today—it was at the centre of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment a couple of weeks ago in Arusha, Uganda.

It is a key part of the UN GA deliberations and it will shape the discourse and decisions at the upcoming meeting of the UNEP-administered Convention on Biological Diversity meeting taking place in Hyderabad this month.

It will also be at the centre of the annual High Level Meeting between UNEP and the EC taking place here in Brussels in just over one week's time.

There we look forward to accelerating and scaling up action and cooperation with the Directorate General of Environment but also evolving and maturing our relationships and cooperation with the Directorate Generals of Development Cooperation and Climate to Research.

Thank you