

Defining The Highest-Level Body for Sustainable Development in the UN **The functions of a sustainable development mechanism in ECOSOC or in a Council**

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Introduction

Broadly speaking, there are basically two options available to meet the challenges of strengthening the institutional framework on sustainable development at UN level. These are the reform of ECOSOC or the establishment of a Sustainable Development Council. However putting these two options aside for now, the mechanism established will have to incorporate and be based on the same functions operating with the same mechanisms. Therefore, focusing on functions first will aid in determining what form of body is most effective. Given the history of sustainable development in the UN, and the global issues we face, effectiveness is now more important than ever.

This paper seeks to progress the governance debate by enumerating some of the functions and mechanism that would be central to any sustainable development body at the UN. A total change of culture must take place within the UN on issues relating to sustainable development in order to tackle what is perceived to be the challenges facing humanity and the Earth.

We have drawn from the previous mandates of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development from 1993 and 2003.

Functions

On a general basis, the functions of a highest-level body on sustainable development within the United Nations system include:

- Political leadership and agenda setting to be enabled by establishing a high-level political body to follow and advance the sustainable development agenda;
- Ensuring implementation to be bolstered by a periodic review mechanism for increased implementation and cooperation;
- Monitor progress in promoting, facilitating and financing, as appropriate, access to and transfer of environmentally and sustainably sound technologies and corresponding know-how, in particular to developing countries, on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed, taking into account the need to protect intellectual property rights as well as the special needs of developing countries for the implementation of sustainable development agreements;
- To review and monitor regularly progress towards the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national income (GNI) of developed countries for official development assistance (ODA). This review process should systematically combine the monitoring of the implementation of sustainable development agreements with the review of financial resources available;
- To receive and analyse relevant input from competent non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders, including the scientific and the private sector, in the context of the overall implementation of sustainable development agreements;
- To enhance the dialogue and participation, within the framework of the United Nations, between non-governmental organizations, relevant stakeholders and the independent sector, as well as other entities outside the United Nations system;



- To review new and emerging issues as well as monitor the implementation of sustainable development goals;
- To enhance the science-policy interface and progress tracking – to be achieved by institutionalizing a regular sustainable development assessment on that global scale;
- To strengthening inter-agency coordination through a sustainable development subcommittee of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) of UN bodies to follow-up and provide advice to the Secretary General on coordination;
- To ensure long-term thinking in policy-making and decision-making – to be achieved by institutionalize a framework to ensure that the needs of future generations are considered in the UN.

The following structural issues, including mechanisms, must also be addressed:

- The structure and modality of the new body, including its leadership, secretariat, membership, and meeting frequency;
- The relationship of the any new highest-level body for sustainable development to the UN General Assembly;
- The relationship to the permanent councils, in particular ECOSOC;
- The relationship to other relevant UN entities, such as specialised agencies, subsidiary bodies working on sustainable development and other relevant intergovernmental institutions, in order to operationalize and integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development;
- Target and designate those specialised agencies with a mandate to work on the three dimensions of sustainable development to report back to the new sustainable development body: The World Bank and IMF to report back on green economy issues; WHO, FAO, ILO to report on social issues; UNEP and MEAs to report on environmental issues;
- The further integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and how they are reported on by the remaining specialised agencies;
- The particular focus that should be given to the financial institutions (IFIs) with a view to the green economy and to UNEP and UNDP;
- The SD organisation's standing in the international sustainable development and environmental governance system, as well as its relationship to environmental law systems, and all intergovernmental entities dealing with aspects of sustainable development;
- How emerging issues will be properly placed on the agenda of the new sustainable development body, being aware that these issues will be of an unpredictable nature;
- How emerging issues will be properly dealt with when they occur, and how a response system be developed to tackle these issues.
- How the open and interactive nature of the present Commission on Sustainable Development can be built on to allow a more enhanced role for Major Groups and civil society, as envisaged by Agenda 21.

Good governance is fundamental to sustainable development. And form must follow function. Focussing first on the functions listed above will help unblock the stalemate about the form of the body require to meaningfully and effectively drive sustainable development across the UN systems.