



**Stakeholder Forum**  
FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

## **Discussion Paper 1:**

# **International Governance for Sustainable Development and Rio+20:**

## **Initial Perspectives**

February 2010

## Discussion Paper 1:

# International Governance for Sustainable Development and Earth Summit 2012:

## Initial Perspectives<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations General Assembly resolution establishing the 2012 RIO+20 Conference<sup>2</sup>, to be held in Brazil, identifies the international governance for sustainable development (IGSD) as one of the overarching priority thematic issues. This recognition is consistent with many of the submissions made by Member States to the UN Secretary-General, wherein they outlined the importance of strengthening both the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) as the highest level forum for sustainable development in the UN, as well as the need to address the broader UN international architecture that supports sustainable development implementation (See Annex 1). It also follows closely on a number of innovative suggestions by governments and stakeholders for an overhaul of the international sustainable development architecture, including proposals such as: transforming the CSD into a sustainable development council under the General Assembly; converting the UN Trusteeship Council into a sustainable development council; using the Security Council to address priority development challenges such as climate change; and initiating a sustainable development segment as part of the annual sessions of the UN Economic and Social Council.

While there is merit in further discussing these and other governance proposals, the greatest challenge has been deciding where, how and when to locate discussions on IGSD. In 2007, Stakeholder Forum proposed a two-track sustainable development initiative<sup>3</sup> to define the areas where the UN's institutions, and the CSD in particular, could make a distinctive contribution to the implementation of global sustainable development. The 2007 argument was firmly constructed on the paragraph 157 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), which stated:

***"strengthening of the international institutional framework for sustainable development is an evolutionary process. It is necessary to keep relevant arrangements under review; identify gaps; eliminate duplication of functions; and continue to strive for greater integration, efficiency and coordination of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development aiming at the implementation of Agenda 21."***<sup>4</sup>

Despite this existing and clear mandate for international institutions to keep sustainable development governance under review, this is not occurring. In fact, the last major discussion on IGSD was held during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Furthermore, discussions on the CSD-11 programme of work's cross cutting issue of IGSD have been limited, and in some cases absent from

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<sup>1</sup> This Discussion Paper was written by Felix Dodds and Richard Sherman. For more information on Stakeholder Forum's activities on Rio+20 see: <http://www.earthsummit2012.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. 2009. Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development; internet: [http://www.earthsummit2012.org/fileadmin/files/Earth\\_Summit\\_2012/GA\\_resolution.pdf](http://www.earthsummit2012.org/fileadmin/files/Earth_Summit_2012/GA_resolution.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Stakeholder Forum. 2007. The UN System and Sustainable Development: Proposals for a Sustainable Development Institutional Initiative, 24 April; internet: [www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/CSD\\_paper\\_version\\_5.pdf](http://www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/CSD_paper_version_5.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations. 2002. Johannesburg Plan of Implementation; internet: [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD\\_POI\\_PD/English/POIToc.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/POIToc.htm)

the last few cycles.

As Brazil outlined in their submission to the Secretary-General:

***"Notwithstanding the international consensus on the need for enhanced coordination and cooperation among international organizations and environmental agreements, diverging views remain on how to reform the current United Nations system so as to enhance its efficiency for driving sustainable development. Overcoming this impasse requires a broader and integrated reflection in lieu of the fragmented approaches which have been attempted so far."***

In this discussion paper, we have modified and updated the 2007 Stakeholder Forum paper to respond to the recognition of IGSD in the upcoming Rio+20 process.

## A Strengthened CSD

In 2007, we proposed the establishment of a process under the CSD, in the form of an

***open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group to focus mainly on the future and role of the CSD, including through a stocktaking process of the first three cycles.***

Such a process would build on the initial views of Brazil, South Africa (see Annex I) and in particular the European Union which proposed that the Conference:

***"should seek ways for strengthening the CSD's role to review the progress in implementing Agenda 21 and JPOI, and reinforces its position, including its analytical and information base, in the context of UN reform."<sup>5</sup>***

The open-ended *Ad Hoc* Working Group, would have as its primary objective ensuring that the CSD returns to its original mandate of integrating environment and development in intergovernmental decision making. The *Ad Hoc* Working Group could conduct a 'stocktaking exercise', with the participation of all stakeholders of the three CSD cycles and identify lessons learnt and obstacles in the implementation of the CSD's core mandates. The aim of such a process would be to identify areas where the CSD could be improved, without any new reform-type initiatives or processes being launched. This initiative would be a learning process and could include a continuous discussion on the CSD and sustainable development in the UN system. The process could lead to a set of changes to the CSD to make ensure its mandate is properly fulfilled and that the CSD becomes the authoritative voice for sustainable development in the intergovernmental system.

The process should focus both on content and process – how can the CSD meetings become more innovative, inclusive, and stimulating, and how can the CSD ensure its outcomes are relevant? South Africa's initial views outline several key issues that should be further explored by the Working Group, namely:

***"In the stock taking process, we need to ask if we are using the CSD sessions effectively? Is it necessary to refine the way that we are interpreting and implementing the decision that member States took at CSD-11, on the organization of the work of the CSD? A number of challenges could be considered, namely: there is a limited assessment of challenges and regional and international***

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<sup>5</sup> European Union. 2009. Submission to the UN Secretary-General; 28 May; Internet: [http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd\\_aofw\\_ni/ni\\_pdfs/hlm\\_submissions/eu.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_ni/ni_pdfs/hlm_submissions/eu.pdf)

***level; there is a limited and general focus on means of implementation; there is limited focus on the institutional arrangement for international sustainable development governance. There is an ad hoc approach to longer terms monitoring of progress with the JPOI targets that have already been reviewed in previous cycles. There is a tendency towards the de-linkage of the JPOI and MDGs.***

***Most importantly there seems to be a tendency to reinforce in a non-integrated way, the positions that are taken in other international forums, on economic, social and environmental issues. This means that in the CSD, there is risk that we are disintegrating and not integrating the economic, social and environmental pillars. This means, that potentially the CSD is a follower and not a leader on sustainable development."***

Regarding substantive issues, the *Ad Hoc* Group could focus on how the multi-year programme of work is implemented in terms of the original CSD mandate as outlined in A/RES/47/191, UNGASS-19 and the JPOI. The discussions could focus on the following five thematic areas:

- 1.1.1 influence on policy/action;
- 1.1.2 approach to governance;
- 1.1.3 political/science/knowledge interface;
- 1.1.4 means of implementation and financing; and
- 1.1.5 participation.

In addition, the working group could address the recommendation made by the European Union which suggested that the Event should "look beyond the CSD work programme and start thinking of how we envisage a post-2017 CSD.<sup>6</sup>" Such a process could be launched at CSD-18, and initially report back to CSD-19 and PrepComm II (2011) with a proposed set of measures that could be implemented during the multi-year programme of work following the High Level Event. This would allow time for reflection and the identification of priority areas that could then be continually addressed and evaluated by members of the CSD.

## **A Strengthened Global Sustainable Development Regime**

Under the JPOI (paragraph 143) the General Assembly was tasked with giving "overall political direction to the implementation of Agenda 21 and its review." To date sustainable development issues are generally discussed within the Second Committee, but in most cases the outcomes are procedural and not substantive. Lars-Göran Engfeldt, the former Swedish Sustainable Development Ambassador argued that "another major weakness was that the highly relevant results of Rio were not linked to the ongoing reform process in the economic and social fields of the UN." He says:

***"there was no movement to use Rio, in spite of its unprecedented high-level participation, as an inspiration or vehicle for the much-needed overall reforms that could lead to a merging of UN development agendas and programmes."<sup>7</sup>***

Engfeldt's views are too a large degree true of the JPOI, and as such sustainable development governance was largely absent from the round of UN reform that emanated from the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document.

<sup>6</sup> European Union. 2009. Submission to the UN Secretary-General; 28 May; Internet: [http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd\\_aofw\\_ni/ni\\_pdfs/hlm\\_submissions/eu.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_ni/ni_pdfs/hlm_submissions/eu.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Lars-Göran Engfeldt. 2009. Towards a World Summit on Sustainable Development 2012 "Uniting for Sustainability", Presentation to the European Economic and Social Committee and Stakeholder Forum Brussels, 1 October; internet: [http://www.earthsummit2012.org/fileadmin/files/Earth\\_Summit\\_2012/brussels/Lars\\_Goran\\_Engfeldt.pdf](http://www.earthsummit2012.org/fileadmin/files/Earth_Summit_2012/brussels/Lars_Goran_Engfeldt.pdf)

This is the view if captured more broadly in Switzerland's initial submission to the Secretary-General, where they proposed that the:

***"event would have to critically assesses the existing governance structure..... it would also have to look at the functioning and effectiveness of the governance system in each of the three pillars of sustainable development. The high level event would have to improve governance of the environment system, of the development system and of the social system and the economic/finance system in order to put in place the governance system that can make sustainable development a reality.<sup>8</sup>"***

As a complementary step to strengthening the CSD process, Stakeholder Forum proposes a process under the auspices of the General Assembly to identify the building blocks of a more robust intergovernmental framework for sustainable development. The second proposal for addressing the institutional framework for sustainable development would be based on an open-ended consultative group on international sustainable development governance under the auspices of the General Assembly.

This process would aim to address the building blocks of a more robust intergovernmental framework for sustainable development and provide the General Assembly with a mechanism to assess and review the workings of the UN's normative, analytical and operational functions with regard to sustainable development. A core function of the consultative group would be to assess the new and emerging developments in sustainable development matters, particularly with regard to identifying areas where coherence and coordination at the intergovernmental and UN system levels should be enhanced. The benefit of a General Assembly process would ensure that sustainable development reforms were placed on an equal footing and synergies could be explored within existing discussions on system-wide coherence and international environmental governance.

Substantively, discussions could focus on the institutional framework outlined in the JPOI, which includes a set of nine objectives and measures on: strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development at the international level; the role of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council; the role and function of the CSD; the role of international institutions; strengthening institutional arrangements for sustainable development at the regional level and national levels, and the participation of Major Groups.

Such a process would ideally be an outcome of the High Level Event, in other words, its work would only start following the 2012 Event. However, this does not mean that the Event would not address IGSD, in fact a key outcome of the Event would be agreements on a set of long-term objectives, or several short- and medium-term objectives, associated with the area of institutional structure. In other words the Event would conclude with the adoption of a shared vision on the "Global Sustainable Development regime and priorities (South Africa 2009)." On the basis of this shared vision and objectives the Informal process would then develop a strategy for strengthening and improving sustainable development across the UN system.

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<sup>8</sup> Switzerland.2009. Submission to the UN Secretary-General; Internet: [http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd\\_aofw\\_ni/ni\\_pdfs/hlm\\_submissions/switzerland.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_ni/ni_pdfs/hlm_submissions/switzerland.pdf)

## Conclusion: Delinking IGSD and IEG

While in theory there is no argument for de-linking the IEG and IGSD agendas, however at the political level these processes and their outcomes should be seen as separately timed endeavors. This separation is necessary to avoid a North-South standoff (as witnessed during the WSSD), with in particular the EU wanting the IEG process to result in agreement on their proposal for a World Environment Organization and the South wanting the process to lead to a strong CSD focused on delivering the means of implementation, in particular finance and technology. This is not to suggest that the RIO+20 process should launch a major new reform process on sustainable development. In fact, given the geopolitical bridges and general state of mistrust among member states, in particular the failure to agree on the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and the stalled General Assembly negotiations on para 169, launching an ambitious reform agenda may not be well received. On the other hand, failing to initiate a process to strengthen the CSD and the UN system would perpetuate the “perception that CSD faces challenges in fulfilling its fundamental roles – to confer political orientation, promote dialogue and partnerships and foster coherence among implementation actions (Brazil 2009.)<sup>9</sup>”

Therefore we suggest that the current IEG process under UNEP be transferred back to the General Assembly process and that negotiations are urgently resumed with the aim of concluding outstanding IEG discussions by the latest PrepComm III in 2012 with UNEP playing a critical ongoing role in support of the GA. In parallel, the CSD should decide, at an organisational session at CSD-18 to launch the *Ad Hoc* Working Group and mandate discussions for concluding this work at CSD-19, which in turn can be presented to PrepComm II. On the assumption that negotiations have concluded, PrepComm II could start the process of discussions and negotiations on a shared vision for global sustainable development governance, with the aim of adopting a set of long-medium-and short-term goals in Rio in 2012, and mandating the General Assembly follow-up process.

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<sup>9</sup> Brazil. 2009. Submission to the UN Secretary-General; 26 May; Internet: [http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd\\_aofw\\_ni/ni\\_pdfs/hlm\\_submissions/brazil.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_ni/ni_pdfs/hlm_submissions/brazil.pdf)

## Annex I: Matrix of Member State Views on IGSD

	IGSD	CSD
Brazil	<p>Notwithstanding the international consensus on the need for enhanced coordination and cooperation among international organizations and environmental agreements, diverging views remain on how to reform the current United Nations system so as to enhance its efficiency for driving sustainable development. Overcoming this impasse requires a broader and integrated reflection in lieu of the fragmented approaches which have been attempted so far. The 2012 conference could aim at debating on governance through a reform of the institutions currently involved in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda in the UN system, with an emphasis on the CSD and UNEP. The 2012 Conference can offer an important point of convergence for deliberation on the reform of the international institutions for sustainable development, while also catalyzing high-level political commitment for the outcome. The preparatory process for the Conference would provide the necessary space for evaluating the proposals on the institutional framework for enhanced international governance for sustainable development, including by building on ongoing political discussions and informal processes.</p>	<p>There is an increasing perception that CSD faces challenges in fulfilling its fundamental roles – to confer political orientation, promote dialogue and partnerships and foster coherence among implementation actions.</p>
Mauritius		<p>Discuss the mode of review of the implementation of sustainable development and the functioning of the CSD.</p>

	IGSD	CSD
South Africa	<p>Ensure a strengthened and continuing global sustainable development regime that is robust and has more impact that is currently the case, including the development of a shared vision on the "Global Sustainable Development regime and priorities.</p>	<p>In the stock taking process, we need to ask if we are using the CSD sessions effectively? Is it necessary to refine the way that we are interpreting and implementing the decision that member States took at CSD-11, on the organization of the work of the CSD? A number of challenges could be considered, namely: there is a limited assessment of challenges and regional and international level; there is a limited and general focus on means of implementation; there is limited focus on the institutional arrangement for international sustainable development governance. There is an <i>ad hoc</i> approach to longer terms monitoring of progress with the JPOI targets that have already been reviewed in previous cycles. There is a tendency towards the de-linkages of the JPOI and MDGs. Most importantly there seems to be a tendency to reinforce in a non-integrated way, the positions that are taken in other international forums, on economic, social and environmental issues. This means that in the CSD, there is risk that we are disintegrating and not integrating the economic, social and environmental pillars. This means, that potentially the CSD is a follower and not a leader on sustainable development</p>

	IGSD	CSD
Switzerland	Since there is a need of more effective institutions and mechanisms in the area of sustainable development, the high level event would have to critically assesses the existing governance structure..... it would also have to look at the functioning and effectiveness of the governance system in each of the three pillars of sustainable development. The high level event would have to improve governance of the environment system, of the development system and of the social system and the economic/finance system in order to put in place the governance system that can make sustainable development a reality	The event would have to look especially at the functioning and the effectiveness of the CSD.
Sweden, for the European Union		It should seek ways for strengthening the CSD's role to review the progress in implementing Agenda 21 and JPOI, and reinforces its position, including its analytical and information base, in the context of UN reform. <sup>14</sup> The EU also sees a need to discuss improvements of the CSD: incremental ones but most importantly, we should look beyond the CSD work programme and start thinking of how we envisage a post-2017.

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