

**REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THE
PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE EU POSITION FOR THE
UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
(RIO+20) IN JUNE 2012**

Summary of responses received

Between February and April 2011, the European Commission launched a public consultation aimed at providing input to the Commission's Communication on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) to be held in June 2011. The over fifty responses came from public authorities at all levels, business associations, environmental NGOs, consumer protection groups etc. A great deal of support was expressed by the respondents for specific actions to help ensure a transition towards a green economy: addressing environmentally harmful subsidies, the use of innovative financing mechanisms and of financial and economic incentives, introducing 'green' criteria in the assessment of policies etc. The need for legally binding measures was also supported by a large part of the respondents, also in connection with climate change and energy issues. The importance of using indicators for monitoring and regular assessment of policies was also underlined. With respect to governance issues considerable support was expressed for strengthening UNEP and improving the coordination of sustainable development related activities within the UN. Finally, stakeholder involvement was considered indispensable for national, regional and global policy making.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2009, the United Nations General Assembly decided to organise a United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at the highest possible level, to take place in 2012¹. This Summit ("UNCSD") should be seen in the context of related previous UN summits, in Stockholm (1972), Rio de Janeiro (1992) and Johannesburg (2002).

The aim of the Summit will be to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, by assessing progress to date, identifying remaining gaps in the implementation of past commitments and addressing new and emerging challenges. The Summit's focus will be on two major, intertwined themes: "a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication" and "the institutional framework for sustainable development".

As part of its key 2020 objectives, the EU wants to move towards a sustainable, resource-efficient and low-carbon economy and the Summit offers an opportunity to pursue this

¹ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64/236

objective at global level. UNCSD also offers a platform to move forward the EU's long-standing agenda to improve global governance.

The European Commission is now publishing a Communication in which it sets out a number of initial suggestions on the overall approach to be taken towards Rio+20 and on some of the more specific issues the Conference should address. The Communication will be the basis for discussions with the other EU Institutions, to arrive at an agreed EU position.

The public consultation – that took place on the basis of an on-line questionnaire and was conducted during the period 14.02.2011 to 10.04.2011 – served to provide the Commission with views from stakeholders. The Commission received 53 responses coming from a large variety of organisations (public authorities at all levels, business associations, environmental NGOs, consumer protection groups etc). Table 1 in annex contains the list of respondents.

A summary of the responses the Commission received is presented below. The summary follows the structure used and questions posed in the questionnaire.

For further details about the UNCSD preparatory process, including official statements, background material, etc. please see: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/>

A. PROGRESS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

Questions and summaries of responses received

- 1. What do you consider to have been the main achievements of past Sustainable Development Summits (Rio 1992, Johannesburg 2002)? What are the remaining challenges? What concrete lessons can be learned from these previous Summits, e.g. in terms of "do's and don'ts"?**

Most respondents found the greatest achievement of past summits to be the emphasis they placed on sustainable development and its relation with environment and development. The next important element of their success was the emphasis they put on global cooperation through global agreements, partnerships etc.

The three Rio conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification were also highlighted by several respondents.

On the other hand, some respondents considered that such large summits do not really achieve all they promise.

Remaining challenges mentioned included: need for more progress on sustainable development issues, more financing for developing countries, and the need to adopt more

binding types of measures (a need that was however questioned by some other respondents including from industry associations).

2. To what extent have EU policies contributed to global sustainable development? What have been the EU's main achievements in this respect and what are the major remaining challenges?

The most important contribution made by the EU according to several respondents is the model it presents to the world with its progressive environmental policies. Concrete EU policies and standards in areas such as water, air, waste etc were cited as very useful examples for the rest of the world.

The EU Strategy for Sustainable Development was also mentioned by some as a success, though several considered that it has not delivered all it promised and some suggested that it was a failure.

Remaining challenges mentioned included climate change policy, protection of the marine environment, biodiversity concerns and need for more recycling at EU and global level.

3. What new developments and trends should be taken into account in an updated sustainable development agenda in the context of UNCSD (for instance globalisation, the economic and financial crisis, the increased demands for food and energy, the emergence of new economic and political powers and a changing geopolitical balance etc.)?

In response to this question points made by the respondents included the following:

- New geopolitical realities oblige governments, companies and individuals to face the limits to material growth and pollution. The world cannot physically cope with billions of people pursuing the western style of over-consumption.
- We are facing unprecedented challenges, but we are also equipped with unprecedented tools to tackle them. For example, we have the technology we need to switch to 100% renewables in our energy production. We have means of eco-farming which could double food production in poor countries within five to ten years.
- There are no silver bullet solutions to overcome the present multiple crises – financial, food, climate, energy. The key is to finally acknowledge that none of these problems can be solved in isolation.
- As the crises of the last years (energy, food, economy and climate) have demonstrated, we need a new development paradigm: a Sustainable Development strategy with clear objectives, instruments and measures.

- The general global support for the concept of a green economy should be taken into account, in particular emphasizing the potential of green industry and investment as a new driver of sustainable economic growth and job creation. Another major development to be considered is the rapid advancement of emerging economies on green and new technologies.
- The EU should consider potential job opportunities from opening up their market to green investment from these emerging economies. Engaging with workers through *social dialogue* to discuss sustainable development policies at national, regional and local levels is essential. So too is promoting re-skilling programmes. The EU can also encourage its private sector investors to actively apply environmental, social and governance criteria in their investment decision-making and public development finance institutions to promote new sustainability standards and criteria for public financing.
- Moreover, synergistic advantages of *advancing gender equality* in the context of sustainable development should be seized.

B. GREEN ECONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION

Questions and summaries of responses received

- 4. Which specific action or policy measure under the heading of green economy holds the biggest potential for concrete and measurable results? Which elements should be emphasised to maximise the contribution of a green economy to poverty eradication? Which aspects should be brought to the fore in relation to job creation and swift transitions in the labour markets?**

Key suggestions made by respondents include the following:

- A clear, consensual, comprehensive regulatory framework should be established to shift the economic rationale of markets towards efficient, responsible and green growth.
- Societies need to face the limits of material growth and pollution. Environmental and social costs should be internalised and the polluter pays principle fully implemented.
- The energy revolution must be a cornerstone of green economy. The overriding climate change threat dictates that green economy actions take energy considerations into account. The pressing need for universal access to renewable energy is also at the heart of the debate, not least because 1.5 billion people do not have access to modern, clean

energy including over a half billion people in Africa alone. Therefore working towards universal access to modern energy, while decreasing energy intensity, will be essential.

- Aiming at a resource efficient and low carbon economy holds great potential for addressing severe environmental problems caused by a wide range of economic sectors while providing new employment to many people. This will provide measurable results in saving public and private money, while lessening pressure on resources. Following this strategy will also increase competitiveness of green businesses on the global market.
- An ecological financial reform, moving e.g. to heavier taxing of energy and other resource use, is necessary to lessen the financial burden related to labour costs and on poor people as well as to incentivize innovation of resource efficient technology.
- It also needs to be taken into account that green growth will not necessarily be inclusive or catalyse poverty reduction unless accompanied by pro-poor strategies that integrate equity and social aspects into a green economy approach. Green growth can be a positive driver of human development where interventions focus for example on agricultural productivity, employment intensity (e.g. agro-industry) and deliberate actions to secure gender-equitable distribution of income, assets and opportunities. Tackling inequality is key, given the ample evidence that it is a major barrier to sustainability and hampers human development overall.

There were also some objections to the emphasis placed on green economy in the context of UNCSO. It was argued that focus on green economy diverts attention from urgent social and ethical issues at the global and national level.

5. What should be the concrete deliverables of UNCSO (e.g. legally binding agreements on specific issues; the use of taxes and tradable permits; performance-based subsidies; labelling schemes etc) and areas (e.g. reducing environmentally-harmful subsidies, beyond GDP schemes etc)? Which specific commitments, objectives and time bound targets should be adopted in relation to them? In addition, what type of deliverables would you suggest to ensure socially just transitions to the green economy?

Many respondents suggested that Rio+20 should adopt clear targets and indicators. World-wide binding environmental and social standards should be established for production and infrastructure; public control over common goods should be ensured.

A clear, consensual, comprehensive regulatory framework should be established to shift the economic rationale of markets towards efficient, responsible and green growth.

Some respondents expressed explicit support for the EU proposal to have Rio+20 adopt a Green Economy Road Map. Such an initiative could: 1) demonstrate and clarify the steps

that are needed at national and international level to ensure the transition towards a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; 2) include a menu of actions, a timeline for implementation, and targets; 3) involve monitoring based upon existing reporting mechanisms; 4) identify relevant tools and instruments to support and facilitate the transition to a green economy; 5) identify roles and responsibilities of key actors; 6) acknowledge that different countries in different developing stages and/or different circumstances may wish to identify different priorities (no one-size-fits-all).

In terms of specific actions several respondents underlined the importance of economic and fiscal instruments and the reduction of environmentally harmful subsidies (e.g. fossil fuel subsidies).

6. Should UNCSO launch new sector-specific initiatives? If so, in which sectors should efforts be concentrated and what should be proposed concretely?

Suggestions for issue and sector-specific initiatives that could be agreed at Rio+20 included:

- Climate change policy and energy efficiency actions
- Investing in ecosystem services
- Actions regarding deforestation, agriculture, chemicals and waste
- International action for the protection of the marine environment as well as better coordination of UN bodies dealing with the marine environment
- More transparency regarding the commercial exploitation of natural resources through initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative or the EU's Forest Law, Governance and Trade Initiative. These models could be promoted by the EU as global environmental governance models to be adopted at UN level.
- Strengthening and elevation of the status of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production of UNEP
- Increased use of cereals to feed people instead of livestock
- Initiate negotiations on a framework for upgrading to Convention or Treaty level of some of the Rio-principles (access to information, Precautionary Principle) and of issues related to Corporate Social Responsibility

7. What should be the contribution of public money, in particular Official Development Assistance, to progress towards a green economy?

Several respondents mentioned that more public finance is needed to help ensure the transition to a green economy. Suggestions were made for the negotiation of financing mechanisms that would support in particular the financing of infrastructure projects. This is particularly needed in developing countries in Africa etc.

The integration of green economy ideas and instruments in current ODA was also considered very important.

8. How can the Summit promote a positive role of private and public-private investment, e.g. through innovative financing schemes?

Key suggestions made by respondents include the following:

- There is a need to move our economic system away from a focus on GDP growth and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.
- Public money should be used to subsidise green initiatives and to promote the capacity building in developing countries taking into account the potential of green economy to promote poverty eradication.
- We also need to focus on public-private investment in order to achieve resource efficiency, waste, water and energy minimization.
- Certified micro-credit, micro-insurance and micro-saving schemes and a standardised model of social business with an added sustainability standard would provide good frameworks within which private or public-private investment can be utilized for green economy development

9. Would there be merit in UNCSO promoting or reinforcing specific actions by the private sector, taking account of existing initiatives such as the "Global Compact"? What form should such commitments take?

There is a broad wish by civil society to be involved in the design and implementation of actions by UNCSO. Business associations responding mentioned this in particular, for instance referring to the experience of the Global Compact (that some other respondents, however, considered has not delivered all it promised to do).

10. What other elements should the EU consider in its position on green economy for UNCSO?

Additional suggestions included:

- Establishment of a global Ombudsman for Future Generations
- Further development of Local Agendas 21 and empowerment of local governments for more sustainable development actions

C. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Questions and summaries of responses received

11. How should the EU pursue improvement of international environmental governance? Which areas should be targeted? Is strengthening UNEP a necessary element of stronger international environmental governance?

A number of respondents suggested that general improvement is needed in the coordination among existing UN bodies dealing with environment and sustainable development issues. At present the UN Economic and Social Council and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development play their respective roles in providing guidance but they are arguably under-resourced and not sufficiently effective in coordinating efforts of other relevant UN bodies.

Strengthening international environmental governance (IEG) was mentioned by some as a key element and condition for improving the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development in the context of UNCSD.

Many respondents recommended that UNEP be strengthened inside the UN system. This should include greater staffing and budgetary resources as well as the necessary authority for the coordination of UN work in the environment area.

12. Should the EU have the ambition to help create a new institution within the UN system dealing with sustainable development or, alternatively, should there be stronger coordination of existing UN bodies?

Suggestions made here included the following:

- New permanent fora should be created that allow discussion of cross-cutting issues, since international environmental bodies currently act largely in isolation.
- Increased coordination among existing UN bodies, but also with other government levels is urgently needed, e.g. through:
 - Engaging and empowering cities as important actors to deliver sustainable development. This can include new governance and commitment schemes between global and local governance institutions along the example of the Covenant of Mayors
 - Establishment of a high level international forum at UN level, allowing for engagement of all stakeholders, making strategic decisions and reviewing progress
 - Creation of permanent local and regional consultative structures along the example of the EU or the Council of Europe

Some respondents were of the opinion that there was no need to create new institutions within the UN system. In their view, what is mostly needed is improved coordination, in particular among multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), and more resources for them to ensure implementation of existing rules and programmes.

Others respondents stressed the need for the EU to look into the roles and functions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council as well as the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), given that these bodies are the central institutions for the promotion, implementation and policy integration for sustainable development.

With regards to the CSD, respondents argued that the overall purpose should be to stimulate better implementation of CSD decisions on the ground, and to enhance the flexibility required to address new and emerging challenges. This would require a reviewed and strengthened CSD mandate with regards to reporting mechanisms, negotiation modalities, and adequate deployment of means of implementation, role of Bureau, Chair, Secretariat and civil society.

13. What other elements should the EU consider in its position for UNCSO on the institutional framework for sustainable development, such as enhanced stakeholder involvement, more effective financial support for governance and capacity building?

Respondents made the following suggestions:

- A strengthened Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development under UNCSO should ensure the integration and balance among the three pillars of sustainable development, as only such a coordinated approach will allow to tackle in a holistic manner the complex global and interrelated economic, financial, environmental, climate and social crises and challenges.
- The link between science, education and policy needs should be strengthened.
- We need to ensure predictable and accessible financial resources for the implementation of sustainable development decisions, by considering policies aimed at more efficient use of existing resources, domestic resource mobilization and innovative financial resources – including contributions made through private sector based solutions and public-private partnerships.
- Measures aimed at strengthening multi-level governance for sustainable development should build further on the parts of the institutional chapter (§158-170) dealing with improving international governance of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.
- New “partnerships for implementation” are needed between UN and other levels of government.

Table 1 List of respondents to the public consultation

Nr	Name	Type	Country
1	AFEP - Association Française des Entreprises Privées	Association of Enterprises	FR
2	ALMÁCIGA Grupo de Trabajo Intercultural IWGIA (Denmark)	NGO	ES DK
3	Association 4D	French Civil Society /NGO	FR
4	Associations21	Network of citizen groups	BE
5	Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat	Governmental and intergovernmental multinational team, organisations, academic and financial institutions, local networks	Baltic states
6	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Belgium Section on globalisation and sustainable development	Governmental	BE federal
7	BioRegional Consulting group	BioRegional Development Group of consultants	International
8	COAMB Ministry of Environment of Catalunya Col·legi Ambientòlegs de Catalunya	Governmental	ES Cat
9	Ministry of Territory and Sustainability Government of Catalonia	Governmental	ES Cat
10	Cefic - European Chemical Industry Council	Large chemical corporations, businesses, national chemical federations and associations, and other partners	International
11	CHEM Trust Chemicals Health and Environment Monitoring Trust	Awareness group of chemical industries	International
12	CIDSE - together for global justice	NGO international alliance of 16 Catholic development agencies working together for global justice	International
13	WWF European Policy Office	NGO	International
14	Nature association in Darmstadt	Citizen	DE
15	Citizen	Citizen	DE/IT
16	COFACE Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union	Association of citizen organisations	International
17	GDF SUEZ	Multinational enterprise	FR

	Gaz de France Suez		
18	Deutscher Bundestag Parlamentarischer Berat für nachhaltige Entwicklung	Governmental federal	DE
19	Ecological Council in Denmark	NGO	DK
20	ETUC European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)	Trade unions association	International
21	CIWIF Compassion in World Farming		UK/International
22	Croplife International – trade association - ECPA European Crop Protection Association EuropaBio	International trade association and European trade association	International
23	The European Movement International	European Parliament	International
24	Suomen luonnonsuojeluliitto FANC Finnish Association for Nature Conservation	Environmental policy work at the national level.	FI
25	Federal environment agency	Governmental	DE
26	Kehitysyhteistyöjärjestöjen EU-yhdistys Kehys ry. The Finnish NGDO Platform to the EU, Kehys	Association supporting Finnish NGO's re EU policies	FI
27	Folkbildningsrådet/ Swedish National Council of Adult Education	National Council	SE
28	Folkekirkens Nødhjælp/DanchurchAid	Charity association	DK
29	Greenpeace European Unit Brussels EU office	Environmental International network	International
30	ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability European Secretariat	World wide Association of local governments	International
31	IFAW - International Fund for Animal Welfare	Main activities: animal welfare, conservation, wildlife trade	International
32	Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values (Satellite Office)	International institute for Promotion of interreligious and intergenerational dialogue and of environmental awareness	International
33	KEPKA - Consumers Protection Centre	Greek non-governmental, non- profit, independent Consumers' Organization.	EL
34	Citizen		AT
35	MEDEF Mouvement des Entreprises de France MEDEF	Association of enterprises	FR
36	Institute for Future Studies and Technology Assessment Sustainability Studies in various issue areas	German technology Institute	DE
37	Municipal waste Europe	Organisation promoting public responsibility for waste	International
38	Naturefriends International EU Policy Office	NGO: Group of 50 member or partner organisations worldwide	International
39	Ökumenische Initiative Eine Welt.	NGO Earth chart support	DE/INT

40	Peace Child International		International
41	Pew Environment Group The Pew Charitable Trusts	Environmental branch of the Pew charitable trust	International
42	Quaker Council for European Affairs	NGO representing the view of European members of The religious society of friends of the Quaker peace church	International
43	Sustainable Development Information Society Forum – Poland	NGO Sustainable Development Information Society Forum	PL
44	Brussels Liaison Office to the EU United Nations Environment Programme	UNEP liaison office in Brussels	International
45	UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund - New York USA	International UN	International
46	Department of Multilateral Relations Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic	Governmental	Czech
47	Federation of German Chemical Industries (Verband der Chemischen Industrie - VCI) Brussels Liaison Office	Association representing German chemical enterprises	DE
48	Veolia Environment	Global company for environmental services	FR/International
49	VITO - Flemish Institute for Technological Research		BE
50	WECF Eco-Accord Russia, Environmental Ambassadors Serbia VAM Voices of African Mothers, Ghana	NGOs	International
51	World Future Council	NGO	International
52	WSPA, World Society for the Protection of Animals	NGO	International
53	UNEP/Wuppertal Institute - Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP)	Institute providing expertise to UNEP	DE/International