

**Major Groups and Stakeholders Asia Pacific Meeting 2011  
Asia – Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the UN  
Conference on Sustainable Development 2012**

**"The Road to Rio 2012: Charting Our Path"**

**Context and Objectives**

1. The Major Groups and Stakeholders Asia Pacific Meeting 2011 was held from 17–18 October 2011, immediately prior to the Asia–Pacific Regional Preparatory Committee Meeting for the Earth Summit 2012 on 19-20 October. Discussions in the meeting were organized under four themes, namely: (1) Regional and Sub-regional priorities and emerging challenges, (2) Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, (3) Institutional framework for sustainable development, and (4) Access to information, public participation and environmental justice (Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration 1992).
2. The UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio+20) provides a critical and timely platform for governments at the highest level to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development. Since 1992 the ecological crisis has worsened and the world has experienced a series of financial shocks and crises. Income and social inequalities have escalated even as high economic growth took place in several countries. There was a commitment to a paradigm shift towards sustainable development, but this has remained elusive.
3. While the environmental dimension of sustainable development has remained weak, the economic dimension characterised by excessive market liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation has resulted in instabilities in the global financial system and a continuing unfair trade system. As we head towards Rio 2012, employment and livelihoods are under threat, while the rights of women, indigenous peoples, youth and other vulnerable groups continue to be marginalised.
4. The Rio+20 Conference should therefore honestly appraise the implementation of the sustainable development commitments and action plans, and identify the gaps and obstacles, to ensure the transformation of the economic, social and ecological dimensions and their effective integration. This needs to take place at the local, national, regional and international levels.
5. In moving forward towards sustainability that also incorporates the inter-generational dimension, the best of knowledge systems and innovations need to be galvanised. Recognising that changes in social values and practices are necessary in addition to technical solutions, there should be increased, integrated involvement of natural scientists, social scientists, and

technologists in helping governments and society to achieve sustainable development. Furthermore, there must be recognition and promotion of indigenous and local knowledge systems and their interface with more formalised knowledge systems.

6. The agreed principles of Rio 1992 should accordingly be strongly reaffirmed and implemented at all levels, in particular common but differentiated responsibilities, the precautionary principle, the polluter pays principle and Principle 10 on Access to Information, Public Participation and Environmental Justice.
7. Twenty years after the first Rio Earth Summit, positive achievements have been primarily manifested at local and community levels. At the national, regional and global levels, many commitments made in Rio remain unfulfilled, and major challenges and gaps persist, even as new issues and challenges have emerged. Thus, it is felt that Rio+20 must result in strong recommitment to the promises made in 1992. The following issues are among those that have yet to be satisfactorily addressed:
  - Promoting sustainable societies that ensure gender equality, democracy, and human rights.
  - Recognising that currently prevailing economic models promote unsustainable consumption and production patterns, facilitate grossly inequitable economic systems that fail to eradicate poverty, assist exploitation of natural resources towards the verge of extinction, and have induced multiple crises on Earth, and need to be replaced by sustainable economies in the community, local, national, regional and international spheres.
  - Providing appropriate regulatory frameworks and mechanisms that will prevent unrestrained financial markets from compromising national sovereignty of member states and that will protect them from the adverse impacts of current and potential future global financial crisis on the three dimensions of sustainable development.
  - Addressing the restriction or loss of policy space in developing countries resulting from multilateral agreements and donor impositions that constrain national development strategies from being comprehensively nationally owned.
  - Upholding primary responsibilities of states to promote, guide and deliver sustainable development policies, provide for essential social services, and provide an enabling environment and financing while recognizing the key role of local governance in implementation.
  - Recognizing the importance of peoples' participation, particularly of youth, women and indigenous peoples, providing for their empowerment

and relevant, functional education to support inclusive sustainable development.

- Addressing challenges and vulnerabilities of the least developed countries and small island states in the face of manifold threats from globalization and climate change.
8. Below are summarized the key issues, challenges and courses of action that have been identified and affirmed in the Major Groups and Stakeholders' meeting.

## **Issues, Challenges and Ways Forward**

### ***On Regional Priorities and Emerging Challenges***

9. As a diverse region that comprises developing countries, including small island developing states, land-locked nations and least developed countries, as well as developed countries, the Asia Pacific region has many common but also particular sub-regional priorities and challenges.
10. As a region that is home to the largest part of humanity, the right to a life of dignity free from conflict and war is integral to sustainable development.
11. Some regional and sub-regional priorities include:
- Eradication of poverty – while many have been lifted from poverty, the region still has the most number of people living in poverty.
  - Capacity to respond to natural disasters and impacts of climate change, including monitoring, surveillance and alert systems; emergency responses; disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change.
  - Conservation and sustainable use of depleting natural resources and biodiversity, including by indigenous peoples and local communities in managing forest, land and water resources, and in the practice of sustainable agriculture.
  - Specific circumstances of small island developing states in the Pacific highlighting the crucial importance of marine resources management and governance, within and beyond national jurisdictions, (including EEZs) necessary for the survival of the people in these islands.
  - More equitable distribution of income and natural resources, particularly land.
  - Stronger national policies that protect and promote food sovereignty in the face of competing resource use (e.g., land for biofuels).

- Need for food self-sufficiency policies and regulation that would reduce reliance on imports, as well as support and incentives for sustainable food production practices.
- Regulation at the international, regional and national levels with effective enforcement mechanisms to ensure corporate social responsibility, accountability and transparency.
- Stronger regulation on foreign investments related to natural resources to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, impoverished and marginalized peoples, and the environment.
- Compliance with trans-boundary agreements to ensure equitable sharing of resources, particularly water.
- Protection and promotion of community access and control of all natural resources, which are vital for impoverished and disadvantaged communities.
- Honoring the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in national policies and laws.
- Safeguarding natural resources (including agriculture, forests, ancestral lands, waters, oceans) against commodification and privatization.
- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for environmentally-sound disposal of toxic substances and wastes, and enforcement of international regulations on toxic substances and wastes, in particular hazardous substances is required to avoid the adverse impacts on communities and the environment.
- Creation of local employment and recognition of labor rights to address population mobility and increasing urbanization.
- Global, regional and sub-regional systems based on science to engage communities and CSOs in community-based monitoring and sharing of data related to impacts on the three dimensions of sustainability, including inter alia chemicals and nuclear emissions.
- Involvement of communities and CSOs in the development, implementation and monitoring of new technologies or techniques.
- Compliance, accountability and transparency of corporations to redress displacements and other violations of rights against communities and the environment.

12. Some emerging challenges include:

- Worsening income and social inequalities in several developing countries that have experienced rapid economic growth, and a trend of social inequity in some developed countries.
- Massive infrastructure projects targeted for the next 10 years, with ecological and social sustainability as well as economic viability requiring thorough assessment. Several current large-scale infrastructure projects are already at the centre of controversy.
- Spread of unsustainable consumption patterns that with growing income disparities result in the wealthy consuming beyond their needs while the poor lack basic needs. Unsustainable consumption patterns put additional pressures on natural resources and the environment as well as lead to new health problems.
- Demographic changes and increased urbanization that result in declining rural workforce with resultant stresses on food production and security.
- Critical importance to the region of active promotion and support of sustainable fishing particularly involving small-scale fishers, in view of the dangerous level of depletion of fisheries resources across the region's seas and oceans.
- Need to ensure faithful and consistent enforcement of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal; ban dumping of wastes and toxic chemicals into the marine environment; and ensure proper management of electronic waste, including efforts towards their reduction and eventual elimination.

***On Green Economy in the Context of Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development***

13. In view of the need for clearer understanding on the concept of “green economy,” participants reaffirmed sustainable development as the overarching paradigm and centered discussions on key attributes of sustainable “economies”, viz:
- Built on sustainable production and consumption patterns and ensuring all people's wellbeing;
  - Democratizes access to, ownership and control over productive resources and assets, particularly for women, and promotes equitable access to opportunities for advancement and improvement of human and family welfare;
  - Provides decent work and right livelihoods and ensures that social benefits are distributed equitably among all peoples;
  - Fosters citizen participation;
  - Upholds social justice, human rights, equity, and gender equality;
  - Achieves economic sufficiency;

- Safeguards animal welfare and protects ecosystems;
  - Ensures agriculture systems and supply chains are sustainable and humane; and
  - Regulates financial markets and holds firms accountable for the social and environmental impacts of their operations.
14. Governments in Rio 1992 agreed to reform existing patterns of consumption and production in pursuit of sustainable development objectives, recognising the link between poverty and unsustainable production and consumption patterns. However, more attention has been given to environmentally friendly production than on consumption patterns. High economic growth in the region has been accompanied by unsustainable consumption patterns. A more rational pattern of consumption is needed to ensure a more rational pattern of production. Consumption patterns are in turn highly influenced by the distribution of incomes across and within countries.
  15. Due to the unequal distribution of world incomes, an inordinately large share of goods and services produced are targeted for those with purchasing power. On the other hand, the poor who have great unmet needs but limited capacity to pay lack basic goods and services such as housing, clean water, sanitation, health services, basic education and food. Solutions cannot be found in the market mechanisms, but must be provided in public policy and government actions. Governments must ensure universal access to basic health, education, sanitation, and other essential services, removing all social and cultural barriers that discriminate against minorities including on the basis of age, sexuality, ethnicity, caste, disability and gender.
  16. Economy and economic life must be defined not in the narrow sense of efficiently allocating scarce resources, but as the range of processes, activities, relations and structures involved in and affecting the provisioning for human life in all its fullness, integrity and dignity. These include not only those involved in “production” as commonly understood, but also activities, processes, relations and structures in what is termed “social reproduction,” rendered primarily through the unrecognized and un(der)valued labor of women.
  17. Technological fixes alone will not solve environmental problems that are consequences of social and economic factors. Fundamental issues such as access, intellectual property rights (IPR), and assessment of the potential impacts of new and untested technologies (e.g., geo-engineering, ocean fertilization, etc.) before they are released in the environment and deployed commercially must be addressed in the development and transfer of technologies.
  18. Opposition was expressed against nuclear energy, mega-dams and agrofuel plantations; instead, governments are called upon to scale up public financing to provide wide access to renewable energy.

19. Opposition was similarly raised against the privatisation and commodification of nature and ecosystem functions that lead to further marginalization of communities.
20. There is need to uphold food sovereignty to address the global food crisis. Communities should have the right to determine their patterns of food production and consumption, and farmers should be able to prioritise food production for domestic consumption. Governments must support small-scale farmers, including women, as they form the heart of sustainable food production systems and along with their families, are the primary objects of rural development.
21. The pursuit of sustainable development in the rural areas must aim at the optimum balance between rural and urban development, with the view towards avoiding problems attendant to excessive rural-urban migration. Efforts to promote sustainable cities via green infrastructure, improved waste management, access to sustainable sanitation and urban food sufficiency are likewise important, but need to be mindful of this rural-urban balance that is determined, among other things, by environmental carrying capacities.
22. Financing sustainable development and a just transition to sustainable economies requires significant public financing, financial and technology transfer from more endowed to less-endowed countries, private sector investments that are productive and non-speculative in nature, and fair and innovative modes of taxation, including a financial transaction tax.
23. Market-based mechanisms that permit developed countries to avoid the delivery of commitments to deep cuts in their greenhouse gas emissions and pass on such obligations through the markets must be reconsidered.
24. Governments must provide enabling policies for promoting sustainable economies as an important impetus to eradicate poverty reduction and achieve sustainable development. Governments must also examine fiscal policies and economic instruments to promote measures conducive to promoting sustainable development, and remove measures detrimental to such objectives including those that subsidize fossil fuel use and support inefficient resource use and economic activities.
25. Governments need to establish regional and inter-regional programmes for supporting capacity development in support of sustainable development. These must inherently involve mechanisms that promote the active participation of stakeholder groups and organisations to exchange good practices and expertise and to support pilot projects, research work, human resource development including training and education, and network activities within and across countries.
26. Stronger partnerships among governments, civil society organisations, private businesses and stakeholder groups must be established for

promoting sustainable economies. Such partnerships need to be within frameworks of accountability and transparency including regulation. In line with this, research institutes, educational institutions and other stakeholder groups are enjoined to support good practice case studies and promote dissemination of information on such good practices for promoting sustainable economies in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

27. As young people make up more than 40 per cent of the world's unemployed, governments must provide children, adolescents and youth with education, training and opportunities for the active participation in economic, political, social and cultural life; promote youth employment rights, and security to prevent their marginalisation and social exclusion; and child labour by addressing the conditions that lead to it.
28. Finally, disaggregated indicators to monitor and assess sustainable economies need to be developed, not based on GDP, but on people's wellbeing, inclusiveness, social equity, human rights, gender equality, decent work, biodiversity and ecological footprint.

### ***On the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD)***

29. The IFSD should implement the agreed sustainable development commitments and actions at the international, regional, sub-regional levels and national levels with broad public participation in the various bodies and in decision-making. The three dimensions of sustainable development must be strengthened (or transformed where necessary) and closely integrated. The framework must:
  - Promote accountability and legitimacy
  - Improve coordination and synergies among sectors, actors and levels
  - Ensure coherence, complementarity, effectiveness and efficiency
  - Guarantee meaningful public participation.
30. There is need to transform the Commission on Sustainable Development into a Council on Sustainable Development under the General Assembly to integrate the work of disparate multilateral bodies working on each of the three dimensions of sustainable development, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. The body must have strong technical support, an independent secretariat and dedicated budget.
31. In support of the IFSD, and in recognition of the continuing weakness of the environmental pillar in the existing IFSD structure, significant strengthening of international environmental governance is needed to deal with the evolving scale and scope of environmental issues and challenges. As the entity with the primary responsibility for the global environment, UNEP should be upgraded and provided with adequate resources for its work. The institutions and work of the numerous multilateral environmental

agreements need to be further coordinated within the context of integrating the 3 dimensions of sustainable development.

32. Strengthening of the environmental dimension must come alongside transformation of the economic dimension to make it supportive of the two other dimensions, rather than overwhelm them. In particular, this transformation needs to be geared toward prevention of the occurrence of more financial and economic debacles, which cause much social dislocation and environmental degradation. The UN must also take a direct hand in economic and financial policy-making and act as an effective counterbalance to the traditional dominant global economic and financial bodies.
33. At the regional level, corresponding sustainable development bodies could be established. Sub-regional analogs could also be created where size and diversity of the region warrant it, such as in the Asia-Pacific.
34. At the national level, governments must establish multistakeholder councils for sustainable development (NCSDs) where absent, and strengthen them where already existing. NCSDs must coordinate planning, policy making, issues resolution, and reporting to the corresponding sub-regional/regional and global sustainable development bodies to ensure vertical coherence from implementation levels to the global level.
35. Local authorities are closest to the ground and directly serve the people. They must be given a responsibility and be involved in decision-shaping that concerns in particular sustainable development.
36. To be effective, the national sustainable development councils should be (a) organized at highest possible level, i.e., chaired by the Head of State/Government; (b) lodged with an appropriate coordinating body such Office of the Prime Minister or Planning Ministry; (c) composed of relevant ministries and major groups/stakeholders including local authorities; and (d) institutionally stable by virtue of a strong legal mandate and endowed with a dedicated budget.
37. The above proposals are initial steps to start fundamental changes that are necessary to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the long term this may include updating the Charter of the UN.

### ***On Access to Information, Public Participation and Environmental Justice***

38. As stipulated in Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, access to environmental information, participation in decision-making and judicial proceedings over environmental matters are a critical part of the policy and institutional framework for achieving sustainable development. Thus the policies on access to environmental information, participation in decision-making and judicial proceedings over environmental matters must be fully implemented at the multiple levels. The Aarhus Convention and UNEP Guideline on Principle 10 provide useful

frameworks for developing and implementing policy measures to achieve Principle 10 objectives.

39. The general public is often denied access to information, participation and justice. In the implementation of P-10 policies, due consideration should be given to respect of human rights, gender equality and the realities and needs of the marginalized groups such as women, youth and indigenous peoples
40. A number of countries in Asia and the Pacific have adopted freedom of information acts and promote the public access to environmental information. However, the level of implementation and compliance with Principle 10 varies considerably, and there are cases where the poor and socially marginalized groups such as women, youth, and indigenous peoples are denied or unable to benefit from the access to environmental information.
41. Governments must provide mechanisms and avenues that support the empowerment of the stakeholders, particularly the socially marginalized groups, to recognize their key roles and to enable their active participation in decision making. Government must also involve major groups and stakeholders in policy dialogues and decision making processes over the environment and sustainability policy issues.
42. Governments must promote the application of P-10 in dealing with the new and emerging issues such as the potential impacts of the emerging technology on the human and environment, by ensuring access to information, public participation in technology assessment, access to liability and redress in cases of damages.
43. Governments must extend the application of the P-10 for promoting and ensuring accountability and transparency of the government, corporations and organizations through effective feedback from the citizens.
44. Governments must recognize and allow alternative peoples' initiatives such as citizen juries, peoples' tribunals, and technology observation platforms.
45. Governments need to exercise the authority to obtain information from the private sector and make available such information to the stakeholders when private sector activities are to cause the impacts on the environment or public concerns. Exceptions to the public access to environmental information and other Principle 10 policy measures should be restricted and should not be abused.
46. To facilitate effective implementation of the Principle 10 policy measures, education, awareness raising, training and capacity development activities must be strengthened.

47. Inadequacy of the forums and institutions at different levels has to be recognized and addressed through such measures as strengthening of the existing mechanism, "Green Bench", establishment of environmental courts, and consideration of creating an international environment court.
48. Governments are called upon to mandate and enable UNEP to develop a robust programme on UNEP Bali 2010 guidelines. In additions, governments must adopt and implement UNEP guidelines on P-10 at national level through adopting necessary legal framework and appropriate policies
49. Governments in Asia and the Pacific must develop the regional/sub-regional conventions on P-10. At the same time, interested governments in the region are enjoined to accede to the Aarhus convention, and/or to adopt its features such as the peer policy review, and complaint/individual petition procedures without precluding the adoption of the Asia Pacific convention. The negotiation for establishment of an international convention on Access to Information, Public Participation and Environmental Justice must be launched at the soonest possible time.
50. To ensure the compliance of countries to Principle10 policy measures at the national level, it is suggested to define the legal rights, obligations and enforcement procedures, and incorporate penalty clauses in such measures in order to pose penalty on the individuals or corporations that fail to provide information despite their legal obligations.
51. Finally, the useful benchmarks and indicators to assess performance on Principle 10 policy measures must be adopted and widely applied.