



UN DESA



**RIO+20**

United Nations Conference  
on Sustainable Development



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*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

# SYNTHESIS OF NATIONAL REPORTS FOR RIO+20



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*



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**RIO+20**  
United Nations Conference  
on Sustainable Development

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# Foreword

At the Rio+20 Conference, world leaders, along with thousands of participants from governments, the private sector, NGOs and other groups, came together to shape how we can reduce poverty, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection on an ever more crowded planet to get to the future we want. The results of Rio+20 expressed in the outcome document titled “The Future We Want” contain clear and practical measures for implementing sustainable development for Member States.

In the lead up to Rio+20 there were numerous efforts which took place in countries around the world to help Governments, Civil Society Organizations and individuals prepare for the event held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. One of the more significant efforts led by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was a support programme to 72 countries across all regions to build a consensus on national views around the themes and objectives of the Rio+20 Conference. The assistance programme was launched in January 2011 at the first Rio+20 Intersessional Meeting held in New York.

Undoubtedly, the results of this work and the fact that we have received almost 60 national reports are a testament to the efforts of a range of development professionals and partners. In many ways what we have found remarkable is the engagement of a wide range of civil society and private actors in this process. The programme activities elicited significant information which has been synthesized into this report. While we probably cannot include all the information garnered, we have attempted to provide relevant content, themes and observations that coincide with the Rio+20 Outcomes. In this regard, we focus on the priorities which have been clearly articulated across the majority of reports.

While a considerable number of reports highlighted the significant advances in sustainable development institutions, policies, programmes and projects, many also underscored the challenges and bottlenecks to moving beyond the economic-led growth strategies of the past 20 years. In this regard, much is still to be done now and in the future to reinforce the links between the economic, social and environmental dimensions that support the development ideals of Member States. The results of this synthesis report highlight a way forward and key priority areas to support the sustainable development ideals of Member States.

We trust you will find the report informative.



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## Executive Summary

In the run-up to Rio + 20, UNDESA and UNDP supported more than seventy countries to engage stakeholders in nationally-led processes whose aims were to review progress, challenges and gaps in the implementation of sustainable development approaches over the last two decades. These preparations were informed by national development plans and strategies and reflected the views of participating stakeholders.

This synthesis report concludes that many countries have made substantial progress over the last twenty years in establishing and strengthening the institutional frameworks necessary to ensure sustainable development. The progress made on the conceptual and institutional levels in the two decades that followed the Earth Summit represents a significant achievement.

Today's challenge is chiefly implementation. The evidence from the reports is overwhelming that a gap exists between stated commitments to sustainable development and the reality of implementing sustainable development policies and programmes in all countries and regions reviewed. This is largely due to integration, inclusion, and coherence challenges. Translating the idea of sustainable development into practice by integrating economic, social and environmental aims and approaches to further environmentally sustainable and socially equitable economic growth remains difficult for most countries. It is clear that fragmented approaches must give way to inclusive processes that bring together sectoral and central government agencies in the formulation of development plans and in their implementation, as well as other national stakeholders, including major groups, at all levels. Equally clear from the evidence is that two ingredients critical to successful implementation are missing from many national development recipes: political will and good governance.

Economic growth is still the chief priority for most governments, and although they increasingly integrate poverty alleviation and other social concerns into development planning, the integration of environmental considerations has lagged. The review of national reports revealed little evidence that countries see sustainability as contributing to growth; at best, governments see sustainability as compatible, or at least not interfering, with growth, but there is little indication that these countries see environmental sustainability as necessary for long-term growth.

The progress in integrating social issues was spurred in large part by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); the national reports indicate that most countries have mainstreamed the MDGs into their national development plans and planning processes. The success of the MDGs in influencing national development plans stems from their shared focus on poverty reduction; the globally accepted set of indicators, with clear goals, targets and timeframes, that accompanied them; and the comparatively high level of visible political commitment attached to the Goals.

The national reports highlight a widespread lack of clarity about the meaning of the term "green economy." Lack of clarity around the definition is accompanied by apprehension about perceived risks associated with green economy, including the potential for imposing conditionalities on aid, barriers to trade and other risks. As a result, relatively few countries have initiated national-level policies or plans for a green economy approach, although some countries have formulated economic development plans and strategies that could provide the foundations for the shift to greener economies. Interestingly, all the national reports contain examples of small-scale "green" projects and initiatives for renewable energy, agriculture, fishing, forestry for livelihoods and the like that address areas of the green economy in practice. This disconnect



suggests that additional efforts may be needed to clarify and help unpack the different inclusive green economy tools, methodologies and measuring frameworks, building on the text and recommendations captured in the Rio+20 outcome document and ongoing follow-up at the regional and country levels.

Photo Credit: UNDP/ Tran Vinh Nghia

**Poverty reduction** has been a top priority for the countries involved in this process, and the national reports reveal significant progress in reducing levels of absolute poverty and hunger; however, in many countries, the distribution of poverty reduction is unequal, with rural areas having made less progress than urban areas. Although countries have made progress towards achievement of the gender equality and maternal mortality goals (**MDGs 3 and 5**), wide gaps separate women and men in terms of socioeconomic targets, such as access to employment, access to and control over productive resources, and empowerment. Many countries flagged the need for improved **integrated water resources management** to address conflicting priorities between different water uses, among them agriculture, energy (hydro), drinking water, irrigation, ecosystem services and flood control. **Energy** is likewise an important issue for all countries, with a primary focus on ensuring reliable supplies of energy for economic growth and for urban populations, and a secondary focus on renewable energy, especially hydropower, but with an increasing interest in other sources such as solar energy, geothermal and wind power.

The synthesis report documents the wide variety of different approaches countries from all regions are taking to sustainable development. Most importantly for the future of sustainable development, it identifies concrete challenges and bottlenecks related to government capacity for implementing policies and programs that integrate the social, environmental and economic aspects of development—challenges and bottlenecks that require the concerted attention and action of national and international development actors. These challenges can be understood as follows:

- **Integration:** incorporating environmental issues into economic planning remains a challenge; there is considerable scope to learn from and build upon the comparatively more successful integration of social issues in mainstream development practice that resulted from national and international commitments to the Millennium Development Goals, whose clear, time-bound, and nationally tailored targets and agreed-upon indicators raised the profile of, and attached a sense of urgency to, issues of poverty, equity, hunger, education, and health.
- **Inclusion:** processes that bring government actors, the private sector and civil society together to pool knowledge, participate in the decisions that affect them, and collectively craft a national vision for the future is critical for development that meets people's needs and whose benefits are both widely shared and enduring.
- **Coherence:** the Rio+20 national preparations underscored the need for more coherent planning and decision-making at and between the national, subnational, and local levels of government as well as across thematic sectors. The evidence shows that few countries boast a well-functioning coordination mechanism with the capacity to align efforts around key, often multi-sectoral, national objectives.
- **Implementation:** the evidence is overwhelming that a gap exists everywhere between stated commitments to sustainable development and the reality of sustainable development implementation, which is constrained by the integration, inclusion, and coherence challenges flagged above.

## The national reports suggest five priority areas for advancing sustainable development.

### Key priorities for advancing sustainable development

**Key priority 1: Strengthening institutions and governance systems and building capacities for collaboration and coordination** at all levels for integrated planning and implementation within and across sectors and levels of government as well as among government, civil society, and private sector actors. Overcoming fragmentation such that disparate groups see themselves as working together toward a common goal – sustainable development – is vital. The outcome document, in paragraphs 100-103, advocates “institutional coherence and harmonization of relevant development policies, plans and programmes” and calls upon countries “to strengthen national, subnational and/or local institutions or relevant multi-stakeholder bodies and processes...dealing with sustainable development, including to coordinate on matters of sustainable development and to enable effective integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.”

**Key priority 2: Unpacking and operationalizing the “green economy.”** Many countries are engaged in some aspects of “green economics” without necessarily calling it that, for instance by pricing ecosystem services or by using financial incentives/disincentives to spur environmental protection or promote sustainable use of natural resources. Countries need assistance in moving from a focus on trade-offs to a more deliberate strategy that also creates triple wins and identifies the elements of inclusive, integrated green economy policies. Though there are many different pathways for greening economies depending on national priorities and country contexts, elements common to many include low-carbon development and climate resilience, resource and energy efficiency, social equity and protection, poverty reduction, and decent green job creation.

**Key priority 3: Reinforcing the connection between the SD agenda and the MDGs.** Sustainable development is still chiefly conceived of as development that is *environmentally* rather than *socially* sustainable. “Social” concerns such as health and education, or inclusion and empowerment, are seen as residing in the MDG framework rather than being integral to the sustainable development agenda. Bringing together these interdependent agendas in the minds of policy-makers and practitioners as well in policy frameworks, development plans, expenditure frameworks, and implementation strategies is a central task in the post-Rio era. The outcome document calls for the development of sustainable development goals that “address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their inter-linkages.”

**Key priority 4: Meaningfully engaging stakeholders,** including governments, civil society, and the private sector. The UN system has been instrumental in supporting the implementation of Principle 10 of Agenda 21, which called for the meaningful participation of people in the development decisions that affect their lives. The role of civil society and civil society organizations and their engagement and pressure over the last two decades has been vital to sustainable development progress. The outcome document reaffirms that “effective governance at the local, subnational, national, regional and global levels representing the voices and interests of all is critical for advancing sustainable development.”

**Key priority 5: Measuring development progress** in a way that looks across the three pillars of sustainable development. The axiom “we manage what we measure” underscores the critical importance of measurement in assessing problems, identifying priorities, gauging effectiveness, and tracking progress. If national systems look only at economic performance, then people cannot hold their leaders accountable when it comes to progress on social and environmental matters. New and more tailored metrics as well as bolstered data collection systems and capacities are needed in both public and private sectors. Such metrics will be critical to the post-2015 development agenda, in particular to the sustainable development goals.

# 1

## Introduction: Approach and Methodology

The objectives of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, also known as Rio+20) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 20-22 June 2012, were to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess progress to date, identify remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and address new and emerging challenges. The Conference focused on three themes: the institutional framework for sustainable development; a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and the thematic areas that would comprise the Framework for Action.

To enhance the effectiveness of Rio+20, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided assistance to 72 countries for national and regional preparations, which included national analytical and consultative processes to identify achievements and challenges and to support a renewal of political commitment for sustainable development.

This report is a global synthesis of the completed national reports and focuses on the key messages and critical elements emerging from these reports to identify lessons and best practices that could be of interest across all regions. This report roughly follows the structure of the Rio + 20 outcome document, “The Future We Want.” Following a brief review of the historical context, the analysis considers the issues raised in national reports on the institutional framework for sustainable development at the national level. This analysis is followed by discussions of the green economy and the framework for action and follow-up, which comprises several thematic areas and crosscutting issues. The conclusion looks at potential opportunities for countries in terms of the critical elements of sustainable development: integration, implementation, inclusion and coherence, or “3i+c.”



Photo credit: UNDP/  
Eskinder Debebe

# The Road from Rio to Rio + 20: The Historical Context

## 2

The experiences of countries around the world since the 1992 Earth Summit clearly show that shifting from an economic-led development model to one that balances economics with questions of environmental sustainability and social equity and justice is not something that can happen overnight—or indeed in ten years, or even twenty. This process requires that national institutions adopt integrated, long-term development approaches, which are usually not in sync with political processes such as elections, either in developing countries or donor countries, or with the sometimes equally cyclical nature of multilateral and bilateral development assistance. While this report focuses on implementation gaps and challenges ahead, it is important to keep in mind how far the international community, national governments and people themselves in countries around the world have travelled along the road to sustainability in the last twenty-five years.

Articulation of what is understood as sustainable development can be found in the December 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (commonly known as the Brundtland Commission report), published as *Our Common Future*. The Brundtland report defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” It called for the concept to “become a central guiding principle of the United Nations, Governments and private institutions, organizations and enterprises.” Both diagnostic and aspirational, the report faulted the prevailing economic-led growth model. Though it championed the notion of bringing together the social, economic, and environmental strands of development and identified broad principles, the evidence base on mechanisms for putting these principles into action was all but non-existent.

Two decades ago, the chief task of the 1992 Earth Summit was to introduce the idea of sustainable development and convince people that it made sense. One decade ago, the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD, also known as Rio + 10) showed that various development actors were starting to move the dialogue from the aspirational “where should we go” to the practical “how should we get there,” suggesting possible approaches and pilot-testing ways to put these ideas into practice. Today, the unfinished business of Agenda 21 lies chiefly (though not entirely) in the realm of implementation. Countries are ahead of where they were just five years ago: an ever-growing evidence base now exists. Many have tried, with both successes and failures, to make good on their Rio promises with concrete policies, programs, and planning mechanisms designed to “green” economic growth. The successes have brought to light ways forward; the failures have highlighted bottlenecks and constraints.

Therefore, the last twenty years have seen tremendous change and heartening progress with respect to sustainable development. Sustainable development is now widely used by elected officials and other policy makers, who acknowledge its importance and affirm that achieving it depends upon a balance between economic, environmental and social objectives. In addition, the national reports reveal significant national-level investment in and commitment to the idea of environmental sustainability, most notably in the development of institutions; new legislation, policy, and planning mechanisms; ratification of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs); and in new requirements and mechanisms for participation. Though its eyes must be on the future, the international community should not forget how far it has come since the 1992 Earth Summit.

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Sustainable development is now widely used by elected officials and other policy makers, who acknowledge its importance and affirm that achieving it depends upon a balance between economic, environmental and social objectives.

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# 3 Institutional framework for sustainable development

This section of the synthesis report looks at the institutional framework for sustainable development at the national level in terms of: national institutions, policies, plans and planning processes; progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and implementation of Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs).

## 3.1 National Institutions and planning processes

The focus of the national reports was the country level, where the national institutions and planning processes would help to<sup>1</sup>:

- (i) Integrate the three pillars of sustainable development and promote the implementation of Agenda 21;
- (ii) Provide government-driven, cohesive policy guidance on sustainable development; and
- (iii) Monitor progress on the implementation of Agenda 21.

Most countries appear to have made good progress over the last twenty years in establishing and/or strengthening institutions engaged in sustainable development agendas. In most cases, these institutions are also those normally responsible for economic development planning processes. These planning institutions have taken on board the main message of sustainable development, i.e. the integration of the economic, environmental, and social pillars, at least in their stated plans. However, their main focus continues to be on economic growth and poverty reduction. Thus, while many countries have integrated social concerns such as poverty alleviation into their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and related planning processes, the integration of environmental considerations generally lags behind.

Nonetheless, the majority of country reports include impressive lists of institutions created since 1992 to address natural resource management and environmental protection. These institutions include environment/natural resource ministries and environmental units or focal points within other sectoral ministries; environmental protection agencies; research institutions focused on the environment; multi-stakeholder networks that bring government officials, researchers, NGOs, CBOs, indigenous groups and others together; and civil society groups formed to address environmental issues. In addition, the last two decades have seen the passage of a great deal of environmental protection legislation.

Furthermore, most countries have national environment and natural resource management strategies as well as policies and programs to address climate change, biodiversity, desertification, forests and wetlands, energy, water supply and sanitation, and more. In addition to national policies on the environment and energy, environment is typically reflected in sectoral policies, particularly when those sectors have clear links to the natural world or depend upon ecosystem health, such as agriculture and livestock, energy, tourism, and coastal and marine resources. Though capacity is limited for integrated, cross-sectoral policy-making and implementation in most countries, the existence of environmental institutions, laws, policies and strategies provides a critical foundation, even though many are still weak in their influence on development policy.

<sup>1</sup> As listed in the "Zero Draft" under the institutional framework section.



Photo credit: UNDP Bangladesh

Progress is, of course, uneven. Some countries, such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Nepal, have gone so far as to enshrine the concept of sustainable development into overarching national documents such as their constitutions, while others have incorporated the concept into national visionary statements, for example, Vision 2030 in Pakistan, Zambia, Vietnam, and Jamaica, Vision 2025 in Tanzania, Vision 2021 in Bangladesh, and Vision 2020 in Mauritius and Timor-Leste. Vietnam put into place the Strategic Orientation for Sustainable Development (Vietnam Agenda 21) in 2004, and it has been mainstreamed into subsequent national development plans. Many have included the concept in their strategic plans, such as the Rectangular Strategy in Cambodia, the Human Development Plan in Ecuador, the National Development Plan in Uganda, and the National Sustainable Development Strategy in Senegal and Togo. Many countries have included the concept of sustainable development in their medium-term or five-year national development plans, among them Bangladesh, Comoros, Djibouti, El Salvador, Tanzania and the Solomon Islands.

A major challenge facing most countries is that planning institutions and processes still work along sectoral lines. Moreover, although the concept of “sustainable development” has been incorporated into many national development plans, translation into practice still remains a challenge. Cross-sectoral approaches and coordination of strategies, policies, approaches, and programmatic interventions are critical to moving sustainable development forward to implementation. Overcoming institutional fragmentation and inertia or resistance is not easy, particular in an environment of tight budgets, limited staff, unreliable funding streams, and shifting donor priorities. The relative power of some sectors (finance, planning) over others (environment, social sectors) also complicates efforts to work together. Yet the involvement of finance and planning ministries and sectors is vital to the sustainable development agenda.

A few examples of the different approaches national governments have taken in this regard can be found in Table 1: Institutional Arrangements for Sustainable Development. These examples highlight the diversity of experiences in all regions in terms of the national institutions, strategies and plans that affect countries' sustainable development planning; they illustrate that, while most countries have the necessary elements in place, further strengthening is needed for them to be able to function effectively, particularly in terms of integrated approaches.

**Table 1: Institutional Arrangements for Sustainable Development**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bhutan</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| In <b>Bhutan</b> , the national vision of sustainable development, i.e. Gross National Happiness (GNH), is enshrined in the 2008 constitution and guides the country's national development plans and their implementation. The GNH Commission is the institution responsible for guiding and monitoring the implementation of GNH. The country is now striving to tackle challenges in putting this concept into practice, such as strengthening local government institutions, improving institutional coordination and building partnerships with civil society and the private sector.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Costa Rica</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Costa Rica</b> has a strong track record in terms of sustainable development institutions. Since a change in its constitution in 1994, there is a constitutional right for a healthy and ecologically balanced environment for all. The state is responsible for guaranteeing, defending, protecting and preserving a safe environment. The National Environmental Council and the Environmental Law have been enforced since 1995. It is interesting to note that there has been direct involvement and leadership from the President for the last five administrations. Costa Rica has subscribed to the most relevant MEAs and has produced legislation for enforcement.                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Ethiopia</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Ethiopia's</b> institutional framework for sustainable development comprises of the Office of the Prime Minister, committees of the House of People's Representatives and its Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Affairs Standing Committee, the Council of Ministers that coordinates and leads 20 sector ministries and 22 agencies working on different aspects of sustainable development, and the Environmental Protection Agency. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development ensures that all line ministries participate in the preparation of national plans, and the Office of the Prime Minister provides leadership and coordination. This has made it possible to integrate the three pillars—social, economic and environment—of sustainable development in national plans and strategies. |
| <b>Vietnam</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| In <b>Vietnam</b> , a National Council on Sustainable Development advises the Prime Minister, helps guide the implementation of the national Strategic Orientation for Sustainable Development, and monitors and assesses the implementation of sustainable development objectives. Steering committees, councils on sustainable development, and offices on sustainable development can be found in a number of ministries, agencies and localities to implement the Strategic Orientation for Sustainable Development in Vietnam.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

### 3.2 MDGs

While most countries have had difficulties linking the three strands of sustainable development, many have been able to link social development and growth through working towards achievement of the MDGs. Analysis of the national reports indicates that most countries in all regions have mainstreamed MDGs into their national development plans and planning processes. The MDGs were conceived of as part of the sustainable development package; indeed, the Goals themselves were launched at WSSD in 2002. However, this conceptual link has not translated into popular understanding or mainstream development practice. At the risk of extreme simplification, the MDGs are seen largely as social goals, and sustainable development is seen as an environmental agenda; the two are often not viewed as linked at the conceptual level much less when it comes to implementation. It is not hard to see why this is the case: of the eight MDGs, six relate to poverty, hunger, health, equality, and education, one relates to development cooperation, and only one relates to environment.

There are a number of reasons why the integration of the MDGs has occurred more successfully than the mainstreaming of environmental issues into national plans and processes. These reasons include the following:

- The **clear targets and goals** as well as agreed timeframes for each of the MDGs have provided countries with a ready measure of progress, and one that allows for international comparisons.
- The MDG focus on ending extreme poverty built on the World Bank-led poverty reduction strategy process, which typically dwelled in the comparatively powerful planning and finance ministries, unlike national sustainable development plans and goals, which were frequently housed in less powerful and less well-funded environment ministries.
- The primary focus of the MDGs is on **poverty alleviation** as well as socioeconomic issues such as maternal and child health, education, gender equity and environment. Most of these issues affect all countries, particularly poverty alleviation. In addition, unlike the environment, all these issues have a (human) constituency attached to them, often one with at least some ability to influence the governance process through voting and other means.
- The **international consensus on the time-bound, specific goals and targets** gives the MDGs credibility in the view of most governments and also provides a measure for civil society to use in holding their governments accountable for progress.

Progress on most MDGs has generally been good in all regions; in fact, at the global level, the extreme poverty, water supply and slum dwellers targets have been met, and gender parity in primary education has been achieved. A detailed discussion of progress toward the goals can be found in the July 2012 UNDP publication, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2012* (<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/the-millennium-development-goals-report-2012/>).

### 3.3 Responses to MEAs

The national reports show that all countries have ratified the twelve major MEAs as well as some of which are regional agreements. Regional institutions such as the Central American Secretariat for Integration (SICA) that coordinates, harmonizes and promotes environmental management in all sectors, have helped to promote MEAs in that sub-region. All countries have received assistance from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to prepare their national plans in response to the MEAs such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), National Adaptation Programme for Action (NAPA), sustainable land management plans, etc. Most countries have also submitted regular reports to the convention bodies, again with assistance from GEF. However, all countries face challenges to some degree or another in terms of implementation of the provisions of the MEAs at the national level; these include:

- **Mainstreaming** – integrating national commitments and strategies related to the MEAs into national planning processes remains the major challenge for most countries.
- **Prioritisation** - given the large number of action plans from international and regional environmental agreements, countries need to select which ones they consider to be high priority or have the resources to implement. There is need for simplification and harmonization of the plans of action, instead of the continuing elaboration of new plans.
- **Fragmentation** – responses to MEAs have been fragmented, sometimes within the same ministry (usually environment), or between different sectoral ministries. As a result, responses such as action plans are often piece-meal and project-oriented rather than strategic. This fragmentation leads to sectoral responses to MEAs that are not integrated into national strategies or development plans, even with multi-sectoral coordinating committees; the MEAs are seen as the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment, and other sectoral or core agencies do not take ownership.
- **Limited technical expertise for implementation**; for example, Liberia and Zambia have identified that they lack the technical capacity to be able to handle scientific and legal issues arising from the MEAs, and Serbia flagged the need for “professional, knowledge-based support activities” for focal points for different conventions and MEAs.
- **Funding** – there is undue reliance on international funding, such as the GEF funds, for enabling activities, for drawing up plans and responses; this dependence on external funding typically results in a lack of commitment of government funds for implementation, a problem that is aggravated where the responses to MEAs have not been integrated into national plans, as is the case for most countries.
- **Implementation** – as with other areas of sustainable development, implementation is the main challenge facing countries in terms of their responses to MEAs; typically plans and programmes have been formulated, but little has been implemented effectively.

## 4

# Green Economy

Most national reports indicated a general lack of clarity about the green economy concept—despite it being a key theme of the conference. Some national reports tried to bring greater clarity to the discussion; for example, one report stated that: “...currently there is no national definition on the meaning of the term “green economy” in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. However, green economy is broadly considered as the economy that ensures sustainable development and does not encourage environmental degradation.” Moreover, for many countries, the links between the green economy and poverty reduction are not clear. Although the lack of a firm definition of the concept of ‘green economy’ provides countries with a great degree of flexibility in defining their own policies and pathways, it can also lead to ambiguity regarding what types of policies can be pursued and how green economy initiatives might compare to other country programmes relating to climate change, energy, environmental management, poverty reduction, inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Nonetheless, many countries are already implementing initiatives and projects related to the “green economy.” Countries demonstrated many specific, concrete achievements in integrating social, economic, and environmental aims, but these mostly remain locally-based interventions. For instance, sustainable livelihood programs that pay local people to manage and protect forest resources or wildlife habitats are widespread, and many show promising results for people, the environment, and the local economy. However, these for the most part remain small-scale and there are few examples of countries scaling up these efforts at the subnational or national level. Tourism was cited in several reports as a sector with tremendous, yet unrealised, potential to achieve triple wins for people, environmental protection, and the economy. This section looks at progress and challenges in terms of two aspects: policies and plans for a green economy (which are comparatively few); and initiatives and projects at the local level that are good examples of the green economy in practice (which are many).

Prior to Rio+20, few countries had initiated specific policies or plans for a green economy; however a range of environmental, energy, climate change and other sectoral policies being pursued could fall under the general green economy umbrella. Undoubtedly, this is because the “green economy” concept is still very new for most countries, and there remains a lack of clarity around how green economy differs from what countries are already doing in the areas of climate change, energy, environmental management, and inclusive growth. However, some countries have formulated national development plans or strategies that provide a strong foundation for inclusive green economy approaches. The following are some illustrative examples of policies and plans that address the green economy and the challenges faced by countries:

- **Vietnam** has some well-developed green economy policy frameworks. The country’s Green Growth Strategy aims to change economic growth patterns through economic restructuring, by encouraging the efficient utilization of natural resources, and by restricting or gradually phasing out industries that require extensive resources and pollute the environment. It calls for the development of technologies to efficiently use natural resources, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and contribute to an effective response to climate change. It aims to improve people’s living standards through job generation from green industry, agriculture, and services and improve quality of life through the development of green infrastructure and environmentally-friendly lifestyles.

“

Some countries have formulated national development plans or strategies that provide a strong foundation for inclusive green economy approaches.

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Photo credit: UNDP/ Adam Rogers

- **Ethiopia** is one of the few countries that have an explicit policy framework based on the green economy concept. In 2011, it developed and adopted the Ethiopian Low-Carbon Resilient Green Economy Strategy. The Green Economy Strategy was developed through a consultative process led by the Office of the Prime Minister, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Ethiopian Development Research Institute. Its main objective is to identify and promote green economy opportunities that will help the country to achieve its ambition of becoming a middle-income country by 2025 while keeping greenhouse gas emissions low.
- In **Cambodia** the Ministry of Environment, with assistance from the Global Green Growth Institute of the Republic of Korea, has also taken on board the message of a green economy and has formulated a Green Growth Master Plan and Road Map. This has been approved by the government, but implementation has yet to begin. Moreover, the focus of the master plan is on the environment and economic growth, with little attention to social dimensions. This plan also lacks a strategic approach and looks at green growth as just another environmental response.
- **Senegal** has carried out some serious work on the potential of green job creation but has not developed a clear strategy on green economy as yet. A study carried out by ILO/UNDP/ENDA looked at those sectors that are likely to generate the largest number of green jobs in three of its regions. It came out that the energy, agriculture, forestry, construction, and waste management sectors

provided the best opportunities. Additionally, its Economic and Social Development Strategy recognises the importance of creating green jobs in the rural regions. Interestingly, Senegal has already drawn up a National Action Plan for Sustainable Production and Consumption and is proposing energy audits in industries to help them reduce their carbon footprint.

- **Tanzania's** report indicates that different national policies have elements that promote a green economy (such as promotion of renewable energy, reduction of tariffs on solar power equipment to make it more affordable, use of energy-efficient appliances and equipment, efficient mass transit systems, cleaner production initiatives, and fuel switching to natural gas and other alternative energy sources), but no overarching green economy policy is in place. In addition, the report underscores in its recommendations that the *"green economy model should be transparent, participatory and should never be used as trade barrier, create technological dependence and/or aid conditionality for developing countries."*

The examples above highlight some of the achievements and challenges facing countries and the need for strategic choices to tackle relevant challenges. In addition, a number of countries expressed reservations about green economy, particularly in relation to trade. For example:

- **Jamaica's** report identified concerns regarding the potential for trade distortions through the creation of international environmental benchmarks and standards, which could place them at a disadvantage. Every effort must be made to ensure that the green economy does not become a market-driven concept that benefits only developed countries and creates barriers to trade for developing countries, the report argues.
- **Bangladesh's** report states that *"LDCs like Bangladesh will be careful about committing to any global green economy agenda that has the slightest chance of turning into a bane for development through the imposition of tariffs and other barriers to trade and pursuit of other economic activities. LDCs are already stymied in their growth by intellectual property rights which make technologies, medicines and other patented products of developed countries beyond the reach of the common people in the developing countries, in particular in the LDCs."* Nonetheless, the report stated that the country is committed to pursuing low-carbon green development, though it will need financial and technical support to do so.
- **Ecuador** – asserts that the green economy, as it is proposed, leaves intact an exclusionary, inequitable and unsustainable system. It may exacerbate many of the current asymmetries to impose fiscal policies for the management of natural resources and enforce these settings to over-emphasize the role of the private sector to the detriment of state action. It may also promote indicators and standards that constrain and restrict trade to the disadvantage of developing countries, and does not cover the transfer of technologies on favourable conditions for developing countries. Ecuador proposes payment for ecosystem services in the Amazon, including non-exploitation of oil reserves in that area.

- **Pakistan** – Discussions during the preparation of the national report indicated that many stakeholders shared the suspicions from developing countries that the green economy could be used as a non-tariff trade barrier and as a “one-dimensional environmental measure” at the expense of development and poverty alleviation. Nonetheless, Pakistan’s 2011 *“Framework for Economic Growth”* addresses “green growth” in its third objective to promote investment in low-carbon technologies. This framework for economic growth is based on an economy that is “sustainable and climate resilient.” However, the plan is yet to be implemented and recent events, such as floods, have highlighted the need for a strategic approach to trade-offs associated with conflicting uses of resources, such as water for agriculture and hydro-electricity.

Many of these concerns and different perspectives on the green economy concept were debated and clarified to a certain degree as part of the Rio+20 outcome document. For example, paragraph 58 of the outcome document provides guidance for countries in designing and implementing green economy policies to ensure that they are consistent with international law, avoid conditionalities on aid, do not constitute barriers to trade, and enhance welfare and well-being.

While many national reports identified “green economy” projects, some challenges and potential opportunities related to up-scaling were also identified:

- The need to address the potential roles of civil society in initiating green economy projects and the private sector in fostering investment projects that promote a green economy, especially through public-private partnerships. Government’s role is to provide an enabling environment for the green economy through a sound policy and planning framework as highlighted in the previous section.
- Access to clean technologies is an issue highlighted in all national reports; this would include both North-South exchanges as well as South-South exchanges, with a key role for the private sector and civil society. This will require international action on intellectual property rights. Government’s role is to provide an enabling environment for technology transfer (including IPR) and capacity development.
- Countries have also highlighted in their national reports the need for resources to help them understand the concept of the green economy better and also to learn from the experiences of others in implementing green economy initiatives and formulating a policy and planning framework. Although not all countries will agree on an exact definition of the “green economy,” the vast majority of them have expressed a need for a “toolbox” of green economy policies, approaches, programs, strategies, and overall guidance based on what works in various contexts. This is reflected in paragraph 66 of the Rio+20 outcome document, which invites the UN and its partners to develop green economy toolboxes, best practices, methodologies for evaluation of policies, platforms and other initiatives.
- Implementation of small- or medium-scale green economy initiatives is essential to identify lessons and best practices, and to demonstrate the potential benefits of the green economy for all three pillars of sustainable development.

# Framework for Action and Follow-up / Thematic Areas

# 5

This section summarizes the main issues raised on the framework for action and follow-up, in order to highlight the major challenges facing countries.

## 5.1 Poverty, Gender Equality and Food Security

**Poverty:** As stated earlier in this synthesis report, poverty alleviation is a primary objective for all countries in every region and tends to be the focus of their national development plans and strategies. As a result, many countries have made progress in terms of poverty reduction and are on track to achieve the MDG 1 target of a 50 percent reduction in levels of poverty by 2015. However, many countries continue to face challenges in distributional equity; for example, urban areas have done well, whilst rural poverty continues to be high - these disparities between the rural and urban populations have tended to contribute to a “rural-urban divide.” These disparities impact adversely on a wide range of determinants of poverty: access to productive resources (land, natural resources); opportunities for paid employment; access to social services such as education and health; access to basic needs services such as housing, energy (electricity cooking fuel, solar), water and sanitation; and provision of infrastructure such as roads, transport, and ICT necessary for sustainable livelihoods. Some countries, such as Serbia and Armenia, saw an increase in the poverty rate in recent years due to the world economic crisis while some countries have had successive increases in GDP that have not translated into equivalent poverty reduction. Others, such as Zimbabwe, saw deterioration in human poverty indicators due to internal political and economic issues.

**Gender equality:** Countries have also made progress towards achievement of goals 3 (gender equality) and 5 (maternal mortality) of the MDGs. However, improvements in some areas, such as health and education, are greater than in areas such as access to employment, access to and control over productive resources, and empowerment. Targets like participation in decision-making (parliaments, senior-level management positions in the public and private sectors) are unlikely to be met. Indicators of women’s participation in economic activities lag, although some countries did show improvements in national figures. Although many national reports acknowledge the importance of gender equality in achieving sustainable development, and have “mainstreamed” gender considerations into their reports, in some instances, mainstreaming questions of gender equality rather than identifying women’s contributions and setting women-specific goals and targets has resulted in the issue’s disappearance from key strategies and plans. Promoting strategies directly aimed at women’s empowerment along side efforts to mainstream gender equality issues has proven the most effective approach.

**Food security and livelihoods:** The national reports also identify significant progress in terms of improved food security and livelihoods in all regions, although challenges remain in tackling issues such as: the rural-urban divide; nutritional deficits for children; and climate change, especially for SIDS. In some countries, the total population suffers from chronic malnutrition especially in rural areas. In the Asia-Pacific region; for example, Cambodia has made significant progress towards food security but some of the population still experience food insecurity, especially in rural areas. Therefore some countries identify the need to focus on boosting both food security and more commercial, albeit small-scale, agriculture and fishing activities. In the past, government policies have neglected subsistence and small-scale agriculture as their focus has often been on promoting exports; there is now a need to re-orient investment in infrastructure and agriculture value-chains such as inputs, marketing, processing etc. targeted at subsistence agriculture.

## 5.2 Water

Water is a key issue identified by countries in all the regions, and national reports highlight the importance of integrated resources management as a crosscutting issue; examples include Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Pakistan, and the Dominican Republic. The priorities range from water supply coverage (Tanzania and Zimbabwe) to integrated watershed management advocated by countries such as Nepal and Bhutan, and the need to address conflicting priorities between different uses: energy (hydroelectricity), drinking water, irrigation and flood control (Pakistan) as well as contamination of water resources by industry and human activity (e.g. Jamaica and Nepal). Bangladesh struggles with the paradox of drinking water scarcity (thanks to ground water stress, salinity intrusion and arsenic contamination) and storm surges and inland flooding. Many countries are putting in place (or have already done so) the necessary legislative and policy frameworks for integrated management of water resources, such as Tanzania's National Water Policy, whereas some countries in Latin America have identified access to water as a constitutional right.

## 5.3 Energy

Energy is one of the major thematic issues identified in most national reports; the main focus for these countries is to ensure reliable supplies of energy for economic growth and for urban populations, moving away from a dependence on fossil fuels to promote renewable energy both for its environmental benefits, especially on climate change, and the drain on foreign exchange reserves. The main sources of renewable energy being utilized include hydropower, geothermal, solar energy and wind power. In many countries, the focus is on energy supplies for rural households, i.e. cooking and heating, to relieve pressure on forests. A number of countries are concentrating on developing alternative sources of renewable energy; however, most countries are also looking at energy conservation and improved efficiency, e.g. through improved cooking stoves in Timor-Leste and Senegal.

In terms of transport, in Africa, rural roads were often mentioned, while in Lebanon, Belarus, and Armenia, urban transport was highlighted – calling for access without unnecessary travel, public mass transit and cleaner technologies.

In **Latin America**, most countries that completed reports, with the exception of Bolivia and Ecuador, do not have local production of fossil fuels. Due to the increase and volatility in international oil prices, national budgets have been additionally strained and it has become an important challenge for local industry and international competitiveness. This has encouraged all countries to explore renewable energy resources, and to plan reduction of the dependence on imported fuels. Ecuador, an oil exporter, is increasing the contribution of hydroelectric energy and other renewables to improve its national energy matrix, as is the case with El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Guyana and Jamaica. Costa Rica has a target to be the first country in the world to produce electricity from only renewable energy resources in 2021. In the Caribbean, some SIDS like Dominica plans to use only renewable energy from geothermal resources, once its production plant is developed and generating.

In the **Asia-Pacific region**, a number of countries have formulated policy frameworks for renewable energy. For example, Bhutan's energy policy aims for a carbon-neutral economy, with reliance on hydropower as it has substantial water resources. Lao PDR's energy policy framework also focuses on hydropower as a source of renewable energy as again it has substantial water resources. The aim is economic growth by supplying electricity both for national economic sector and for export to its neighbours. The country has also improved access to electricity for both urban and rural areas. Some countries have prioritized boosting reliable energy supplies for its productive manufacturing industries and for urban areas, especially the capital city; this has



sometimes been at the expense of rural areas, which continue to rely on fuel wood as a source of cooking fuel. Initiatives for renewable energy for the rural sector are usually small-scale and based on improved access to electricity and increasingly on solar energy.

Photo credit: UNDP/ Dilip Lokre

In **Africa**, renewable energy is also promoted as an alternative to the fossil fuels. For example, Burundi has great potential for solar energy to reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuel and help preserve its forest cover (biomass being a major source of fuel). In the Comoros, the energy sector clearly shows the potential contribution of renewable sources of energy. Apart from long hours of sunshine, the country has an active volcano and it could tap into this source of geothermal energy. Djibouti has prepared a National Strategy for the Promotion of Solar Energy and has implemented a number of small-scale solar energy projects (mainly in rural areas for irrigation and electrification of schools and some housing units). Liberia formulated a National Energy Policy in 2009; this provides the framework for promoting affordable access to energy services for all Liberians, and aims at making Liberia a carbon neutral economy by 2050 through the use of renewable energy. Tanzania, which has a high dependence upon biomass fuels, is promoting renewable energy in part by increasing the involvement of the private sector in renewable energy development as part of its national energy policy.

However, most renewable energy initiatives are project-based and are implemented in rural communities mostly by civil society organizations; overall, there is a lack of a strategic focus in these initiatives. However, the presence of a policy framework for renewable energy in most countries and the experience gained through the small-scale initiatives provide sound entry points for fostering green economy-type projects, especially in rural areas, to replace the reliance on fuel wood for cooking, combined with energy conservation measures.

#### 5.4 Climate Change and Natural Hazards

One of the major challenges highlighted in national reports from all regions is climate change and its impact on increased frequency and intensity of natural hazards such as hurricanes cyclones, floods, land slides and droughts over the last few decades. Although SIDS, e.g. in the Caribbean and the Solomon Islands, are among the most vulnerable, other countries have also identified increased incidence of natural disasters. For example, in the Asia-Pacific region, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Pakistan have experienced recent devastating floods. In Latin America, countries in the path of hurricanes and tropical storms in the Caribbean and the coasts of Central America have suffered devastating effects. In Africa, increased incidence of drought has harmed countries in the Sahel sub-region in West Africa as well as in Eastern Africa. Thus all the regions face major challenges in responding to climate change, in terms of both mitigation and adaptation measures; the challenges include a lack of capacity, high financial costs, a paucity of resources, and poor information on the impacts of climate change.

Photo credit: UNDP/ Mohammad  
Rakibul Hasan



## 6

# Conclusions: The Way Forward

This concluding section of the synthesis report weaves together different threads from the national reports discussed above with a view to identifying the main challenges and potential opportunities facing countries as they look ahead to the next twenty years. This section views these important questions through the lens of four closely-linked elements necessary for a transition to more sustainable forms of development, namely, integration, inclusion, coherence, and implementation, also known as “3i+c.” These organising elements provide a guide to how countries view the challenges they face, where they have made gains, where serious challenges remain, and what can be done.

## Integration

The countries in this study have made significant progress over the last twenty years in establishing and/or strengthening the **institutional frameworks** necessary for achieving sustainable development. The experiences highlighted in the national reports demonstrate that many national planning institutions have taken on board the main message of sustainable development, i.e. the integration of the three pillars— economic, social and environmental—into their national development strategies and plans. However, the lack of inter-ministerial coordination badly hinders sustainable development. The fact that the sustainable development function typically resides in the ministry responsible for the environment, and in most cases such a ministry is at the bottom of the ministerial hierarchy and nearly always has significantly less power and influence and fewer resources than coordinating ministries, further impedes progress. For countries to build on their achievements and operationalise this institutional framework to implement their national strategies and plans, the process must be coordinated by a central agency with sufficient political power and clout as well as command over financial resources.

This means that the focus now needs to be on consolidation of the institutional framework for sustainable development. This can be done by building on and strengthening existing national institutions that can provide a **central coordinating function** with an overarching legislative and policy mandate as well as political backing. Institutions that are part of a country’s core planning bodies that could serve as “champions” for sustainable development and help to mainstream all three pillars of sustainable development into national planning processes are required for progress.

The establishment and/or strengthening of the national institutional frameworks has been accompanied in a number of countries by the formulation of national strategies or plans that provide the overall direction and vision for sustainable development in the country. These strategies and plans provide potential entry points for mainstreaming social, economic and environment objectives in their implementation.

## Inclusion

Inclusion refers to two related ideas: that stakeholders have a say in setting more effective, responsive development priorities and participate in the development planning and implementation process; and that people themselves equitably accrue the benefits of this process.

Stakeholder involvement is fundamental to sustainable development; development only meets the needs of people when, in the words of the motto of Vietnam’s Agenda 21, “people know, people discuss, people implement, and people inspect.” Evidence shows that involving civil society and other actors in decision-making on sustainable development has helped countries shape more integrated and inclusive development



Photo credit: UNDP/  
Giacomo Pirozzi

approaches. Mechanisms for stakeholder engagement have brought previously unheard voices, such as those of women and young people, into the sustainable development dialogue. The very idea that multi-stakeholder dialogue was considered a critically important element of national Rio+20 preparations shows how far countries and the international community have traveled since the 1992 Earth Summit. In general, all the national reports reviewed show that countries have developed some mechanisms for citizen participation, consultation, and information-sharing, and that, increasingly and in most countries, citizens themselves demand such participation as their right. However, evidence suggests that these mechanisms and the capacities of those engaged by them require strengthening in many countries.

In terms of accruing the benefits of development, evidence from many countries suggests that the income gap between the richest and the poorest countries, the income gap between the richest and poorest people within countries, and the gaps in a host of well-being indicators between rural and urban populations are all growing larger. The financial crisis and its impact on food and fuel prices had a disproportionate impact on the living standards of the poor in developing countries. The majority of poor people in the world now live in middle-income countries, creating a greater potential for improvements in the lives of the poor thanks to the resources available in such countries, but also a greater potential for social exclusion and societal divisions. In countries with fast-growing economies, the skewed distribution of development's benefits is increasingly a source of tension. Rising inequality, rural-urban gaps and the resulting flood of migrants to urban slums,

dislocation due to the economic, food, and energy crises of recent years, natural-resource-based conflicts, ethnic tensions, regional security issues, insufficient resources for robust social protection mechanisms, and continued gender inequality were threats to inclusion cited in the national reports prepared for Rio+20.

The experiences of different countries in this study highlight a number of opportunities for promoting inclusive growth by involving stakeholders in implementation. These include the following:

- **Civil society groups are vital to addressing serious social and environmental issues.** For instance, civil society groups have been instrumental in many countries in promoting community-based, green-growth projects that bring triple wins. Upscaling these interventions so that they can become more than the sum of their parts is impeded by lack of capacity and resources. In addition, the evidence shows that countries frequently see civil society groups as the most effective avenue for reaching specific disadvantaged communities, such as those in rural area or urban slums. Civil society is also seen as a source of expertise in advocacy, awareness-raising and mobilization around environmental issues.
- **The private sector is often mentioned as a source of development finance, technical expertise, job creation, innovation, and efficient delivery of services.** Reports cited the potential of the private sector to help countries transition from environmentally harmful, resource-intensive production to cleaner technologies, to innovate in the area of green economy and to provide investment and know-how in tourism, infrastructure development, renewable energy and more. Key mechanisms include direct ventures with communities or with civil society organisations and public-private partnerships.
- In the Asia-Pacific region, **tourism** is another growing economic sector identified by a number of countries that offers opportunities for inclusive growth, especially if it is handled well. Community-based ecotourism and cultural tourism initiatives that are initiated and managed in partnerships with civil society and the private sector provide models that can be emulated by other countries.
- **The degree to which the nine major groups are able to participate meaningfully in development varies by group and by country.** It is difficult to make a blanket statement about the relative influence of different major groups on the national development process. That said, there is little mention of the disabled, which likely reflects a real lack of involvement by this group. Evidence that a human-rights-based approach to development is motivating efforts to involve excluded, marginalized, or vulnerable populations in the development process is scant; this may be happening in some countries, but the issue is not framed in this way in the reports. Some bottlenecks related to engaging multiple stakeholders identified included limited capacity, low levels of literacy, insufficient resources, language barriers, social norms, gender inequality, and social exclusion of certain groups. Greater access to information, more platforms for engagement, capacity development, and institutionalization of multi-stakeholder engagement processes are all high priority.

## Coherence

Institutional coherence, a core element of good governance, is a prerequisite for the implementation of sustainable development. Aligning different parts of government around shared objectives, bringing promising approaches to scale, and ensuring policy coherence across sectors to eliminate perverse incentives and policies that work at cross-purposes requires robust institutions, strong coordination mechanisms, and well-functioning accountability and transparency systems.

The national institutional framework for sustainable development that has been put into place over the last twenty years, and which includes institutions, laws and policies, and planning processes, provides a solid foundation for progress. The policy and planning frameworks that are a first step toward cohesion tend to exist in the form of a national vision document or five- or ten-year sustainable development strategy. Where countries falter is in implementing these strategies and visions, chiefly because the institutions charged with leading countries to a sustainable and equitable future typically lack the capacity to formulate and execute plans that bring together various levels and units of government to deliver on national priorities. In many countries, no one institution has the power, mandate, resources, and inclination to compel or facilitate a situation in which all actors pull together to achieve cross-cutting, integrated development aims. Though there are exceptions, fragmentation is the norm.

Bringing substantive and administrative coherence to the work of the different sectoral ministries and agencies involved in sustainable development as well as promoting coordination and collaboration between different levels of government is vital for meaningful progress. The outcome document underlined the need for more coherent and integrated planning and decision-making at the national, sub-national and local levels. Good governance is a pre-requisite for this sort of effective institutional framework for sustainable development. Good governance is also the foundation for the transparency and accountability systems needed to combat corruption, thus potentially redirecting government funds back to sustainable development.

For all countries, building upon the institutional framework for sustainable development is still very much a work in progress. Institutions need further strengthening so that they are able to formulate a coherent policy framework that enables different government agencies to work together to implement the government's strategic priorities. They also need assistance in addressing broader governance capacity constraints, such as the long-standing resource challenges common to all low-income countries. Reports cited the failure among donor countries to meet the 0.7 percent GDP pledge of development assistance as having serious impacts on sustainable development. One country report flagged the issue that the lack of cross-sectoral budgetary support lines and dedicated funding were major impediments to the implementation of multi-sector sustainable development strategies.

In addition, political instability and power transfers typically lead to shifts, sometimes sudden and severe ones, in priorities and staff, a not-infrequent occurrence that deals a heavy blow to governance for and progress on sustainable development implementation. A final concern is the degree to which influential individuals and interests can derail progress by circumventing the rule of law and policy processes via corruption and regime change.

The post-Rio +20 provides an opportunity to build on the lessons and best practices identified during the preparatory process to implement coherent approaches to the formulation and implementation of sustainable development policies. It is clear that **coherence between different national sectoral policies**

(agriculture, forestry and water resources management, for instance) as well as between overarching fiscal, economic, social and environmental policies such that they all support the agreed national vision for sustainability is vital. Equally important is a **coherent policy framework** that eliminates perverse incentives and encourages private sector and civil society involvement in greening the economy through appropriate investment and taxation policies and an enabling environment that encourages transfer of clean technologies. The multilateral and bilateral donor community has a role to play by bringing coherence to their programs as called for in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

## Implementation

The major challenge common across all countries is **implementation** of the strategies and plans that they have formulated. The opportunities identified in this synthesis report that would help to build on the existing achievements in terms of the institutional framework and planning processes to actually implement the strategies and plans include the following:

- Most countries already have a ***national vision*** for sustainable development. These vision documents need to be backed up by translation of strategies into action plans that build synergies among the social, economic and environment pillars of sustainable development.
- As discussed above, many countries have set up the necessary institutions for coordination and collaboration between agencies. However, this institutional framework needs to be translated into ***practical mechanisms for allocation of resources, monitoring and enforcement*** that results in sectoral and core agencies working together and cooperating in implementation. These mechanisms would also include the country's budgetary process.
- ***Capacity development and institutional strengthening*** to ensure cooperation and collaboration between different government institutions in implementation of national strategies and plans. For many countries, this is very much a new concept. Too often, lack of coordination mechanisms, budgets for cross-disciplinary work, and incentives for working together makes it difficult even for motivated groups and individuals to collaborate. It is not uncommon for staff and leadership to be concerned with protecting the turf, resources, and power of "their" sector rather than collaborating to contribute to a larger good. Collaboration requires a set of skills that is distinct from the substantive or technical skills that were the focus of professional training for most government employees. Other capacity challenges common to developing country governments include insufficient technical knowledge; weak data systems and assessment abilities; limited accountability mechanisms; limited research capacity; limited monitoring and evaluation capacity; and a lack of public awareness of and support for sustainable development.
- ***Clear targets and goals*** at the national level (similar to the MDG goals and targets) tailored to the country's needs and priorities, such as a set of globally agreed upon sustainable development goals (SDGs). Such national goals and targets would provide an overall framework for each sector to formulate their specific goals and targets that are aligned with national goals and with other sectors.



Photo credit: UNDP/ Adam Rogers

- ***Harnessing the political commitment*** already expressed by many governments in formulating their strategies and plans in order to ensure allocation of the requisite financial, human and technical resources for implementation. For example, among the country reports for Anglophone Africa, only those of Ethiopia and Seychelles showed evidence of the involvement of executive and political leadership in promoting sustainable development.
- ***Availability of funds.*** Development partners play a key role in supporting a country's strategies and development plans, for example through the UNDAF process or other national mechanisms such as Timor-Leste's National Priorities Process. Development partners have to ensure that their funding priorities are closely aligned with a government's sustainable development priorities.
- ***Regimes for monitoring and evaluating implementation*** are needed in all countries to ensure that appropriate of sustainable development policy frameworks are designed and adopted. Countries do not have explicit ways of measuring the degree to which they are advancing sustainable development.

The discussion above documents the different approaches that countries are taking to sustainable development and highlights their achievements in putting in place the necessary policy, planning and regulatory framework for sustainable development. The analysis also identifies challenges faced by countries as well as opportunities for countries to learn from one another by sharing experiences and identifies possible entry-points for countries to build on their achievements in setting up their institutional framework for strategic development planning.

Based on this analysis of the national reports, it is possible to identify five suggested priority areas for advancing sustainable development.

**Key priority 1: Strengthening institutions and governance systems and building capacities for collaboration and coordination** at all levels for integrated planning and implementation within and across sectors and levels of government as well as among government, civil society, and private sector actors. Overcoming fragmentation such that disparate groups see themselves as working together toward a common goal – sustainable development – is vital. The outcome document, in paragraphs 100-103, advocates “institutional coherence and harmonization of relevant development policies, plans and programmes” and calls upon countries “to strengthen national, subnational and/or local institutions or relevant multi-stakeholder bodies and processes...dealing with sustainable development, including to coordinate on matters of sustainable development and to enable effective integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.”

**Key priority 2: Unpacking and operationalizing the “green economy.”** Many countries are engaged in some aspects of “green economics” without necessarily calling it that, for instance by pricing ecosystem services or by using financial incentives/disincentives to spur environmental protection or promote sustainable use of natural resources. Countries need assistance in moving from a focus on trade-offs to a more deliberate strategy that also creates triple wins and identifies the elements of inclusive, integrated green economy policies. Though there are many different pathways for greening economies depending on national priorities and country contexts, elements common to many include low-carbon development and climate resilience, resource and energy efficiency, social equity and protection, poverty reduction, and decent green job creation.

**Key priority 3: Reinforcing the connection between the SD agenda and the MDGs.** Sustainable development is still chiefly conceived of as development that is *environmentally* rather than *socially* sustainable. “Social” concerns such as health and education, or inclusion and empowerment, are seen as residing in the MDG framework rather than being integral to the sustainable development agenda. Bringing together these interdependent agendas in the minds of policy-makers and practitioners as well in policy frameworks, development plans, expenditure frameworks, and implementation strategies is a central task in the post-Rio era. The outcome document calls for the development of sustainable development goals that “address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their inter-linkages.”

**Key priority 4: Meaningfully engaging stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and the private sector.** The UN system has been instrumental in supporting the implementation of Principle 10 of Agenda 21, which called for the meaningful participation of people in the development decisions that affect their lives. The role of civil society and civil society organizations and their engagement and pressure over the last two decades has been vital to sustainable development progress. The outcome document reaffirms that “effective governance at the local, subnational, national, regional and global levels representing the voices and interests of all is critical for advancing sustainable development.”

***Key priority 5: Measuring development progress in a way that looks across the three pillars of sustainable development.*** The axiom “we manage what we measure” underscores the critical importance of measurement in assessing problems, identifying priorities, gauging effectiveness and tracking progress. If national systems look only at economic performance, then people cannot hold their leaders accountable when it comes to progress on social and environmental matters. New and more tailored metrics as well as bolstered data collection systems and capacities are needed in both public and private sectors. Such metrics will be critical to the post-2015 development agenda, in particular to the sustainable development goals.

It is clear from the national reports that **fragmented approaches must give way to inclusive processes that bring together sectoral and central government agencies in the formulation of development plans and in their implementation.** There is a need to ensure national political commitment for sustainable development that is backed up by allocation of resources that can help to translate plans into action, supported by the commitment of development partners and accountability mechanisms with teeth. When political will and political interest are absent, discrete measures to advance sustainable development will have limited impact. Studies, training, technical or managerial capacity building, south-south cooperation, knowledge-sharing: for these disparate efforts to become more than the sum of their parts and spur real and lasting transformation, leadership and commitment from the top are required.

# Annex

## Countries targeted for Rio+20 National Preparations support

|                          |                                |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Albania                  | Kyrgyz Republic                |
| Algeria                  | Lao PDR                        |
| Angola                   | Lebanon                        |
| Antigua & Barbuda        | Liberia                        |
| Argentina                | Madagascar                     |
| Armenia                  | Malawi                         |
| Bangladesh               | Maldives                       |
| Belarus                  | Mali                           |
| Belize                   | Mauritania                     |
| Benin                    | Mauritius                      |
| Bhutan                   | Moldova                        |
| Bolivia                  | Mongolia                       |
| Botswana                 | Morocco                        |
| Burkina Faso             | Mozambique                     |
| Burundi                  | Nepal                          |
| Cambodia                 | Niger                          |
| Cameroon                 | Nigeria                        |
| Cape Verde               | Pakistan                       |
| Central African Republic | Occupied Palestinian Territory |
| Chile                    | Papua New Guinea               |
| Colombia                 | Paraguay                       |
| Comoros                  | Peru                           |
| Congo Brazzaville        | Philippines                    |
| Congo DR                 | Rwanda                         |
| Costa Rica               | Saint Lucia                    |
| Cote d'Ivoire            | Senegal                        |
| Djibouti                 | Serbia                         |
| Dominica                 | Seychelles                     |
| Dominican Republic       | Solomon Islands                |
| Ecuador                  | Sri Lanka                      |
| El Salvador              | St Kitts and Nevis             |
| Equatorial Guinea        | Sudan                          |
| Ethiopia                 | Tajikistan                     |
| Fiji                     | Tanzania                       |
| Gambia                   | Timor Leste                    |
| Ghana                    | Togo                           |
| Grenada                  | Uganda                         |
| Guatemala                | Uruguay                        |
| Guinea Bissau            | Uzbekistan                     |
| Guyana                   | Viet Nam                       |
| Haiti                    | Yemen                          |
| Jamaica                  | Zambia                         |
| Kenya                    | Zimbabwe                       |



To view all the national reports submitted, please visit the Rio+20 website at: [www.uncsd2012.org/nationalpreparations.html](http://www.uncsd2012.org/nationalpreparations.html)



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*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

