The Global Thematic Consultation on Environmental Sustainability in the post-2015 Development Agenda

Leadership Meeting, March 18-19, 2013, Costa Rica
Co-Chairs Summary

The Leadership Meeting of the Global Consultation on Environmental Sustainability in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, hosted by the Governments of France and Costa Rica and co-led by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), was held 18 - 19 March 2013in San José, Costa Rica. Eighty-eight representatives from intergovernmental organizations, private sector, and civil society, as well as government and UN representatives, met to review the results of the first phase of the Global Thematic Consultation on Environmental Sustainability (see agenda and background note for the meeting) to:

- build consensus on the key issues that should frame environmental sustainability in the post-2015 agenda, considering key inter-linkages, drivers and enablers;
- identify areas where further dialogue, outreach and innovative thinking is needed to continue to build consensus and evolve the discussion, which will frame the second phase of the Consultation; and
- develop a cohort of leading and emerging thinkers from around the world to continue to engage in dialogue and raise visibility and awareness around environmental sustainability issues for moving towards the world we want.

A summary of the meetings proceedings has been prepared by IISD Reporting Services. This co-chairs' summary therefore focuses on the outcomes of the meeting.

AREAS OF CONSENSUS

Changing the Narrative on Environmental Sustainability

Participants strongly affirmed that environmental sustainability is not ancillary to development but a guiding principle of sustainability and human well-being. However, environmental sustainability is still often approached as something that results in trade-offs with human and economic development objectives. For example, the lack of ownership and valuation of natural resources as economic inputs has fostered a counterproductive argument that achieving environmental sustainability will mean a loss of economic prosperity and growth and is therefore bad for business. We need to overcome this argument by changing the narrative to one that recognizes that integration across the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development leads to multiple benefits. Borrowing unsustainably from

> *"Environmental sustainability is not a 'nice to have' it is a 'have to have'. It is non-negotiable."* - Andrew Deutz, Director of International Government Relations at The Nature Conservancy

the world's natural resource base will no longer continue to work. The participants also highlighted the narrative should be in the context of overall sustainability, recognizing it cannot be achieved without an environmental underpinning. The post-2015 development agenda is an opportunity to elevate environmental sustainability out of its silo and promote a global dialogue on the interlinked and multiple dimensions of sustainable development.

Principles for Translating This Narrative into the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Meeting participants suggested that the content and principles of the Millennium Declaration remain valid but that the guidance and leadership provided by the Rio+20 Outcome Document as well as internationally agreed environmental goals need to be built on to fully reflect the evolving narrative on environmental sustainability. The future framework and goals need to respect a range of criteria as a minimum for them to have universal applicability and to be truly sustainable. The following **criteria** emerged out of the discussion:

- **Environmental sustainability needs to be fully integrated**: Environmental sustainability needs to be at the core of the post-2015 agenda. There is a pressing need to break down the silos - an approach that has been recognized as a key bottleneck for achieving MDGs in general and the goal on environmental sustainability in particular. This requires integrating environmental sustainability within other development priorities (e.g. poverty reduction, health, gender) to raise its importance and affect fundamental change in development and growth. In the post-2015 framework we should therefore avoid addressing specific thematic environmental issues which will replicate mistakes from the past by 'compartmentalizing' policy interventions. We need a broader way to frame environmental sustainability such as notions on natural capital, ecosystem services, ecological footprint, and planetary boundaries which cut-across sectors.

  > *"Issues related to equality, opportunities, gender, the role of indigenous communities, and rights-based approaches should be highlighted" – Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, Vice President of Global Policy Center for Conservation and Government for Conservation International*

- **Sustainability rests on good governance and equality**: An unequal society, across countries and generations, cannot be a sustainable society. Structural barriers to participation by poor and vulnerable groups in predominantly growth -led models are responsible for growing inequalities which need to be addressed. Governance issues will therefore be critical in the post-2015 agenda. In particular, environmental sustainability and human rights need to be linked, to avoid duplicating the dominant model which has led to environmental degradation, social injustices and inequalities. Bringing together human rights and environmental sustainability will help a move towards sustainable development by integrating the rights of citizens to a clean and healthy environment and across generations. The voice of youth and young people is essential in this regard as well as with its

  > *"Gender equality and equality as such is really a prerequisite for sustainable development" - Sabine Bock, Director of the German office of Women in Europe for a Common Future*

fundamental intergenerational equality principle.

- **Accountability and social justice for sustainability through increased engagement with civil society and private sector**: Empowering civil society groups through access to information, access to justice and transparent and inclusive decision making will promote accountability and delivery of sustainable outcomes and equality. Accountability needs to permeate across all levels of government and governance from local to global. This requires recognition for the roles, responsibilities and rights of civil society and the private sector, as full and mutually accountable partners to governments. Accountability frameworks will need to be developed which promote inclusive decision making with civil society.

> *"It is important to include indigenous peoples' point of view if we are going to talk about environmental sustainability" – Myrna Cunningham Kain, member of the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues*

- **Integrated local action and national change**: Community based initiatives and institutions provide significant success stories in many countries and regions from around the world. Overcoming compartmentalized interventions, these community programmes build on traditional knowledge and technologies, and integrate human rights-based and ecosystem-based approaches to address local livelihoods and environmental problems. Local efforts are replicated and amplified through networking at national, regional and global scales, also serving as platforms for exchange of skills and experiences, knowledge-sharing and capacity building, and upscaling of impacts and benefits. Resources to support community-based institutions are necessary to bridge the framing of global sustainable development goals and local priorities, including direct community representation at local, national and global decision-making processes.

Transformational Change Needed - Business As Usual Will Not Work

The aspiration for transformational change was consistently expressed throughout the consultation. Transformational change is understood not as small incremental improvements to business-as-usual but a completely different way to innovate, collaborate, build institutions, measure progress, and be accountable. Fundamental to this is the need for goals that do not shy away from difficult issues.

Meeting participants asserted environmental decline and growing inequality a result of a growth-led economic model which was in need of fundamental change, including a stronger focus on valuing negative and positive environmental externalities both in public and private decision-making through natural capital accounting, green accounting, and other methods. The challenge to promote private sector responsibility and government accountability were prominent among impassioned calls for a new agenda in which well-being, happiness and a decent life are at the center instead of constant growth at all costs. It is understood that such change would need structural changes to the patterns of trade, consumption and production, education, measurements of progress, as well as

> *"Sustainability is more profitable" – L. Hunter Lovins, President of Natural Capitalism Solutions*

a deliberate and careful analysis of the related drivers for change, and time-frames. It was suggested that measurement of wealth (e.g. GDP) needs to be reformed to integrate social and environmental factors. Some, particularly young entrepreneurs, suggested that markets can be a tool of transformation instead of the cause of environmental, societal or economic ills. The view expressed is that a post-2015 agenda should boldly go after transformational change through ambitious goals and beyond only small improvements to the MDGs which would be a disappointment.

Linking Global Commons and a Universal Agenda to National and Local Level Context

The post 2015 agenda must be immersed in inter-linkages and connections rather than compartmentalized sector specific goals and targets. A key challenge will be developing a post-2015 framework which addresses planetary boundaries but also recognizes that different contextual influences of all countries. This will mean differentiated goals would resonate for national and local levels; however, interlinked goals should overcome this challenge given they can be adapted and will lead to decision-making for sustainable development.

There was wide ranging discussion which highlighted the different perspectives and challenges:

Global level: Threats to planetary boundaries and risks from climate change are increasing dramatically. The post-2015 agenda therefore needs to ensure goals are designed to protect the global commons. The timeframes for addressing these global issues, the need to build on existing global agreements, and setting priorities will be challenges for the post-2015 agenda. These challenges should be approached from the recognition of the pressing need to move to a new type of development and thinking on economic growth which respects planetary boundaries.

National level: National level institutions develop and implement their own development strategies based on their specific contexts. To facilitate greater attention to environmental sustainability into national development approaches there was agreement that key development challenges (poverty reduction, food security, consumption and production patterns, energy, etc) need to be linked to key environmental sustainability parameters which would then help to drive alternative decision making processes and investments to achieve sustainability. The meeting debated the notion of common but differentiated responsibility but was not able to conclude. The role of civil society was considered as two-fold: one is to continue to monitor public action and its relevance to sustainable development, and the other is to raise awareness on a need for transformation in our production and consumption patterns.

Local level: Local actors remain the front line of change but unfortunately too often local scale projects are uncoordinated and remain islands of success in a much broader development agenda. Programmes and projects based on local experience must be designed in a way that integrates environmental/economic/social outcomes and must be linked through cooperative learning and sharing. Civil society networks are key in this regard and we need to continue to build on existing experiences from local level action.

Key Drivers of Change:

- Governance and accountability - good governance and inclusive decision making processes emerged as strong priorities for the next development agenda. There is a world-wide expectation of stakeholder groups to be included, to contribute, to be empowered and to be full partners in the work towards a just and sustainable world. Most view accountability as one of participatory governance.

- Education - changing mind sets is seen as a critical component for the next development agenda. This will require significant changes in education - moving to an education system that instills in learners respect for natural ecosystems and planetary boundaries. Participants showed general consensus that education will be key to environmental sustainability in the coming decades

- Local capacities and action - many participants, including those coming from global perspectives recognized that building local capacities and empowering local action will generate momentum for the transformation into a sustainable future. Many examples of successful community based approaches exist and need to be taken as the starting point to enable change. However, we need to ensure that upward linkages to national development and global commons remain central to local change. A key approach to this could be locally area based measurement of goals.

- Incentives – there was an ongoing discussion on the roles of incentives and how different stakeholders respond to different incentives based on their value systems. Two types of incentives were referenced as permeating decision making: moral incentives and monetary incentives. While different stakeholders will respond to different incentives based on their value systems, using a combination of both these incentive structures could lead to better outcomes. For example, for the private sector focusing on an integrated bottom line addressing not only financial but also social and environmental outcomes would lead to a greater respect for moral incentives which target respect for environmental and social sustainability in conjunction with monetary incentives promoting better investments decisions. Similarly access to information and awareness raising would strengthen the moral incentives of stakeholders which could be harnessed in dialogue with the private sector to further shape change.

Moving to a New Set of Goals and Implementation

The Leadership Meeting participants avoided moving the discussion to the elaboration of specific goals and targets related to environmental sustainability. They stressed the need to first provide an adequate framing and criteria for the characteristics of a post-2015 agenda in terms of environmental sustainability. The importance of developing a post-2015 agenda that reflects the complexity of sustainable development challenges in a way that is practical and can be translated into implementation will be a key challenge. To help ensure this can happen, the engagement of civil society and private sector throughout the development of the agenda and its implementation will be critical.

Additionally, measurement and monitoring will be important to ensuring implementation and multi-dimensional indicators will need to be applied. One way of contributing to environmental sustainability

is a move to measures of progress and wealth that go beyond GDP to include natural capital stocks. While new measurement technologies and methodologies now exist there will be a need for strong political will to implement the monitoring mechanisms needed.

AREAS WHERE FURTHER DIALOGUE AND THINKING IS NEEDED

The objectives of the Leadership Meeting were not only to clarify areas of consensus but also to identify areas where further dialogue is needed. These issues will frame the second phase of the post-2015 global thematic consultation on environmental sustainability (April-May 2013). A series of open e-discussions will be organized around the topics identified below and hosted on http://www.worldwewant2015.org/sustainability2015. It is recognized that there is overlap across the issues highlighted below but specific topics have been identified to help bring focus and depth to the dialogue.

Unpacking Key Inter-linkages and Principles (April 15-28, 2013):

- Environmental sustainability and poverty reduction

Poor and marginalized people are more reliant on the environment for their livelihoods and therefore the impact of environmental degradation is more strongly felt (in terms of health, income, and more). Today the interconnections between human well-being and the environment are well understood thanks to studies such as the Millennium Assessment. Still, there is need to generate clear suggestions on how to reflect these connections in the post-2015 agenda. In the consultations so far, there was much talk of breaking the MDG silos but what are the inter-linkages between poverty reduction and environmental sustainability that could be articulated in the next agenda?

- Environmental sustainability and equality

It has been repeated time and again that inequalities can hamper the achievement of environmental sustainability. Consultation participants see inequalities in environmental sustainability, as an issue of different levels of access to: eco-services for livelihoods and health (e.g water, clean air, clean and renewable energy): between rich and poor countries, the rich and the poor within each country, rural and urban populations, women and men, current and future generations. Involvement into decision making processes of these different groups has also been underlined at several takes. Still, why does inequality undermine the attainment of environmental sustainability? Why should equality be at the center of our attention? Post-2015 goals are expected to be ambitious and universal. What does this mean in the context of inequality?

- Environmental sustainability, human rights, peace and security

There are obvious links between environmental sustainability as a human rights issue and many national constitutions recognizing the rights of its citizens. The human rights of environmental sustainability have been echoed throughout the consultation thus far and in the Leadership Meeting. Still, there are differing opinions and sensitivities. What are the key issues and themes

which reflect the links between human rights and environmental sustainability? How can a rights-based approach support environmental sustainability? What accountability mechanisms need to be in place?   What do we mean by 'resilient societies'? Where the MDGs did not capture these fundamental aspects of sustainable development, how can environmental sustainability in a post-2015 agenda properly reflect these?   What concrete recommendations can be made on how to ensure the post-2015 agenda recognizes the linkages between human rights, peace and security and environmental sustainability?

Moving Towards Transformational Change (April 29-May 12, 2013):

- Role of the private sector/markets

During e-discussions and the Leadership Meeting, the need to change existing economic growth models was identified as critical. In this regard, the role of the private sector and markets need to be considered. Markets and corporations are globally interconnected and a powerful influence on natural resource use decisions. All types of businesses, including the micro-, small, and medium enterprises are the essence of our economic societies, creating jobs and providing households and public procurers with goods and services. Therefore, businesses can be tremendous drivers of change, experiencing that sustainable production processes (e.g. cradle-to-cradle, limited use of toxic chemicals, cleaner production, and social development schemes) can also make economic sense. The green champions are outperforming the businesses that do not adapt quickly enough to the challenges of a changing environment and resource scarcity. Business response to demands and consumers' expectations varies widely, creating new opportunities for change. But businesses also operate in a legal context, where environmental rules and regulations may, at the very best, involve shifts from business as usual.   Though we have started to understand the potential roles and responsibilities of the private sector, we have not gone as far as understanding how and to what extent they can help responding massively and timely, alongside governments and civil society, to the environmental challenges we are facing. What is the role of the private sector in the post-2015 development agenda with regards to environmental sustainability? How can the private sector be held accountable, and how can market forces be leveraged in favour of environmental sustainability? What incentives for environmental sustainability and green economy policies can be incorporated into the next set of development goals? How can an incentives based system be made accountable so that it is not abused by acts of green-washing? How can a green economy approach assist developing countries to leap frog in their development trajectory? How can the market be better utilized as a tool for change? Which market mechanisms can be harnessed for sustainability and how?

- Education for sustainable development and changing behaviours

Just as businesses are potentially powerful drivers of change, also are consumers. For the latter to fuel change, they need to be better aware of the impact of their choices on the environment and on the global community as a whole. Education can help address largely false dichotomies such as "biofuels versus food". Education for sustainable development (ESD) has been mentioned from day

one of the consultation, and a lively debate has arose on what this encompasses including discussions on what knowledge needs to shared, what alternative sources of knowledge can be tapped into, how should knowledge be shared. These discussions confidently conclude that ESD will need to play a central role in the post-2015 development agenda. However, in the next phase this topic needs to be further explored. What is the role of education in changing behaviours? What kinds of education systems are necessary for environmental sustainability? Is there evidence that ESD changes behaviours and choices? What is the timeframe for such change to become visible? Are there other key drivers of behavioural change that need to be considered?

Translating Global Commons and Universal Agenda to Local Action and Context (May 13-26, 2013):

- Country Context and Typologies

There is a clear consensus that the post-2015 goals and targets will need to be universal, applying not just to a portion of the world, i.e. the developing countries. Indeed, halving the number of people who suffer from hunger still leaves out billions of people in all continents of the world who continue to suffer starvation. Especially when it comes to environmental goals and targets, a sole focus on developing countries will not suffice or meet the ambitions for the post-2015 agenda. Still, not all regions, countries face the same problems, at the same levels, scales and severity. Therefore, one could suggest having a limited number of typologies of countries to which a certain sub-set of goals and targets would apply. Categorizing countries into typologies (e.g. small vs. big, developed vs developing, landlocked vs connected to the seas, high income vs low, high inequality vs more equal) is a complicated exercise that tries to capture the essence of the many social, cultural, economic and environmental aspects that characterize countries. In the next phase of the consultations, it will be useful to explore what are the pros and cons of following the CBDR for the post 2015 agenda, and typologies can be developed? What would be their specificities/characteristics? Are there other ways to have a universal agenda that is flexible enough to be applicable to all countries?

- Local Empowerment

Local civil society groups can deliver a wide range of development benefits when empowered to manage their ecosystems and natural resources. These benefits extend well beyond poverty reduction and livelihood gains and encompass the social, economic, and environmental dividends that underpin sustainable development. The post-2015 sustainable development framework will need to consider local level action and empowerment to take advantage of this transformative potential. Some questions to consider include the following: How can local action and empowerment help drive a transformative agenda for environmental sustainability? How can the architecture for a new set of goals incorporate incentives that encourage both capitalizing on the comparative strengths of local ecosystem-based initiatives and provide the support structure that will allow them to flourish? How can we best measure the participation and empowerment of local organizations within sustainable development programming? What might these indicators look like for environmental sustainability goals? How can upscaling be done more strategically, efficiently, effectively?

NEXT STEPS

Co-hosts and co-leads:

- Outreach to build upon existing members and networks
- Support to Leadership Meeting participants for future engagement
- Hosting the e-discussions and synthesizing inputs
- Final Report

Leadership Meeting Participants and Those Engaged in the Consultation:

- Outreach and engagement of networks – sharing the key messages coming out of the consultation
- Contribution to online e-discussions, hosting "ask the expert" sessions, google hangouts, video messages, blogs on the consultation platform. Laura Hildebrandt (laura.hildebrandt@undp.org) can be contacted for additional information if interested or to suggest other ideas.
- Organizing face-to-face meetings on related issues and contributing results to the global thematic consultation
- Inputs to draft Final Report (expected in June)