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**REVIEW OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20 CONFERENCE) AND ITS  
IMPLICATIONS FOR SUBREGIONAL COOPERATION ON SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH-EAST ASIA**

(Item 6 of the provisional agenda)

**Summary of the major outcomes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development  
and possible follow-up activities in North-East Asia**

*Note by the Secretariat*

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## I. OVERVIEW OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE UNCSD

1. The UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 20-22 June 2012. This important event that gathered more than 120 high-level political leaders marked two decades of efforts taken by the international community in pursuit of sustainable development since the commitments enshrined in Agenda 21 were adopted by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. To underscore the succession linkage between these two important milestones, UNCSD became unofficially known as the Rio+20 Conference.
2. The UNCSD deliberations produced a set of outcomes that are expected to shape the (sub) national, (sub) regional and global agenda on sustainable development for years to come, compiled in the outcome document titled "The future we want". In this document, adopted by governments at the Conference and subsequently endorsed by the 66<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly<sup>1</sup>, the member States of the United Nations renewed their political commitment to sustainable development, including through confirming their adherence to full implementation of the Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation) and others.
3. The document further focuses on two main themes of the Conference: 1) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and 2) the institutional framework for sustainable development. Regarding the former, acknowledging different national circumstances and priorities, the outcome document recognized green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development goals, which should be flexible and not constitute a set of rigid rules.
4. The outcome document further requested the United Nations system to act in cooperation with relevant donors and international organizations in order to coordinate and provide information upon request on:
  - (a) Matching interested countries with the partners that are best suited to provide requested support;
  - (b) Toolboxes and/or best practices in applying policies on green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication at all levels;
  - (c) Models or good examples of policies on green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication;
  - (d) Methodologies for evaluation of policies on green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication;

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<sup>1</sup> The draft resolution with the text of the Outcome document is available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/66/L.56](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/66/L.56)

(e) Existing and emerging platforms that contribute in this regard.

4. In this regard, the UN member States noted the efforts of countries that have already initiated processes to prepare national green economy strategies and policies in support of sustainable development. It is worth mentioning that the leading role of member States in North-East Asia in this process was also reflected in the Chair's Summary of SOM-16 (1-2 September 2011, Seoul) in Rio+20 Conference, where the Meeting underscored that the subregional countries have already put in place a number of groundbreaking rules, regulations, policies and programmes relevant to the themes of Rio+20.

5. As for the second theme of the UNCSD - institutional framework for sustainable development - the UN member States underscored that it should integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced manner and enhance implementation by strengthening coherence and coordination, avoiding duplication of efforts and reviewing progress in implementing sustainable development policies. The outcome document further reaffirmed that the framework should be inclusive, transparent and effective and should find common solutions related to global challenges of sustainable development. In addition, the UN member States recognized that effective governance at the local, subnational, national, regional and global levels representing the voices and interests of all is critical to sustainable development.

6. Noting that an improved and more effective institutional framework for sustainable development at the international level should be consistent with the Rio Principles and built on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the outcome document resolves to strengthen the institutional framework for sustainable development by, inter alia:

- (a) Promoting the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development;
- (b) Using an action- and result-oriented approach giving due regard to all relevant cross-cutting issues;
- (c) Underscoring the importance of interlinkages among key issues and challenges and the need for a systematic approach to address them at all relevant levels;
- (d) Enhancing coherence, reducing fragmentation and overlap and increasing effectiveness, efficiency and transparency, while reinforcing coordination and cooperation;
- (e) Promoting full and effective participation of all countries in decision-making processes;
- (f) Engaging high-level political leaders, providing policy guidance and identifying specific actions to promote effective implementation of sustainable development policies, including through voluntary sharing of experiences and lessons learned;

- (g) Promoting the science-policy interface through inclusive, evidence-based and transparent scientific assessments;
- (h) Enhancing the participation and effective engagement of civil societies and other relevant stakeholders;
- (i) Promoting the review and stocktaking of progress in the implementation of all sustainable development commitments.

#### **A. Strengthening intergovernmental arrangements for sustainable development**

7. While reaffirming the respective roles and authorities at the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, the UN member States decided to establish a universal intergovernmental high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently replacing the Commission. The high-level political forum is expected to follow up on the implementation of sustainable development policies and should avoid overlap with existing structures, bodies and entities in a cost-effective manner. In addition to issues cited in para. 6, the Forum could:

- (a) Set a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges;
- (b) Follow up and review progress in the implementation of the previous sustainable development commitments and the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference;
- (c) Encourage high-level system-wide participation of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and invite other relevant multilateral financial and trade institutions to participate, as appropriate;
- (d) Improve cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system on sustainable development programmes and policies;
- (e) Promote system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies.

8. The UN member States further decided to launch an intergovernmental, open, transparent and inclusive negotiation process under the General Assembly to define the format and organizational structure of the high-level forum with the aim of convening the first high-level forum at the beginning of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

#### **B. Environmental pillar in the context of sustainable development**

9. The governments reiterated the need to strengthen international environmental governance within the context of the institutional framework for sustainable development, in order to promote a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development as well as coordination within the United Nations system. In this regard, the outcome document outlined a number of measures to strengthen the role of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as the leading

global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda and invited the General Assembly to adopt a resolution, at its sixty-seventh session, strengthening and upgrading UNEP. Establishing universal membership in the Governing Council of UNEP was cited as one of the measures along with strengthening financial capability and solidifying the role of UNEP in consolidating UN 's activities on environment.

### **C. Regional, national, subnational and local levels**

10. The UN member States acknowledged the importance of the regional dimension of sustainable development stating that regional frameworks can complement and facilitate effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete actions at the national level.

11. Moreover, the Rio+20 outcome document emphasized "that regional and subregional organizations, including the United Nations regional commissions and their subregional offices, have a significant role to play in promoting a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their respective regions"(para. 100). In this regard, these institutions were urged to prioritize sustainable development through, inter alia, more efficient and effective capacity-building, development and implementation of regional agreements and exchange of information, best practices and lessons learned. The UN regional commissions and their subregional offices were further requested to support UN member States in implementing sustainable development policies.

### **D. Thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues**

12. The outcome document further listed a number of thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve the objectives of the Conference. Some of these issues, which have particular relevance to the work of NEASPEC, are reflected below:

- **Sustainable cities and human settlements:** The importance of pursuing sustainable urban planning and design was underlined, inter alia, through provision of sustainable city infrastructure and adoption of energy efficiency measures.
- **Oceans and seas:** While committing to protect and restore the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems and maintain their biodiversity, the member States expressed concern that the health of marine ecosystems is adversely affected by marine pollution from sea and land-based sources.
- **Biodiversity:** The outcome document reaffirmed the intrinsic value of biological diversity, as well as its various values and critical role in maintaining ecosystems, and highlighted the importance of the conservation of biodiversity, enhancing habitat connectivity and building ecosystem resilience.
- **Desertification, land degradation and drought:** The UN member States reaffirmed their commitment to take coordinated action nationally, regionally and

internationally, to monitor land degradation and restore degraded lands in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas and encouraged capacity-building, training programmes and scientific studies and initiatives aimed at deepening understanding and raising awareness of the economic, social and environmental benefits of sustainable land management.

- **Sustainable consumption and production:** The UN member States recognized the importance of pursuing fundamental changes in the way of consumption and production in societies in order to achieve global sustainable development goals and adopted the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns.

### **E. Sustainable development goals**

13. After reaffirming their commitment to full and timely implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, the UN member States recognized the importance and utility of devising a set of sustainable development goals, based on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which would fully respect all the Rio Principles. The goals are expected to address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their interlinkages and be coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015. They should be action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities.

14. In order to initiate the process of achieving the sustainable development goals, an open working group will be set up comprising 30 representatives prior to the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly and is expected to submit a report, to the sixty-eighth session of the Assembly, containing a proposal for sustainable development goals for consideration and appropriate action. The initial input to the work of the working group will be provided by the UN Secretary-General, in consultation with national Governments, while the ongoing support will be offered by the United Nations system, including through establishing an inter-agency technical support team and expert panels.

15. Recognizing that there is a need for global, integrated and scientifically based information on sustainable development, the UN member States requested the relevant bodies of the United Nations system, within their respective mandates, to support the regional economic commissions in collecting and compiling national inputs in order to contribute to the global effort.

### **F. Means of implementation: Finance**

16. The UN member States agreed to establish an intergovernmental process under the auspices of the General Assembly that will assess financing needs, considering the effectiveness, consistency and synergies of existing instruments and frameworks, and

evaluating additional initiatives, with a view to preparing a report proposing options on an effective sustainable development financing strategy. An intergovernmental committee, comprising 30 experts nominated by regional groups will implement this process, concluding its work by 2014 with a report to the Assembly.

### **G. Means of implementation: Technology**

17. The outcome document recognized the importance of strengthened national, scientific and technological capacities for sustainable development as a means to help countries develop their own innovative solutions, scientific research and new, environmentally sound technologies, with the support of the international community. In this regard, the UN member States requested relevant United Nations agencies to identify options for a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies. Furthermore, the UN Secretary-General was requested to make recommendations regarding the facilitation mechanism to the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly on the basis of the options identified and taking into account existing models.

## **II. POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES ON SUBREGIONAL LEVEL AND THE ROLE OF NEASPEC**

18. It should be recalled that the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) was established in 1993 by member States of the subregion as a follow-up to the UNCED. Thus, NEASPEC is an evident example of the subregional institutional framework for addressing the issues of sustainable development. NEASPEC is currently the most comprehensive environmental cooperation mechanism in North-East Asia both in terms of geographic representation and its programme of work.

19. NEASPEC facilitated a concerted subregional discussion during the preparatory process to Rio+20 Conference in the course of its SOM-16 held on 1-2 September 2011 in Seoul. As such, the SOM-16 featured a special session dedicated to the Rio+20 Conference, which in addition to official delegations of NEASPEC member States also gathered a wide representation of UN agencies, research institutions, academia and civil society organizations. As a result of this session, the subregional member States produced a Chair's Summary which was submitted as the official NEASPEC input both to the Asian and Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting (RPM) and to the UNCSD secretariat as an input to the zero draft of the Rio+20 outcome document.

20. The regional and subregional organizations, including the United Nations regional commissions and their subregional offices, were given a significant role in the Rio+20 outcome document, where their capacity to promote a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development was specifically highlighted. Additionally, they were requested to prioritize sustainable development through, inter alia, more efficient and effective capacity-building,

development and implementation of regional agreements and exchange of information, best practices and lessons learned.

21. Taking into account that the secretariat functions of NEASPEC are performed by the UNESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (SRO-ENEAA), there is a high potential for synergies between the actions on the subregional level and the processes that will be coordinated by UNESCAP on the regional level. NEASPEC could serve as a platform to facilitate concerted inputs and discussions of subregional member States on the decisions of Rio+20 that are most relevant to its current programme of work and design its future activities in accordance with the outcomes of the Conference and the role that was allocated to subregional entities in the outcome document.

22. The potential areas for involvement of NEASPEC are listed in Table 1 below and may include, inter alia, the followings:

#### **H. A green economy in the context of sustainable development:**

As the Conference invited the relevant intergovernmental and regional organizations to support developing countries upon request to achieve sustainable development, including through the green economy policies in the context of sustainable development (para. 68 of outcome document), the NEASPEC may facilitate policy dialogue among stakeholder groups of member States on policies in support of green economy in the subregion and beyond, especially in light of the existing initiatives implemented in a number of member States in North-East Asia. This may include exchange of ideas on models of good examples, toolboxes and best practices. The initial work of NEASPEC can be based on the ongoing activities of SRO-ENEAA and NEASPEC in the field of Eco-Efficiency Partnership. This may position NEASPEC as the locus of subregional follow-up to Rio+20 outcome document.

#### **I. Thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues**

The NEASPEC may wish to consider the guidance provided in the Rio+20 outcome document regarding the thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues, especially, concerning the current areas of work of NEASPEC and in elaboration of its future activities. Such thematic areas, include, inter alia, i) sustainable cities and transport; ii) biodiversity; iii) sustainable consumption and production; iv) desertification, land degradation and drought; and v) oceans and seas. Details of proposed actions by NEASPEC and the relevant provisions of the Rio+20 outcome document are reflected in Table 1 below.

#### **J. Sustainable development goals**

The NEASPEC may become a platform for subregional discussions on elaboration of sustainable development goals and consolidate joint inputs in this regard to regional and global discussions. As the sustainable development goals are expected to focus on thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues reflected in the outcome document, the starting point for NEASPEC discussions may be the existing areas of work and other most pressing environmental challenges in North-East Asia.

**Table 1: Proposed actions under NEASPEC in support of relevant thematic areas highlighted in Rio+20 outcome document [no page number on this page]**

Thematic Areas	Rio+20 Outcome (relevant paragraphs)	Proposed Action by NEASPEC and reference SOM-17 documents
<b>Green Economy</b>	<p>Consider...as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development and that it could provide options for policymaking (56)</p> <p>Enhance our ability to manage natural resources sustainably and with lower negative environmental impacts, increase resource efficiency and reduce waste (60)</p> <p>Invite relevant stakeholders, including the United Nations regional Commissions ... to support developing countries upon request to achieve sustainable development, including through, inter alia, green economy policies (68)</p>	<p>Facilitate policy dialogue among stakeholder groups of member states on policies in support of green economy</p> <p>Promote NEASPEC as the locus of subregional follow-up to Rio+20 outcome</p>
<b>Sustainable Cities (transport)</b>	<p>Support a safe and healthy living environment for all, sustainable transport and energy; safe and green urban spaces; safe and clean drinking water and sanitation; healthy air quality (135)</p> <p>Recognize that partnerships among cities and communities play an important role in promoting sustainable development (137)</p>	<p>Launch a knowledge platform for low- carbon city development in North-East Asia, consisting of a web-based database of strategies and programmes</p>
<b>Biodiversity</b>	<p>Enhance habitat connectivity and building ecosystem resilience(197)</p>	<p>Connect protected areas and conservation efforts beyond borders for the conservation of</p>

	<p>Implement the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets(198)</p> <p>Promote international cooperation and partnerships and information exchange (202)</p>	<p>NEASPEC flagship species, which will directly contribute to achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets' Strategic Goal C on the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity</p> <p>Support policy development for sustainable livelihoods of local communities in protected areas and habitats of NEASPEC flagship species</p>
<b>Sustainable consumption and production</b>	<p>Adopt the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns (226)</p>	<p>Facilitate knowledge sharing among member States on eco-labeling programme and green procurement and, in particular, conduct capacity building programme for Mongolia</p>
<b>Desertification and land degradation</b>	<p>Encourage capacity-building, extension training programmes and scientific studies and initiatives aimed at deepening understanding and raising awareness of the economic, social and environmental benefits of sustainable land management policies and practices(207)</p>	<p>Continue to implement the Regional Master Plan on the Prevention and Control of Dust and Sandstorms in North-East Asia, and, in particular, provide technical support to Mongolia through NEASPEC</p>
<b>Ocean and Seas</b>	<p>Protect, and restore, the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems, and to maintain their biodiversity (158)</p> <p>Recognize the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction(162)</p>	<p>Launch the North-East Asian Marine Protected Area Network to strengthen multilateral cooperation on marine biodiversity and improve the management of marine protected areas</p>

### III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

23. The Meeting may wish to discuss the main aspects of subregional follow-up activities under NEASPEC in support of the implementation of the outcomes of Rio+20.

24. This Meeting may wish to provide the guidance on how to strategically shape the current and future programme of work of NEASPEC in line with the Rio+20 outcome document and how to strengthen its role in subregional cooperation for sustainable development.

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