



Africa Regional Preparatory Process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20

Concept Note



**United Nations
Department of Economic
and Social Affairs**



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1. Background

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 was a landmark event for the sustainable development agenda. It highlighted international commitment to providing public and political support for addressing environment and development issues in a holistic and integrated manner. The Conference, otherwise known as the Rio Summit, at which Agenda 21 was adopted, sought to build on the momentum engendered by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE), which took place in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972, and which was the first global forum that sought to address the interlinked areas of environment and development.

A five-year review conducted in 1997 reported that little progress had been made in implementing Agenda 21. The desired momentum for accelerated implementation and a political declaration affirming renewed commitment were not generated. In view of this, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was convened in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. The goal of WSSD was to conduct a further (10-year) review of implementation of the outcomes of UNCED, particularly Agenda 21, and to reinvigorate global commitment to sustainable development.

The main outcomes of the global conferences and summits on sustainable development are summarized in the box below:

UNCHE, 1972: A Declaration on the Human Environment; a set of principles that called for rational and integrated planning and harmonization of development and environment objectives; and an environmental management programme facilitating comprehensive planning and taking the impacts of human activities into account with a view to protecting and enhancing the human environment for present and future generations.

UNCED, 1992: The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; and Agenda 21 - a global plan of action that was adopted to ensure sustainable development through integration of environment and development issues. It reflected global consensus and political commitment at the highest level on development and environment cooperation. Other outcomes were the Forest Principles and Global Conventions on Climate Change and Biodiversity.

WSSD, 2002: The Political Declaration; the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI); and Type II partnerships initiatives. The Political Declaration reaffirmed global commitment to the objectives of sustainable development. The Plan of Implementation contained targets and timetables to engender actions on a wide range of issues, most of which converged with and reinforced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The partnership commitments on Water and Sanitation, Energy, Health and Environment, Agriculture, and Biodiversity and the Ecosystem Management (WEHAB) initiative numbered over 200 at the time of the Summit, including major initiatives by development partners. In order to better focus efforts to address the development needs of Africa, the international community identified the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) for special attention and support.

On 11 December 2009, the Second Committee of the General Assembly adopted a resolution to organize the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government (HOSG), in Brazil, in June 2012. The objective of the Conference is to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the

outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and address new and emerging challenges.

The Conference will focus on two themes, to be discussed and refined during the preparatory process:

1. A green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and
2. The institutional framework for sustainable development.

2. Regional Implementation Review Process

At UNCED, it was recognized that regional and subregional cooperation was important for implementation of the outcomes. In this regard, the Regional Commissions of the United Nations and other regional institutions were called upon to promote the integration of environmental concerns in regional and subregional development policies. Regional bodies were also requested to improve regional and subregional consultation to facilitate exchange of data, information and experience in the implementation of Agenda 21. This mandate was strengthened at WSSD, which tasked the Regional Commissions in collaboration with other regional actors to facilitate and promote balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development into their work, and into the work of regional, subregional and other bodies. Further, it was indicated that this could be done by facilitating and strengthening the exchange of experiences including national experiences, best practices, case studies and partnership experiences related to implementation of Agenda 21.

In view of the foregoing, and in conformity with its status as the United Nations regional arm in Africa, ECA has played and continues to play an important role in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda in the region. In 1997, the Ministers responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning in Africa established the Africa Committee on Sustainable Development (ACSD) to provide a platform for advocacy and for regional level assessment of the implementation of sustainable development commitments. Since then, a number of institution-strengthening measures have been taken at the Ministerial and Committee levels as well as at ECA to enable adequate response to this mandate. The Committee on Food Security and Sustainable Development (CFSSD) was established in April 2007, by Resolution 853 (XL) of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to take over the functions of the defunct Africa CSD.

In order to allow for effective consideration of regional and subregional inputs throughout the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) Implementation Cycle, meetings of the ACSD since 2005 have provided platforms for the Africa Regional Implementation Meetings (RIMs) that review progress in the implementation of the commitments contained in A21, PFIA21 and the JPOI. Regional implementation meetings are organized in collaboration with the CSD Secretariat, African regional and subregional organizations, regional offices of funds and programmes, as well as other organizations of the United Nations system. The outcomes of the RIM feed into the global CSD sessions. Furthermore, the thematic cluster of issues discussed in the RIMs is aligned with those contained in the Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Commission.

3. Need for a Well Coordinated Regional Preparatory Process for Rio+20

In order to ensure high-quality inputs to the Conference, the Second Committee of the General Assembly called for efficient and effective preparations at the local, national, regional and international levels by Governments and the United Nations system and encouraged the active participation of all major groups at all stages of the preparatory process. Further, it decided that the Conference and its preparatory process should take into account the decision taken at the eleventh session of the Commission to carry out, at the conclusion of the Multi-Year Programme of Work, an overall appraisal of the implementation of A21, the PFIA21 and the JPOI. It also decided that a preparatory committee should be established within the framework of the CSD to carry out preparations for the Conference.

A five-year review of the implementation of the outcomes of WSSD in Africa conducted by ECA and partners in 2007 in the context of the regional review process revealed that while progress had been made in implementing the sustainable development agenda in Africa, many challenges and constraints remained. The review also showed that adequate means of implementation within the framework of effectively functioning institutional and strategic frameworks for sustainable development are crucial. In this regard, African countries should be adequately prepared to ensure that the concerns and priorities of the region are well articulated and reflected in the outcomes of the 2012 UNCSO. The decision of the Second Committee to convert the RIMs into regional preparatory meetings for the Conference in 2011 reflects the importance attached to regional review processes in bridging the gap between the global and national levels.

An effective regional preparatory process is therefore essential to effectively guide and prepare African countries to collectively articulate their concerns and priorities and ensure that these are adequately reflected in the outcomes of the Conference. It will also serve to strengthen the regional consultative mechanism to support national, subregional and regional implementation following the Conference. The proposed process is intended to mirror the preparatory process that was instituted to prepare African countries for the WSSD. This will include the establishment of a Steering Committee to guide and facilitate the process, with ECA serving as overall coordinator.

4. Objectives and Scope

The overall objective of the regional preparatory process is to provide guidance and to facilitate consultations in order to ensure the coordination of Africa's preparations for the Conference in an effective and efficient manner. The intent is to arrive at a consensus on Africa's key sustainable development concerns and priorities, to effectively articulate them and to ensure that they are adequately reflected in the Conference outcomes.

Through their respective Regional Economic Communities (RECs), all African countries in the five subregions of the continent will be actively engaged in the process.

5. Expected Outcomes

1. Well-articulated documentation of progress in the implementation of A21, PFIA21 and JPOI commitments, clear understanding of the constraints and challenges, and well-informed recommendations to enhance implementation progress;
2. Enhanced understanding and appreciation of the institutional and strategic frameworks necessary to effectively pursue sustainable development in Africa;
3. Increased understanding and appreciation of the new and emerging challenges to advancing Africa's sustainable development agenda and well-informed, action-oriented recommendations to effectively address the challenges;
4. Clear understanding and appreciation of the prospects and challenges for Africa in the transformation to a green economy in the pursuit of sustainable development and poverty eradication goals;
5. Clear articulation of Africa's concerns and priorities in regard to implementation of sustainable development commitments; and
6. Increased commitment and actions to advance Africa's sustainable development agenda.

6. Outputs

- Five subregional review reports on the implementation of A21, PFIA21 and JPOI commitments;
- Africa regional review report on the implementation of A21, PFIA21 and JPOI commitments;
- Report on new and emerging challenges to advancing Africa's sustainable development agenda;
- Report on institutional framework for sustainable development in Africa;
- Report on a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication in Africa; and
- Africa consensus statement to Rio+20.

7. Implementation Strategy and Partnerships

7.1 Implementation strategy

As mentioned above, the proposed process is intended to mirror Africa's preparatory process to WSSD. A steering committee will be established to guide the review process. Review reports on the implementation of sustainable development commitments will be commissioned for the five subregions of Africa. In addition, thematic reports on new and emerging challenges, a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication in Africa and on institutional frameworks for sustainable development in Africa will be prepared. The subregional review reports will be tabled for discussion at subregional consultative meetings and will be finalized based on comments and inputs provided at the meetings.

A draft regional review report and a draft Africa consensus statement will be prepared based on the findings of the subregional consultations. The draft regional review report will include an analysis of the political commitment for sustainable development, an integrated analysis of progress made and gaps remaining; institutional and strategic frameworks for sustainable development; new and emerging challenges; a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication in Africa; and international cooperation.

The process will culminate in a ministerial-level Africa regional preparatory conference (Planning/ Finance, Environment and Social Sectors), where the draft regional review report, the draft Africa consensus statement and the different thematic reports will be tabled for discussion. These will be finalized based on comments and inputs provided at the conference.

The conference will also adopt a statement on strengthening the regional consultation/coordination mechanism for realizing the sustainable development agenda in Africa, following the UNCSD. Given that this conference is expected to attract participation at the level of Heads of State and Government (HOSG), it is essential that the consensus statement and other relevant outcomes of the ministerial conference are endorsed by the African Union (AU) Summit.

7.2 Partnerships

Cooperation and collaboration among the various regional and subregional actors and with development partners is imperative to building synergies, leveraging resources and ensuring that the review process is conducted in the most effective and efficient manner. In this regard, partners will be engaged on the basis of their respective comparative advantages.

It should be underscored that an important objective is to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development with a focused political document as a main outcome. It is also important to note that the Conference will attract participation at the level of Heads of State and Government (HOSG). In this regard, it is essential that the consensus statement adopted at the ministerial level be endorsed at the Summit level. Therefore, the African Union Commission (AUC), being the Secretariat of the African Union, has an important role to play.

In addition to AUC and its NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency (NPCA), partnership with RECs and the African Development Bank (AfDB) is pertinent. These regional and subregional bodies will provide the necessary political and/or financial leverage at these levels, engender buy-in from all regional actors, as well as direct the process to ensure that consensus on Africa's sustainable development concerns and priorities is reached in the most efficient and effective manner.

Partnership with bilateral and multilateral development partners, including United Nations entities, as well as all major groups as identified in Agenda 21, is an essential part of the process. Participation will be based on their relevance and respective comparative advantages to the preparatory process. Proposed United Nations partners include UNEP, UNDP, UNDESA and other UN organizations. African civil society networks representing the nine major groups identified in Agenda 21 will take part.

8. Main Activities, Lead Agencies and Implementation Time Frame

Table 1 provides the lead agencies and implementation time frame for the main activities planned as part of the regional preparatory process for Rio+20. Given the partnership approach to implementation, the estimated financial resources requirements will be determined in consultation with all partners.

Table 1: Main activities, lead agency and time frames

No.	Activity	Lead Agency	Time Frame																							
			2011												2012											
			J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1.	Draft and finalize the concept note	ECA																								
2.	Establishment of the Steering Committee	ECA jointly with partners																								
3.	Mobilization of funding	All Partners																								
4.	Organization of the workshop on Institutional and Strategic Frameworks	ECA jointly with partners			x																					
5.	Organization of the workshop on Sustainable Development Indicator Framework	ECA jointly with partners			x																					
6.	Preparation of the 5 subregional review reports	RECs with support of AfDB and other partners																								
7.	Preparation of the Africa Report institutional framework for sustainable development	ECA																								
8.	Preparation of the Africa Report on new and emerging challenges	AfDB																								
9.	Preparation of the Africa Report on a green economy in the context of sustainable and poverty eradication in Africa	UNEP																								
10.	Organization of 5 subregional consultations	RECs with support of all partners																								
11.	Finalization of the 5 subregional review reports	RECs																								
12.	Consolidation of the draft regional review report and preparation of the consensus statement	ECA jointly with AUC																								
13.	Organization of the regional preparatory conference	All partners jointly																								
14.	Finalization of the regional review report and the consensus statement	ECA jointly with AUC																								
15.	Endorsement of the consensus statement by the AU Summit	AUC																								
16.	Participation in Rio+20, including organization of side events	All partners																								
17.	Follow-up actions (implications for Africa, conference outcomes and the way forward)	All Partners																								