



Post-Rio to Post-2015 Background Paper Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development

The post-Rio+20 period marks an opportunity to rethink and redefining the way in which all stakeholders engage, participate and shape decisions at all levels of government processes. The Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) and good governance came out of Rio strengthened. Whereas section IV of the Rio+20 Outcome Document is the primary IFSD section with paragraphs 75 to 103 detailing governance issues, there are many references to governance elements interspersed throughout the Document. In the first section, aptly named ‘Our Common Vision’, paragraph 10 of the Outcome Document reads:

“We acknowledge that democracy, good governance and the rule of law, at the national and international levels, as well as an enabling environment, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger. We reaffirm that to achieve our sustainable development goals we need institutions at all levels that are effective, transparent, accountable and democratic.”

Strengthening IFSD was one of the two major agenda points of the Rio+20 process and conference. Much time and energy was invested in this process over the official two-year preparatory period leading up to Rio+20 Conference which took place in June 2012. Several governments, the UN itself and civil society engaged strongly in the negotiations. The process and negotiations showed agreement on the need to strengthen IFSD. Several institutional options were discussed during the two-year preparatory period, and whereas principles of good governance now permeate the outcome document from Rio, no final agreement was arrived at on the institutional positioning of sustainable development within the UN.

However, Paragraph 84 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document mandates the development of a new mechanism to deal with sustainable development at the United Nations. Paragraph 85 delineates elements of the work areas of the new mechanism. These two paragraphs are now the basis for the new mechanism that will deal with the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development at the UN and at intergovernmental level. The Paragraph 84 names the new mechanism as “ a high level political forum”. The term is a placeholder name as it is deliberately written with lower case letters. Thus the mechanism that will be named and positioned within the UN hierarchy at a later stage will signal to the world the importance given sustainable development in global politics.

Arriving at an agreement on what exactly the high level political forum (HLPF) does and what it functions remains a major challenge. With the mandate from Rio, a process has started within the UN to find a solution, and over time a workable solution will have to be found as decisions are expected by May 2013. This will be a critical juncture in time for future work on sustainable development at intergovernmental level. At this time the functions and work of the present Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will be discontinued and the new mechanism on sustainable development is expected take over this responsibility.

The key questions to address in this working group session include:

1. What should the functions and modalities of the HPLF be?
2. What should the proper name of the HLPF be?
3. What place should the HLPF have within the UN hierarchy? And to whom should it report?
4. What aspects of CSD’s history and agreed modalities should be retained and adopted going forward?
5. How can governance models integrate sustainable development across the UN System?
6. How should the HLPF reporting on sustainable development?
7. What governance models and modalities can be adopted post-Rio to promote the rights of future generations and intergenerational fairness? I.e. should the High-Commission/Ombudsperson for Future Generations initiative be revived?