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Round tables

Chairperson's summaries of the round tables

A series of four Roundtables were convened from 2-4 September, as an integral element of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Under the theme of "Making It Happen," participants addressed the challenges for the Johannesburg Summit. Participants included Governments; UN agencies, organizations, funds and programmes; intergovernmental organizations; and Major Groups. Representation was at the highest level.

The Summit Secretariat prepared a background document containing questions relevant to issues of: mobilizing resources, improving international and national institutions as well as their capacity to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, promoting cooperation in the WEHAB priority areas, providing access to scientific knowledge and affordable technologies, and strengthening commitment to global solidarity.

Roundtable One: Monday 2 September, 3:00 pm

The first Roundtable was convened under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Aleksander Kwasniewski, President of the Republic of Poland. He cited commitments made in Rio, Monterrey as well as at the Millennium and Children's Summits. He noted that although each contributed new elements, more stimuli were needed from this Summit to respond to major problems such as poverty eradication, famine, hunger, environmental degradation, and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. Participants expressed confidence that the Plan of Implementation to be adopted at the Summit would provide some answers on how to implement solutions to those problems.

1. Leading to renewed and stronger commitment to global solidarity

Security, stability, peace and respect for human rights as well as good governance are basic requirements for sustainable development. Justice for the world's poor must be ensured so that poverty can be eradicated. Accountable and rights-based partnerships should be developed without dismantling the social base of sustainable development. New partnerships at the global and regional levels, alliances between civil society and governments and the strong engagement of local communities provide hope for progress. However, renewed and stronger commitment to global solidarity must be grounded in the political will of governments. A strong Plan of Implementation and partnership initiatives must be complementary.

2. Mobilizing resources to support Millennium development goals and Summit priorities

The percentage of GDP set aside for ODA has declined in the past ten years, and a number of participants agreed that agreed ODA targets must not only be met, but also increased, to ensure adequate resources for developing countries in addressing poverty eradication. While noting that ODA should not comprise an unsustainable form of charity, several participants stressed that developed countries should instead redirect resources and establish venture capital funds in the poorest countries to stimulate investment in the South. WEHAB issues could guide the prioritization of ODA resources.

Clear goals, accountability, peer review, trust in partnerships and addressing corruption in both the private sector and government were emphasized as keys to success in attracting investment for poverty reduction. The private sector can be a positive agent for change, but it needs reassurance that legal and political frameworks will promote stability for investments, as well as support from the public sector.

Globalization must be codified and the multilateral trade system must be fair and equitable for all. Removal of trade barriers by developed countries and substantial trade liberalization are essential to provide developing countries as well as countries with economies in transition with new trade opportunities. However, in the view of some, trade liberalization has too often been proposed as the

solution for sustainable development, with the debate turning to those who control trade liberalization, with little discussion of the rights of local communities.

Several participants stressed that countries with economies in transition should be involved in development and integration into global economic systems. Additionally, funds must be earmarked to create jobs in rural areas, and financially viable projects need to be developed and access to credit needs to be facilitated.

Mobilization of resources is not just about financial and technical resources but includes human resources. WSSD should offer solutions for mobilizing human resources. Several participants stressed job creation for income generation to reduce poverty, while another noted that expanding employment must be linked to improving the quality of employment, including good health and safety standards. Gender equality was stressed, and in particular women's rights. A number of participants stressed the importance of an educated and empowered citizenship.

Sustainable development initiatives should take into account the specific social and economic conditions and cultural identities of indigenous people. Many stressed that programs should be applied based on consultations with local communities, including women, youth and indigenous people. Recognition of land rights, the right to self-determination, and a rights-based approach to addressing poverty that would contribute to improve policies at the national level are essential for strengthening local and indigenous communities.

3. Improving coherence and consistency in national and international institutions as well as their capacity to integrate the three components of sustainable development

Progress since Rio includes improvements in legal systems, and sustainable development implementation at regional levels and by civil society. Institution building is progressing in many parts of the world. A number of participants stressed the need to mainstream environmental considerations into the economic agenda through government ministers of finance, trade, industry, mining, and agriculture. This should be the major task of the next decade. National sustainable development strategies provide a means for national integration and cooperation. It was emphasized that an integrated network of institutions at all levels is essential for coherent and consistent implementation of sustainable development policies.

Regional sustainable development strategies are useful for regional level cooperation and integration. The European Union water initiative, the Alpine Convention, the NEPAD initiative, and a framework for regional ocean initiatives were cited as examples of integrated regional initiatives. It was noted that a system of development banks is well established and is effectively assisting in implementing agreements in the ECLAC region.

Several participants emphasized the vulnerability of local communities to the climate change phenomenon, especially in the form of natural disasters, and the very great potential for severe economic and social consequences. They maintained that the international community is obliged to assist in reducing this vulnerability through support for regional actions, and internationally through the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

In terms of institutional improvements, some participants noted the multiplicity and hierarchy of international agencies, and one suggested that ECOSOC be used as a forum to ensure coherence and coordination of policies of the UN system related to sustainable development. The Commission on Sustainable Development should follow-up the Summit and partnership initiatives. With respect to the national level, many agreed that national governments should give more recognition to local governments.

4. Promoting cooperation in the five priority areas of water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB)

The need for affordable and accessible water and sanitation projects was highlighted. On biodiversity, it was stressed that special ecological networks were needed and that options for balancing biodiversity and energy needs should be developed. Sustainable development concerns agriculture producers directly, and several participants noted that destruction of agricultural lands in areas of conflict has caused production to drop due to wasted water resources. Support was expressed for activities on water access, access to renewable energy and assistance in resource-efficient energy consumption. Several participants called for urgent, equitable and fair solutions to agriculture subsidies. Others noted that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption must be changed.

5. Bringing to bear scientific knowledge on decision-making and ensuring affordable access to critical technology and scientific knowledge

Decision-making must be based on sound scientific analysis. Several participants highlighted a lack of reliable data, especially at the regional level. With regard to the WEHAB areas, sufficient knowledge and technology are available, but not readily accessible. Modern technology for shifting to sustainable development processes is costly and those with low purchasing power have less opportunity to acquire and benefit from new information and technologies. Capacity building is needed to apply available scientific knowledge and corresponding know-how. Several participants noted that a considerable body of technologies and corresponding knowledge is available in the public sector in developing countries, which could be made available to developing countries at affordable prices.

6. Recommendations from participants included the following:

- Fulfill ODA commitments and facilitate FDI flows to developing countries. ODA should particularly target the least developed countries that have limited access to FDI;
- Develop financially viable projects and access to credits, regional and global cooperation, peace and security, capacity-building and economic stability;
- Create markets for environmental services with strong support from the private sector;
- Increase GEF funding and make procedures simpler and more transparent;
- Ratify the Kyoto Protocol so that it can enter into force as soon as possible; and
- Recognize the right to self-determination and land rights of indigenous communities.

Roundtable Two: Tuesday 3 September, 10:00 am

The second Roundtable was convened under the chairmanship of H.E. Ms. Massoumeh EBTEKAR, Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Participants addressed the problems of poverty, indebtedness, lack of necessary resources, lack of health care services, sanitation and fresh water supply, trade related issues including subsidies, tariffs and primary goods prices, the digital divide and the impacts on the environment.

Global warming was considered by a number of participants to be of major concern, especially for Small Island Developing States and other vulnerable countries. Participants from Small Island Developing States expressed anxiety about rising sea levels in parts of the country that are, at most, one or two meters above sea level. Other countries discussed increasingly harsh weather conditions that have had deleterious effects on their farming and livestock. This is especially important for countries that rely heavily on such means. It was suggested that capacity building for local people could be an important tool to help adjust to changing conditions.

1. Leading to renewed and stronger commitment to global solidarity

In assessing implementation on a broad level, the importance of political will was frequently stressed. Public opinion and awareness was seen as a strong motivating factor for the creation and maintenance of such resolve. It was emphasized that implementation of sustainable development goals hinges on the application of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

A number of participants pointed out that peace and security are essential preconditions for economic growth and development as well as protection of the environment. Sustainable development is impossible in regions and countries marked by conflicts, upheavals and wars.

2. Mobilizing resources to support Millennium development goals and Summit priorities

Human Resource Development

During the Roundtable discussion, a number of participants highlighted the importance of education and health as key elements required for sustainable development and, in particular, poverty eradication. Participants stressed the need for human resource development as essential for creating a foundation for future economic growth as well as social development and environmental protection. Among the priorities, universal primary education, especially for girls, was highlighted. The link between health and education was also explored and provision of potable water, proper sanitation and eradication of disease were seen as essential to creating conditions supportive of development.

Capacity building was discussed as a corner stone for human resource development as well as other aspects of sustainable development. One participant stated that, in his country, the cultivation of

culture and creation of an identity was seen as integral to the assurance of a sense of human dignity. This sense of belonging to a community is important to maintaining a healthy and sustainable society.

Financial Resources

There was a special and strong emphasis placed on the need for financing and the mobilization of new and additional resources to facilitate implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg agreements and commitments. A number of participants expressed concern over the difficulty of finding donors for project proposals. Too much of the money allocated for projects is absorbed in the process of project approval and administration. This arrangement should be improved to ensure that a larger portion of the funding is devoted to the actual project.

The Clean Development Mechanism was identified a new source of financing aimed at combating climate change. The mechanism is transparent and involves all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector.

A proposal to establish an International Humanitarian Fund to meet the goals of poverty eradication, health care, sanitation and education for the poor, received broad support. This would be funded by a percentage of external debt repaid by the developing countries, a percentage of money seized from illicit drug trafficking, money derived from corruption and deposited abroad and the taxation of major financial transactions. There was also a suggestion to consider the possibility of global taxation for the development of global public goods.

It was repeatedly emphasized that developed countries should honor their commitments to contribute 0.7 per cent of their GDP to developing countries as Overseas Development Assistance. Domestic savings and private investment were cited as other important sources of finance.

The Marshall Plan of the post World War II era was identified as a possible model for providing assistance for sustainable development.

The heavy debt burden carried by many developing countries was identified as a major impediment to mobilizing domestic resources for sustainable development. Many suggested the cancellation or restructuring of debt. Capping debt service at no more than ten percent of budgetary resources was also proposed.

Trade and foreign direct investment were cited among the important means of mobilizing financial resources. Therefore, calls were made for removal of market distorting subsidies as well as trade barriers. There were also calls for greater provision of market access for developing countries.

The instability of financial markets was identified as a major obstacle to development. Several participants expressed concern over the inability of vulnerable economies to weather the wide

fluctuations in the market as well as the string of recent crises. It was pointed out that existing international financial institutions do not currently have the capacity to adequately address these issues. There is thus a need to strengthen and reform these institutions.

3. Improving coherence and consistency in national and international institutions as well as their capacity to integrate the three components of sustainable development

The significance of a balanced and holistic approach to the three pillars of sustainable development was highlighted. It was pointed out that an integrated approach, while not a novel idea, needs further development. There is currently no internationally agreed tool for using an integrated approach in policy and programme planning and development. Efforts should be undertaken to address this shortcoming.

The importance of collaboration and coordination among the international and regional organizations and other actors in the realization of sustainable development was highlighted. At the national level, there is need for better coordination among ministries.

The NEPAD initiative was mentioned as a potentially successful partnership and there was a general call for greater cooperation and partnership among countries. Sharing of information and experience should be undertaken among developing countries as well as between developed and developing countries.

4. Promoting cooperation in the five priority areas of water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB)

Human resource development is an important part of addressing issues related to water, energy, health, agriculture, and biodiversity. Access to energy by the poor was cited as a principle requirement for sustainable development. Problems of ensuring safety in power generation, especially when working with nuclear energy, were addressed. It was stated that developing countries need greater financial and technical assistance to meet these concerns as well as to develop alternative energy sources. Concerns were expressed over the existing unsustainable patterns of consumption, which impacts on natural resources.

5. Bringing to bear scientific knowledge on decision-making and ensuring affordable access to critical technology and scientific knowledge

Participants underscored the importance of national capacity building in science and technology in developing countries and international cooperation to facilitate access of developing countries to technology and corresponding knowledge.

The importance of equitable sharing of benefits from economic growth and development as well as scientific and technical progress was emphasized. Some participants noted that intellectual property rights systems should ensure that the benefits from the use of genetic resources and traditional knowledge be more equitably shared with the country of origin.

A greater level of transfer of technology is required and there is a need to narrow the digital divide. Centers of excellence and institutions of higher learning should be established to build capacity for technological development at the national level. Such technology should be appropriate to the national situation and circumstances. For example, Information Communication Technology (ICT) is currently a strong engine of growth around the world, but the developing countries are being left behind.

Although the goal for developing countries is to reach a comparable level of development as the industrialized countries, it is important to facilitate transfer of technology to developing countries to enable them develop while avoiding environmental degradation.

Incorporation of sound science into policy and decision-making was stated as a necessary requirement for addressing the WEHAB issues. Technology cannot be effectively used to achieve sustainable development unless there is a strong link between the scientific community and policy makers. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change was given as an example of success in this regard.

6. Recommendations from participants included the following:

- Establish an International Humanitarian Fund to meet the goals of poverty eradication, health care, sanitation and education for the poor;
- Create a system of peer review among countries to ensure commitment and long-term implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. This would require an institutional follow-up mechanism for such a review, and the United Nations was recognized as a possible forum;
- Invest in education as a key element required for poverty eradication and sustainable development;
- Increase the levels of consumption among some sectors of society in order to alleviate poverty while, at the same time, curbing the high levels of consumption in developed countries to attain a sustainable global rate of consumption;

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- Cap the servicing of the external debt to 10 per cent of the national budgetary resources for highly indebted developing countries;
 - Develop science and technology to address recycling and cleaner technology; and
 - Consider the possibility of global taxation for the development of public services.

Roundtable Three: Tuesday 3 September, 3:00 pm

The third Roundtable was convened under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Goran Persson, Prime Minister of Sweden.

1. Leading to renewed and stronger commitment to global solidarity

Lack of political will was identified as a principal cause of slow progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. Renewed commitment to the integration of environmental, economic and social pillars of sustainable development through a global coalition of governments, international organizations and civil society needs to be carried out through increased partnerships and cooperation among relevant sectors. Overall, the discussion reflected agreement that an inclusive approach involving consultation with local communities and stakeholders should provide the basis for continued efforts to define and implement concrete actions.

Some participants highlighted linkages among environment, trade, peace accords, military arms reduction, implementation of the Monterrey agreement, and developing the values of democracy within a sustainable development framework. They supported adherence to principles of freedom, equality, tolerance, and respect for nature, and proposed international networks for science that reach across political, religious and social boundaries as a basis for global solidarity.

Sustainable development could be achieved through a sustainable development coalition given common but differentiated responsibilities of nations. This requires mobilization to involve everyone in understanding and implementing sustainable development. The Commission on Sustainable Development should be strengthened to follow-up implementation of the outcomes of WSSD.

2. Mobilizing resources to support Millennium development goals and Summit priorities

Sustainable development depends on the ability of countries to mobilize domestic and international financial resources. The commitment of several countries at the Monterrey Conference to increase their levels of ODA over a period of time is a concrete step toward resource mobilization for poverty reduction. Participants said that FDI and ODA should be complimentary and suggested debt cancellation for the poorest countries, and noted agreement to raise their ODA to 1% of GDP. The contribution of the trade, as discussed at Doha, was mentioned as one of the most significant resources for sustainable development.

Several participants stressed the importance of eliminating unsustainable and trade distorting subsidies including harmful agricultural subsidies. It was noted that US\$ 1 billion per day spent in developed countries on agricultural subsidies exacerbated extreme poverty in developing countries by depriving small farmers export opportunities and of sustainable livelihoods, while increasing overall disparities in wealth between the North and the South. While there was general agreement that world

leaders should take action to eliminate harmful agricultural subsidies but most also recognized that this would be a challenging task. One participant said that it is possible to gradually reduce trade-distorting subsidies in a way that is also fair to developed country farmers.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic and hunger in Africa require more creative ways of mobilizing resources. Increased support from GEF and the World Bank should be given to educational and research institutions, the Global Fund on HIV/AIDS could be complemented by a global fund on poverty alleviation, and an international solidarity fund could mobilize action through civil society, for example in the aftermath of natural disasters in developing countries that require relief assistance.

There was general agreement that governments must increase support to institutions that can build basic human resource capacity and allow community-based organizations to contribute to sustainable development. The private sector, for its part, should stimulate community action through the planning of social and economic development efforts. Small farmers need to acquire education and the means to build capacities to participate in markets. International institutions should provide continuing support for these efforts.

Caution was raised against imposing a donor-driven agenda in implementation and avoidance of new bureaucracies. Recognizing that states represent national interests and private organizations answer primarily to their shareholders, there was support for the creation of a global NGO that could pragmatically address poverty, health, education and other issues on a voluntary basis, with contributions from the private sector, including resources, technology, and support for free and fair trade.

3. Mobilizing resources to support Millennium development goals and Summit priorities

Ensuring a coherent and coordinated follow-up to Doha, Monterrey and WSSD commitments was considered important, and several participants called on the UN to avoid duplication, promote coherence within the UN system, and establish clear links between the Plan of Implementation and partnership initiatives. Additionally, UN bodies should focus on action-oriented and locally embedded strategies that add value.

Consulting local communities has proven vital to development of regional and national poverty reduction strategies. The lack of resources is a problem, but development banks have the potential to assist in the education and technology sectors, and industry can accommodate many stakeholders in consultation processes. Environmental action plans, economic development, health, agriculture, and energy efficiency can be implemented through funds from the private sector, loans from development banks, and increased levels of employment. Strengthening regional cooperation for implementation is essential in this regard.

Regarding the national level, it was proposed to create a mechanism to ensure continuity so that a change in national government does not affect implementation of international agreements and commitments. Good governance should provide a framework, and partnerships should be supported so their impacts are felt in a context of cooperation and coherent effort. Elaboration of national sustainable development strategies and poverty reduction strategies could be complemented by permanent mechanisms for implementation. Real progress will be seen over time, as stronger linkages are formed among sectors.

4. Promoting cooperation in the five priority areas of water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB)

Partnerships provide a new foundation for sustainable development. One of the basic sustainable development commitments lies in the strengthening of dialogue and empowering civil society. An understanding of cultural diversity is also fundamental to making sustainable development happen in a way that is not only effective, but also appropriate for those who stand to benefit. Partnerships need to incorporate a cultural understanding of communities and their value systems in order to successfully meet targets related to energy, biodiversity, clean water and sanitation.

Investments in initiatives for children's health including work with reporting and developing indicators on children's health, water and sanitation, and air pollution were seen as important. Clear actions to deliver water and sanitation to the rural poor should involve investment in rural infrastructure, and engage NGOs, empower women and youth, and monitor implementation. The traditional belief that water is an unlimited resource must end.

Participants from African countries highlighted problems of drought, desertification and health. The problem of desertification in the Sahel region requires substantial funds to maintain roads, wells, and the social infrastructure and living conditions of rural and urban communities. In this region, inclusion of farmers and trade unions in efforts to address the WEHAB areas was mentioned as an example of dealing with such challenges in an inclusive manner, illustrating the relationship between implementing sustainable development and ensuring decent working conditions.

5. Bringing to bear scientific knowledge on decision-making and ensuring affordable access to critical technology and scientific knowledge

The Millennium Declaration addresses universal education and notes the need to increase enrollment rates. The problem of brain drain was highlighted, and proposals were heard regarding introduction of new technologies into development programmes and integration of relevant sectors for information sharing, ODA should be used for the optimum benefit in developing countries.

Investments in science and technology are necessary to increase the scientific and technological knowledge base in developing countries. Investment in educational programs in these disciplines is

crucial to reverse the decline in science and technology research in developing countries. Networks and institutions are in place, but need to be utilized to make science relevant to the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development. One participant called for triangular cooperation among finance providers, developing countries that have made advances in developing technology, and recipient countries involved in South-South technology transfer.

6. Recommendations from participants included the following:

- Establish a global fund on poverty alleviation, similar to the Global Fund on HIV/AIDS;
- Create a mechanism to ensure continuity so that a change in national government does not alter prior international agreements and commitments;
- Invest in science and technology to increase the scientific and technological knowledge base in developing countries;
- Promote coherence within the UN and establish clear links between the Plan of Implementation and partnership initiatives; and
- Consider the possibility of creating a global NGO that could pragmatically address poverty, health, education and other issues on a voluntary basis.

Roundtable Four: Wednesday 4 September, 10:00 am

The fourth Roundtable was convened under the chairmanship of H. E. Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana.

1. Leading to renewed and stronger commitment to global solidarity

Participants expressed the importance of multi-stakeholder processes. One participant described the process of developing a matrix to set priorities to reshape national policies, involving all stakeholders. The Plan of Implementation needs to be carried out in both developed and developing countries and can be an important tool in formulating a new rationale for tackling global issues, creating alliances and gaining public support. The Summit has underscored the importance of a multilateral approach, and will provide new impetus to engage major groups as well as the media continuously for the cause of implementation.

Systemic approaches at the local level should prioritize renewable energy, water supply and sanitation, social family support schemes, cultural diversity, reciprocity and cooperation. One participant supported a new paradigm of social development through empowering local communities, and through economic justice and ecological compassion. Another proposed national, regional and global youth councils.

2. Mobilizing resources to support Millennium development goals and Summit priorities

The discussion on mobilizing financial resources revolved around issues of meeting ODA targets, national budgets tied to servicing foreign debt, the potential of FDI to implement sustainable development initiatives and creating an investment-friendly environment, and the need for international cooperation on the problems of smuggling and tax evasion.

Perceptions of mismanagement of ODA were also discussed. Several participants felt that the view that ODA is wasted needs to be changed through evidence of effective use. Others challenged that up to 70% of ODA funds identified for specific countries do not actually end up being spent in-country. Rather than relying on ODA, an investment-friendly climate should be fostered. Small country participants felt that their voice was not heard by international financial institutions, and that the response to HIPC initiatives was very slow. They called on those institutions to accelerate the process. However, some participants noted that small countries are at a disadvantage in attracting FDI because they lack economies of scale. Trade barriers can sometimes negate ODA applications. Some measures, including a 0.5 percent tax on regional trade to generate funds to improve infrastructure and Tobin tax on international financial transactions were suggested.

The recognition that business can and should be part of the solution is a positive outcome of the Summit, and was discussed in detail by a number of participants. Some shortcomings of NGOs,

such as difficulty in obtaining long-term funding, were noted. Regarding forestry, for example, the private sector can more effectively address reforestation through working with small farmers, and through land and forest stewardship, providing incentives for conservation. Companies are potential partners not just for funding but also as a means for implementing environmental projects.

Many private companies want to demonstrate that they have become environmentally and socially responsible. They face questions about legitimacy and are increasingly keen to establish links to environmental activity, and developing countries should try to take advantage of this. Businesses are acknowledging that trust and responsibility are essential to credible efforts in meaningful partnership through efforts such as the Global Compact Initiative. The representative of the business community noted that: sustainability for business is an opportunity; responsibility is the standard by which they will be judged; accountability is an obligation they must assume; and partnership is the pathway that they will pursue in the future.

Capacity building should begin at the local level and build up through governments and NGOs, using education as a means to further development. Education and capacity building should be linked through work carried out in the field that allows for a practical transfer of human resources and skills. Education was suggested as a sixth priority added to WEHAB. Education should be specifically targeted at women and girls.

There is a need to create small and medium-scale entrepreneurs and jobs, especially in least developed countries, in such areas as renewable energy supply at the local level. Investments in maintenance of small-scale water and energy systems can create jobs and contribute towards alleviating poverty. Resource mobilization for cities is needed to improve housing conditions and address rapid urbanization.

Several participants noted that in spite of their efforts in training skilled people, many young and educated people left their countries in search of better jobs. Some compensation should be given when international firms actively recruit their skilled people.

Pro-poor budgeting for women is needed to harness their intelligence and abilities. Partnership initiatives should also bear in mind the rights of local and indigenous communities to be consulted, recognizing their rights to self-determination and prior informed consent.

3. Improving coherence and consistency in national and international institutions as well as their capacity to integrate the three components of sustainable development

At the international level, UN agencies and programmes should streamline a process whereby country reports can be submitted using one format to avoid duplication. One participant noted that the UN Development Group works to facilitate better coordination at the country level among the UN

agencies, funds and programmes. He also stated that better coordination with OECD, World Bank and others outside the system should be improved.

Many discussed the effects of desertification and drought in connection to action on water management. Desertification would be best addressed through the UNCCD, which contains provisions that link combating desertification with sustainable development. Several called for coordinated implementation of the Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

Cooperation at regional and national levels is necessary, but international coordination is also required to avoid overlaps and wasting resources. One participant noted that the World Urban Forum could serve to stimulate linkages among all levels for local action. Regional integration can be a catalyst for sustainable development.

Some called for a forum for the poorest small countries to have a voice in promoting broad-based partnerships in international institutions. One participant highlighted regional efforts on behalf of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), but noted that policy statements emanating from Rio and the Barbados Programme of Action need to be translated into action. A mechanism for advancing the cause of SIDS in multilateral institutions, including contingent line of credit to small disaster-prone states, was suggested. Bodies that promote regional cooperation should link up to international initiatives and promote South-South cooperation through research centers of excellence in WEHAB areas, to exchange ideas and knowledge and support capacity building in developing countries. These bases could be upgraded to regional centers of excellence.

There is a need to use technology and institutional mechanisms to encourage a multiplier effect. Ministries of planning should be strengthened to better articulate the integration of sectoral issues. Centers for monitoring water and the environment can measure degradation of soil and watersheds and prevent desertification before it is too late.

4. Promoting cooperation in the five priority areas of water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB)

Regional and global cooperation in the WEHAB areas needs to be promoted to meet the targets for water and sanitation. Coordination for regional implementation or consultations on issue areas of education in the WEHAB areas should occur regularly to ensure continuous follow-up. Application of science and technology is key to the establishment of water treatment systems in rural areas.

Several participants noted that the Draft Plan of Implementation contains a number of agricultural and sustainable development provisions that can inject dynamism into future action. Capacities among farm organizations should be built at the national level, and poverty in rural areas

must be addressed in part through land ownership and water resources. Aid organizations working with farmer organizations through farmer-to-farmer exchanges have a greater potential to spread financial and technical assistance.

One participant recommended that biodiversity become an asset for mega-biodiverse countries so that it can be valued more accurately. The indigenous community felt that their stewardship of biodiversity should be recognized as contribution to the wealth of the world.

5. Bringing to bear scientific knowledge on decision-making and ensuring affordable access to critical technology and scientific knowledge

One participant stressed that political decisions must be based on sound science. Another pointed out that because humankind is destined to make decisions with incomplete scientific knowledge, precaution is a necessary element involved in decision-making with a lack of scientific verification. Another noted that governments should seek independent and objective scientific advice and scientists must be recognized as important advisors to governments, and opinions provided should be respected.

On technology, safe drinking water technologies should be widely diffused through working with the business communities to distribute, upgrade and maintain them.

6. Recommendations from participants included the following:

- Promote broad-based participation, through coordination with UN bodies, with education as the top priority.
- Pursue regional integration, through specific projects in each country to avoid working in isolation in addressing sustainable development.
- International financial institutions must respond to the needs of small countries and accelerate the response to HIPC initiatives.
- Small and medium-scale entrepreneur development is essential, especially in least developed countries, in creating jobs and contributing towards poverty alleviation.
- Encourage aid organizations to work closer with farmer organizations to facilitate spreading financial and technical assistance through farmer-to-farmer exchanges.
- Decision-making should be based on sound science, while applying the precautionary approach where information is lacking. Government should seek out independent, objective scientific advice in this regard.