



Network of Regional Governments
for Sustainable Development

UN Secretary General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability
Civil Society Consultation Questions – Response from nrg4SD

The Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development, nrg4SD works tirelessly to champion the work of subnational governments on sustainable development, including climate action. International organisation representing over 600 subnational governments (namely federated states and regional governments) at the global level; nrg4SD promotes understanding, partnerships and projects in sustainable development and seeks greater international recognition of the important contribution of subnational governments towards sustainable development. Member of the Forum Global d'Associations de Régions (FOGAR), nrg4SD is the voice of FOGAR in the field of sustainable development.

The content of this document does not necessarily reflect the detailed opinion of each member of nrg4SD.

1. Context: assessing progress towards global sustainability

a) What is your objective assessment of progress (or regress) in the achievement of global sustainability over the past few decades?

Since the Sustainable Development (SD) Summits in Rio 1992 and Johannesburg 2002, several important achievements of global sustainability have been reached.

Firstly, important **international agreements** have been ratified by several governments which imply an international coordinate action (eg. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and subsequently the Kyoto Protocol, Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on Desertification, Johannesburg Declaration, Global Programme of Actions on SD such as Agenda 21 and JPol). Consequently, most of governments have elaborated and implemented more and better regulation on SD issues, with a clear focus on environmental themes.

Secondly, a step forward has been taken on **legislation on strategic documents** (such as sustainable development strategies (at national and subnational levels), plans and programs on different areas like climate change, transport, energy, social inclusion. Strategic thinking in governments has facilitated the implementation of initiatives with a longer temporal goal that would benefit not only the actual society but the rights and needs of the future generations.

Thirdly, the **level of public awareness of SD** and environmentally behavior has substantially increased. People and organisations know now what we are talking about, what SD means and how they can influence the future consequences with their daily life (this can be seen by, for example, the implementation of multiple public participation processes at all levels concerning the elaboration and implementation of policies and the variety of schools that have integrated the SD in their educational program).

Fourthly, all over the world subnational governments have been demonstrating in a number of ways that their contribution and leadership is essential to help achieve the ultimate objectives of sustainable development. The **intensive role of the subnational**

governments and local authorities on SD issues has facilitated the success of multiple SD policies (like sustainable development strategies, Agendas 21, climate change strategies, the EU Covenant of Mayors...).

Last but not least, global sustainability progress has been achieved thanks to the **implementation and improvement of different sectoral policies and processes** such as environmental assessment methodologies, voluntary agreements, climate change issues, green procurement (especially on public procurement), etc.

However, **some there are still remaining challenges** that should be tackled in order to improve the progress towards global sustainability, namely:

- To continue including **SD as a horizontal commitment in all policies**. This means to increase mainstreaming SD into laws, plans and bodies (truly incorporating the 3 pillars of SD through, for example, considering SD strategies into political principles).
- To achieve effective **coordination among different governmental levels, especially among national, subnational and local authorities**, being these 2 last ones particularly well placed for identifying the needs and the strengths of their societies thanks to their closeness to the citizens to whom they are liable and accountable.
- To **acknowledge** that the initiatives and efforts of nation states towards SD become stronger when transposed and complemented by **subnational governments** and their stakeholders.
- To provide and facilitate at national and international level **adequate and adapted institutional frameworks and resources** so as to **maximise the potential of subnational governments** in the common challenge towards SD.
- To develop and implement **standard sustainability assessment methodologies**, based on, for example, standardise indicators and objectives, externalities calculations, etc.
- To further **deepen collaborative work with civil society, also building upon the solid experience of subnational governments** in doing this.

b) Why have the three pillars of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) not been better integrated into coherent policy making?

Some reasons that can explain this lack of integration are:

- 1) that responsibilities (competences) with regards **SD** have been **mostly considered by the environmental ministries/departments**, instead of being considered in a wider concept that would include the interdependency among the 3 SD pillars and therefore the collaborative work of several structures/departments/ministries,
- 2) the **insufficient coordinating mechanisms at national, subnational and local government** level among the different relevant ministries, departments and agencies; and



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3) the **lack of a reference definition (common understanding) of SD** equally interpreted by all actors and all levels of governance. This has triggered discrepancies on the sustainability justice (most of the cases mainly on the environmental justice) of initiative and actions.

2. Foundations for a new vision of sustainability

a) How would you define the new vision (or “paradigm shift”) required to transform economic development dynamics in a manner that simultaneously pursues the goals of poverty eradication, full and decent employment and reducing inequalities, while promoting social and environmental regeneration and sustainability?

At global level, we are in the middle of a period of deep reflection about how to make the way forward to a green economy. Certainly this is induced by the global financial and economic situation we are in since 2008, but also thanks to the preparatory process of the United Nations Rio 2012 Conference on Sustainable Development, which will take place next June 2012. As stated in UNEP’s recent report on green economy¹, increasing evidence from the economic, social and environmental points of view justifies the need and opportunity to carry out important efforts by governments, the private sector and our societies in general in order to encourage a green economy.

Subnational governments have a vital role in the realisation of a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Subnational governments can also benefit from the opportunities of a green economy by improving their environmental, social and economic conditions and enhancing their environmental assets.

Within the European Union (EU), the adoption and implementation of the Strategy Europe 2020² as the vertebrating axis of the European policy for the future demonstrates the will of European member states to achieve a smart, green and inclusive economy. The priorities outlined by Europe 2020 are i) smart growth based on knowledge and innovation; ii) green growth capable of ensuring competitiveness while guaranteeing the efficient use of resources, and iii) inclusive growth to encourage the creation of jobs as well as territorial cohesion.

The EU 2020 Strategy contributes to higher resource efficiency, job creation, and increased innovation, as well as being good for the climate and the environment. However, it does not include the goal of poverty eradication and reducing inequalities with a global point of view, even though it offers some scope on international cooperation on eco efficiency.

The European Strategy Europe 2020 enshrines the fundamental contribution of subnational governments to public policies towards ensuring the effective implementation of the green economy model.

¹ “Towards Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication”, UNEP, February 2011

² COM (2010) 2020 final 03.03.2010 Europe 2020 – A Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth
http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

None of these international and European initiatives can be taken to its full potential if not accompanied with a full revision of the global environmental governance and the sustainable development framework. Any new international governance should be deeply rooted in **a wide multistakeholder and multilevel governance approach, which also recognises the full potential of subnational governments** in achieving sustainable development.

3. Better and more coherent policies and institutional mechanisms

a) What better policies and measures are required at national and international levels to put into practice the goals of the new development paradigm? These can be discussed generically, or in relation to particular sectors such as agriculture, forestry, extractives, services (including social/environmental services), manufacturing, water, energy, housing, etc..

First of all, not only national and international levels are crucial to design and implement this new development paradigm. **Subnational governments have a vital role in the realisation of sustainable development and poverty eradication in the context of a green economy.** Subnational governments are particularly **well placed for identifying the needs and the strengths of their societies** in this process thanks to their closeness to the citizens to whom they are liable and accountable. Either through power-sharing arrangements or constitutional attribution of powers subnational governments are **often responsible for** the development and implementation of **laws, policies, strategies and fiscal mechanisms** in areas **that directly contribute to a green economy and the achievement of sustainable development** such as energy, mobility, waste, industry, agriculture, water, land and resource management, climate change mitigation and adaptation, ecological services, education, social inclusion, health, civil protection to environment risks, spatial planning, tourism, technology transfer, public procurement, decentralised cooperation.

Subnational governments **encourage flagship initiatives that facilitate the transition** towards a green economy and contribute to the economic development, recovery and regeneration of their territories. Some examples of these initiatives are the encouragement of ecoinnovation in the private and associative sectors and via public procurement; the implementation of policies for boosting and consolidating green jobs; the modernisation of the energy and transport sectors on the basis of the development of smart grids and efficiency technologies, and the elaboration of strategies to tackle global change and challenges.

The challenges of this new development paradigm are tightly interlinked. Therefore, initiatives or solutions need to be searched and established through **integrated approaches of policy making at all levels of government**, involving the economic sectors and social actors.



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b) What obstacles (at the national or international level) need to be overcome in implementing these new policies and measures? What are fair and politically acceptable ways of overcoming these challenges?

The transition to the new development paradigm will have to take into account the **global financial and economic situation** that lacks on economic resources and the different starting points of the different countries.

Moreover, the **fragmentation of competences with regards to SD** among different governmental departments might hinder the efficient transition to the new development paradigm.

Often **responsibilities** related to SD are **being shared with national, subnational and local governments. But rarely institutional frameworks and resources are fully adequate and adapted** to the implementation responsibilities of subnational governments, nor oriented to maximising their potential to contribute to SD.

g) What mechanisms should be put in place to ensure better policy dialogue and coherence among all stakeholders in meeting the goals of the new development paradigm and holding public institutions accountable? Should existing institutions be reformed and/or new ones be created? And if so why and how?

The review of international environmental governance and the sustainable development framework should **go beyond the discussions around existing institutions, including UNEP**. The economic, social and environmental challenges we are facing are crying out for **multilevel and multistakeholder governance** adapted to the modern times. True multilevel and multistakeholder Global Environmental Governance and Sustainable Development Institutional Framework will help turn the current and emerging environmental issues into opportunities. Such a positive interpretation generates hope and trust; and though it requires strong leadership, it is also in itself an enabler of leadership because it places the ownership of the process in all key stakeholders and levels of government.

Subnational governments call on all national governments and international organisations **to review the framework of the current Major Group for Local Authorities in order to reflect as well the crucial role of subnational governments**. It is worth noticing that, within the Rio Conventions, at their last meeting in October 2010 in Nagoya the parties of the UN Convention for Biological Diversity (UN CBD) adopted Decision X/22 endorsing the Plan of Action for Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities. The Decision invites Parties to involve subnational governments, cities and other local authorities when revising their national biodiversity strategies and action plans; and invites subnational governments, cities and other local authorities and their networks to contribute to the implementation of the Plan of Action. Besides, the Plan of Action identifies as partnerships and coordination mechanisms the establishment of Advisory Committees of Cities and of Subnational Governments.

Subnational governments also call on national governments and international organisations **to build upon the current dialogues on the basis of the existing Major Groups and move towards the establishment of new deeper formal “partnerships”**

with subnational governments and local authorities, based on commitment and accountability.

At the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC26/GMEF) that took place February 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya, the President's summary of the meeting, as a contribution of UNEP to the preparatory process towards Rio +20, highlighted the urgent need of real reform of the current international environmental governance, as opposed to cosmetic reform; and stated that "local and regional authorities are critical in implementation of agreed national commitments" (paragraph 62 in combination with 45). This recognition has already taken place within the Rio Conventions, not only under the UN CBD as above mentioned, but also during the last Conference of the Parties of the UN Convention for Climate Change (UNCCC) held in December 2010 in Cancun, Mexico. The Cancun Agreement recognised for the first time subnational governments and local authorities as key governmental stakeholders in global climate change efforts. Besides the Outcome of the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on long-term Cooperative Action under UNCCC (WG-LCA) contained numerous references to subnational governments and local authorities.

4. Measures of progress beyond GDP

c) How could these indicators become associated with time-bound targets that could be a part of new sustainability goals?

To be able to overcome the short term interest and planning, these indicators need to be linked to clear targets, timetables and responsible implementers to be able to predict and assess the roadmap we are drawing.

The **calculation of externalities** (assumed as social and environmental costs not taken into account by the current economics system) is an optimal tool for governments to justify decision, prioritise future initiatives and set targets towards global sustainability. Several subnational governments in their sustainable development strategies provides a first calculation of the environmental externalities of their territories.