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Rio +20: the WWF-UK call for action

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WWF-UK is calling for action from Governments to:

- Rebuild economies in a way which aims to eradicate poverty, promote sustainable development, and take account of the value of the natural environment;
- Redirect inappropriate subsidies to sustainable water, energy and food initiatives;
- Support the development of global Sustainable Development Goals which address the interlinked social, environmental and economic challenges to establish the framework for international development after 2015;
- Promote business initiatives which bring sustainability accounting into investment planning and practice; and encourage private investment in green products, technologies and programmes.

Green Economy

A Green economy, including a stable and secure financial system, needs to deliver three key outcomes:

- improved human wellbeing and social equity;
- reduced human impact so as to keep within the environmental limits/carrying capacity of the planet; and
- safeguarding natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystem services in order to provide water, energy, and food security for all, now and into the future.

Governments and policy leaders need to include measures of progress which go beyond GDP and account for the value of natural wealth – biodiversity, natural resources and ecosystems. The contribution of natural wealth to the economy should be reflected in both national accounts and corporate reporting.

Measuring sustainability is a priority issue for Rio+20, which should adopt measures of development which recognise the value of natural resources and services. There currently are overall indicators for two of the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic (GDP) and social (IHDI) but not environmental. WWF-UK calls for a comparable indicator for the environment.

At the same time governments need to redirect money currently used for subsidies that impede the transition to sustainable development. These subsidies which currently support investment in fossil

fuels, and in unsustainable agriculture and fisheries practices, should be used to encourage investments which bring benefits to local communities and safeguard the natural environment.

Sustainable Development Goals

The proposal for SDGs is the best opportunity to enshrine the principle of equity and to embed sustainability in the post- 2015 global development framework. SDGs should contribute to achieving the three overarching objectives for sustainable development defined in Johannesburg in 2002 as:

- poverty eradication,
- changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and
- protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development.

SDGs should build on the experience from the MDGs of the coherence brought to development at both the international and national level. While it is important to work towards attainment of the MDGs by 2015, the Rio +20 Conference needs to mandate a clear and transparent process ahead. This process should bring together successes and lessons from the MDGs with the proposed SDGs. The aim should be to identify the principles and unify discussions on the post-2015 development agenda, including those on climate change. The process must ensure participation by all relevant stakeholders.

The United Nations and member states should aim to set out global goals that are universally applicable, address the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development, and are equitable both within and between countries. The Millennium Declaration¹, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation², and Agenda 21³ provide useful guidance.

Business initiatives

Many businesses realise the importance of addressing sustainability. For example, Unilever’s global sustainability plan is applied to all its planning and operations⁴. The UK government is keen for business to take an active role but needs to clarify how business is expected to contribute and what support is needed.

WWF-UK supports the proposal from Aviva on Corporate Sustainability Reporting⁵ and the initiative on Natural Capital Accounting⁶. These proposals encourage companies to incorporate sustainability into their business models.

Opportunities for private investment in green goods and services need to be explored. For example, Forest Bonds which allow private investors to underpin sustainable forest management could provide a mechanism to increase investment in sustainable development. The scale of finance needed for the transition to a green economy can only be achieved by harnessing private investment; governments need to explore how best they can enable this investment to take place.

For further information on any aspect of the above please contact:

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1961-2011: 50 years of conservation. WWF works in over a hundred countries to protect the natural world, tackle climate change, and promote sustainable consumption.

¹ <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>
² <http://www.environment.gov.au/about/international/uncsd/index.html#jpoi>
³ <http://www.environment.gov.au/about/international/uncsd/publications/pubs/agenda21.pdf>
⁴ <http://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/uslp/>
⁵ <https://www.aviva.com/data/media-uploads/news/File/Rio%202012/Towards%20a%20convention%20on%20corporate%20sustainability%20reporting%20two%20pager%20end%20March%202012.pdf>
⁶ <http://www.naturalcapitaldeclaration.org/declaration.php>
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