

**Sixty-eighth session**

Item 19 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**Sustainable development: implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development****Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development****Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

The present report, prepared in response to General Assembly resolution [67/203](#), provides an update on the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and on the implementation of the resolution. It highlights the role of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in reviewing the overall follow-up to the Conference and, more generally, progress in sustainable development and new and emerging issues.

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\* [A/68/150](#).



## **I. Introduction**

1. The present report provides information on the progress made in implementing General Assembly resolution [67/203](#), by which the Assembly called in particular for coherence, synergy and mutual support among follow-up processes to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. At the time of preparation of the present report, various processes launched at the Conference were ongoing, such as the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. There has also been an ambitious process of reflection and consultation on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. Moving forward, there is need to ensure greater coherence and mutual support among these various processes within the broader framework of the post-2015 development agenda.

2. The present report should be read in conjunction with other reports submitted to the General Assembly on sustainable development.

## **II. Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development**

3. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was held from 20 to 22 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20 years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

4. It was the largest United Nations Conference ever, gathering not only world leaders but also an impressive number of non-State actors, including representatives of the nine major groups created by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, as well as foundations and philanthropic organizations, academia and others.

5. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want” (see General Assembly resolution [66/288](#), annex), launched several intergovernmental processes, which are at various stages of implementation.

### **A. Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals**

6. In January 2013, the General Assembly established the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and welcomed its membership (General Assembly decision [67/555](#)). To date, the Open Working Group has held four sessions under the co-chairmanship of Macharia Kamau (Kenya) and Csaba Körösi (Hungary). It will hold four further sessions, and aims to complete the stock-taking and information-gathering phase of its work in February 2014. Thereafter, the Open Working Group is expected to begin preparing its proposal for sustainable development goals for the consideration of the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session.

7. At its first session, the Open Working Group had a broad exchange of views. At the second session, the Group considered two issues, namely, conceptualizing the sustainable development goals and poverty eradication. At the third session, the Group considered food security and nutrition; sustainable agriculture; desertification, land degradation and drought; and water and sanitation. At its fourth

session, the Open Working Group focused on employment and decent work for all; social protection; education and culture, with youth as a cross-cutting issue; and health, population dynamics. The Group will hold another five sessions between now and February 2014.<sup>1</sup>

8. The following main ideas have emerged from the work of the Open Working Group thus far:

(a) The Millennium Development Goals are the point of departure for the development of sustainable development goals. Completing the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals on poverty eradication and other important social objectives must figure centrally in the post-2015 development agenda. At the same time, the sustainable development goals must be more ambitious and must be at the centre of a transformational agenda;

(b) The sustainable development goals should reinforce and build upon international commitments in the economic, social and environmental fields undertaken at United Nations conferences and summits and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development;

(c) Poverty eradication is multidimensional and remains the overarching objective of the international community. It needs to be central to a proposal on sustainable development goals;

(d) The sustainable development goals must be universal and applicable to all countries, which means that they must be flexible enough that countries at different levels of development and with different national priorities can have ownership of them. They will need a strong bottom-up engagement through broad consultation in their formulation. The voices of the poor and vulnerable especially need to be heard;

(e) A global dashboard of goals and targets could be a way of reflecting common but differentiated responsibilities and adjusting the goals to national circumstances;

(f) The sustainable development goals will need to draw on strategies and approaches to sustainable development that exploit effectively the critical interrelationships and key drivers of change and support it with appropriate means of implementation. The sustainable development agenda has to be supported by transformative change and shifts in order to realize the vision of sustainable poverty eradication and universal human development that nurtures respect for human dignity, protects our planet and promotes harmony with nature for the well-being and happiness of present and future generations.

## **B. Institutional framework for sustainable development: high-level political forum on sustainable development**

9. Another critical outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was the establishment of a universal intergovernmental high-level political forum to follow up on the implementation of sustainable development.

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<sup>1</sup> For the programme of work see <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1778Pow2805.pdf>.

10. In July 2013, the General Assembly decided on the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum (resolution [67/290](#)).

11. The high-level political forum will be a hybrid process: it will meet every four years for two days under the auspices of the General Assembly at the level of Heads of State and Government and every year under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for eight days, including a three-day ministerial segment within the framework of the substantive session of the Council. It will replace the annual ministerial review in 2016. The forum's meetings will result in negotiated declarations.

12. The inaugural meeting of the high-level political forum under the auspices of the General Assembly will take place at the level of Heads of State and Government on 24 September 2013, while the first meeting of the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, including three days at the ministerial level, will take place in 2014.

13. The meetings of the high-level political forum will provide for the full and effective participation of all States Members of the United Nations and States members of the specialized agencies. The Assembly encouraged broad participation by the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, and other relevant intergovernmental organizations, including the World Trade Organization. It also decided on modalities to enhance the participation and consultative role of major groups and other stakeholders.

14. The General Assembly mandated the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to support the forum in close cooperation with all relevant entities of the United Nations system, including funds and programmes, multilateral financial and trade institutions, the secretariats of the Rio conventions and other relevant treaty bodies and international organizations within their respective mandates. The expanded Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA plus)<sup>2</sup> will be used to engage the United Nations system and other entities in supporting the work of the forum.

15. The functions that the General Assembly envisioned for the forum encompass those highlighted in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (see resolution [66/288](#), annex, para. 86). The forum will have a thematic focus reflecting the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, in line with the thematic focus of the activities of the Economic and Social Council and consistent with the post-2015 development agenda (see resolution [67/290](#)). It will also discuss specific sustainable development challenges facing least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and Africa, as well as sustainable development challenges faced by middle-income countries.

16. The forum, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, will also conduct regular reviews of the implementation of sustainable development commitments by countries and United Nations entities, starting in 2016. Those reviews will replace the national voluntary presentations held in the context of the annual ministerial reviews of the Council and build on the experiences and lessons

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/unsystem.html>.

learned in that context (ibid.). The forum will also take into account the work of the Development Cooperation Forum.

### **C. Strengthening the science-policy interface**

17. One of the roles of the forum is to strengthen the science-policy interface and enhance evidence-based decision-making at all levels. As recognized at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the documentation prepared for the forum must enable it to fulfil this role. In 2014, the forum will consider the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report, based on a proposal of the Secretary-General reflecting the views from Member States and relevant United Nations entities, including the Committee on Development Policy.

18. This year, the Secretariat has produced a pilot version of the global sustainable development report<sup>3</sup> in order to facilitate the discussion and decision-making of Member States and other stakeholders.

19. The report maps existing sustainable development assessments and related processes and provides science digests of issues not contained in the assessments. It highlights emerging issues identified by scientists. It also contains policy issues for consideration.

### **D. Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing**

20. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Heads of State and Government also decided to establish an intergovernmental process under the auspices of the General Assembly, to assess financing needs, consider the effectiveness, consistency and synergies of existing instruments and frameworks and evaluate additional initiatives, with a view to preparing a report proposing options on an effective sustainable development financing strategy to facilitate the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objectives (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex, para. 255).

21. An intergovernmental committee comprising 30 experts nominated by regional groups, with equitable geographical representation, has been tasked to implement this process, and to conclude its work by 2014. The committee was established by the General Assembly in June 2013 (decision 67/559). The first session of the committee will be held from 28 to 30 August 2013 in New York. Member States and other interested parties will be briefed on the work of the committee, as requested in resolution 67/203.

22. The committee is expected to draw on technical support from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations system and to conduct its work through open and broad consultation with relevant international and regional financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1621>.

## **E. Options for facilitating the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies**

23. With respect to the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the General Assembly on technology facilitation, four workshops were convened in April and May 2013 by the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. They drew from the knowledge and perspectives of over 20 thinkers and practitioners from academia, research institutions and non-governmental organizations.

24. The report of the Secretary-General on options for a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies (A/67/348) provides recommendations for the way forward. The workshops allowed participants to better appreciate the range of opinions on the subject and the complexity of issues, which must be well understood before further action can receive consensual support. Numerous issues are likely to benefit from a continued substantive dialogue.

## **F. Sustainable consumption and production**

25. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development reaffirmed that sustainable consumption and production patterns are essential requirements for sustainable development, as established in the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development also reaffirmed commitments to phase out harmful and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption and undermine sustainable development. Governments also strengthened their commitment to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production by adopting the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns elaborated at the nineteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

26. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (see General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex) provides the vision, functions, organizational structure, means of implementation and criteria for programme design. The aims of the 10-year framework include facilitating access to support and financing, in particular for developing countries, awareness-raising, information-sharing and fostering innovation and new ideas. The framework also provides an initial, non-exhaustive list of five programmes covering consumer information; sustainable lifestyles and education; sustainable public procurement; sustainable buildings and construction; and sustainable tourism, including ecotourism.

27. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), within its current mandate, was requested to serve as the secretariat of the 10-year framework, and was invited to establish a voluntary trust fund to support implementation of the framework, in particular its programmes and initiatives. At its sixty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided on the composition and nomination process of a 10-member board with 2 members from each regional group (see resolution 67/203). Nominations for the board have been received from all regional groups. The General Assembly designated the Economic and Social Council as the ad interim Member State body to receive reports from the board and the secretariat for the framework.

28. National focal points are being nominated by Member States to ensure close coordination and engagement with the 10-year framework. An inter-agency coordination group was established in May 2013 to support the implementation of the framework. It will be co-chaired for the first two-year cycle by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs jointly with UNEP.

29. The General Assembly, in its elaboration of the formal and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, decided that the forum could provide recommendations to the board of the framework, as well as to UNEP as the secretariat of the framework, taking into account their reports (see resolution [67/290](#)).

## **G. Partnerships and voluntary commitments**

30. Renewed commitment to revitalizing partnerships was an important part of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, together with voluntary commitments that emphasized outcomes rather than just the composition of partnerships.

31. Partnerships and voluntary commitments are not a substitute for Government responsibilities and intergovernmentally agreed commitments; they are intended to strengthen implementation by involving those stakeholders that can make a contribution to sustainable development.

32. The Sustainable Development in Action registry of the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform compiles information on voluntary commitments registered at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and partnerships registered by the Commission on Sustainable Development from the World Summit on Sustainable Development. They are on various topics, such as energy, water, sustainable transport, waste management, sustainable cities, mining and sustainable tourism. The voluntary commitments of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development seek to be specific, measurable, achievable, resource-based and time-bound.<sup>4</sup>

### **Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States**

33. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Member States reaffirmed that small island developing States were a special case for sustainable development. They called for the convening of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2014. Samoa made the gracious offer to host the Conference and the General Assembly decided to hold the Conference from 1 to 4 September 2014, to be preceded by activities related to the Conference from 28 to 30 August 2014 (decision [67/558](#)).

34. In November 2012, the Secretary-General appointed the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs to serve as the Secretary-General of the Conference. The secretariat of the Conference is housed in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with the involvement of all the relevant parts of the United Nations system.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/930Report%20on%20Voluntary%20Commitments%20and%20Partnerships.pdf>.

35. The ongoing preparations are led by small island developing States and are guided by General Assembly resolution 67/207, in which the basic objectives of the Conference were outlined, namely: (a) to assess the progress and gaps in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of small island developing States and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action, (b) to seek renewed political commitment for the same, (c) to identify new and emerging challenges and opportunities and ways to address them, including through collaborative partnership, and (d) to identify priorities for the sustainable development of small island developing States in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

36. The preparations are being carried out at the national, regional and global levels. At the national level, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported local consultancy for national reports of small island developing States, where possible. Country consultations on the post-2015 development agenda were also taken into account in the national preparatory process for the Conference. All completed reports of national consultations are available on the Conference website.<sup>5</sup> Regional overview synthesis reports will be prepared on the basis of the national reports from the small island developing States of each region.

37. Regional meetings were held in all three small island developing States regions<sup>6</sup> in July 2013. The regional meetings were structured around the four objectives enumerated above, with regional variations and depending on the host country preferences. These outcomes fed into the interregional report that will be the basis for the interregional meeting that will take place in Barbados from 26 to 28 August 2013.<sup>5</sup>

38. The global preparatory process is expected to be launched at the end of 2013 (see General Assembly resolution 67/207). The General Assembly will define further modalities of the Conference at the main part of its sixty-eighth session.

39. The substance of the four preparatory meetings revolves around the four major objectives of the Conference mentioned above. The main messages are as follows:

(a) There is a strong commitment by small island developing States to taking full ownership of sustainable development, eradicating poverty, building resilience and delivering quality outcomes;

(b) There is a need for a transformational strategy to ensure acceleration of achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and to integrate priority sustainable development issues into the post-2015 development agenda;

(c) There is a need for an effective high-level political forum that addresses the priorities of small island developing States, including an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

40. As the host country, Samoa has expressed a desire to bring partnerships into sharp focus as an additional key outcome of the Conference, which would entail announcing new partnerships at the Conference but also featuring ongoing partnerships that can be held up as best practices. ECESA plus and the Department

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<sup>5</sup> For these reports and further updated developments see [www.sids2014.org](http://www.sids2014.org).

<sup>6</sup> The Caribbean; Pacific; and Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea regions.

of Economic and Social Affairs have been encouraging efforts within the United Nations system to spearhead initiatives to strengthen existing partnerships, notably in five concrete thematic areas of particular importance to small island developing States: climate change, oceans and seas, waste management, sustainable tourism and natural disaster resilience.

## **H. Intergenerational solidarity**

41. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development underlines the need for promotion of intergenerational solidarity for the achievement of sustainable development, taking into account the needs of future generations. The Secretary-General has produced a report on this topic, including the related conceptual framework and institutional arrangements, for consideration by the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session ([A/68/322](#)).

42. In May 2013, the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized an expert panel on intergenerational solidarity aimed at providing an opportunity for stakeholders to exchange views on the topic of intergenerational solidarity and future generations, including a conceptual framework and institutional arrangements, with a view to informing continued consideration of the topic.

43. The main issues raised were as follows:

(a) Concerns for future generations need to be included in decision-making processes at all levels;

(b) A framework for intergenerational solidarity has to start with a set of shared values and principles that are clear and flexible enough to be acceptable in different cultures and political systems;

(c) Access to education and health is one of the determining factors for the development of future generations, and investments need to be increased in this area;

(d) There is a need to include the younger generation in the decision-making processes, and the high-level political forum could set an example.

## **I. Mainstreaming of sustainable development in the United Nations system**

44. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development called for the further mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the United Nations system, and requested the Secretary-General to report through the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly on progress made in that regard.

45. The report of the Secretary-General ([A/68/79-E/2013/69](#)) was discussed in the Economic and Social Council in July 2013. The report describes how the United Nations system has accumulated experience in supporting integrated approaches to economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. At the same time, it recognizes that mainstreaming sustainable development remains a

complex endeavour that implies rethinking the way the United Nations conceives its analytical and operational work and its support to intergovernmental processes.

46. Studies have shown that Governments attach great importance to the support of the United Nations in the area of sustainable development. Within individual United Nations system organizations, strategic plans are an important tool for driving the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development into policies and operations. The governing bodies of a number of organizations are currently developing new strategic plans, which should provide the opportunity to align the objectives and activities of organizations, not only with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, but also with sustainable development.

47. The United Nations Development Group also has a key role to play by providing guidance on integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development through the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, where they are in place.

48. Only if United Nations system organizations work closely together at all levels, including in cooperation with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, can they support sustainable development. Regional commissions and the regional United Nations Development Group teams remain key players at the regional level, as are the regional coordination mechanisms.

49. At the international level, a wealth of inter-agency mechanisms help United Nations organizations to work together to support policy coherence and integrated approaches. Thus, the Environment Management Group has developed an environment and social sustainability framework. The high-level political forum could build on these initial efforts to develop a framework for further mainstreaming sustainable development into the United Nations system that would benefit the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

### **III. Coherence and coordination of the follow-up processes in the context of the post-2015 development agenda**

50. The present section reviews how the different tracks of the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development come together in the context of the post-2015 development agenda and explores how the high-level political forum and the United Nations system could best serve as an umbrella for these various endeavours.

51. Sustainable development and poverty eradication are now firmly recognized as the overarching objectives of development for the post-2015 period.<sup>7</sup> The principles of sustainable development will be encompassed in the set of universal sustainable development goals that Member States will adopt in 2015.

52. The challenges in the coming months and years will be threefold. First, there must be consistency of messages and directions across all the United Nations

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 development agenda entitled “A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development”. See also the report of the United Nations system Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda entitled “Realizing the future we want for all”, and General Assembly resolution 67/290 on the format and modalities of the high-level political forum.

processes. Secondly, synergies have to be found among processes so that they are fully supportive of each other. Thirdly, a critical challenge will be to achieve in practice the ambitious goal set up in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to strengthen the institutional framework for sustainable development. Because of its broad functions of providing leadership and reviewing progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments, the high-level political forum has a critical role to play in achieving those three objectives. In particular, the high-level political forum will be the legitimate forum to discuss and coordinate the ongoing post-Conference processes until they all reach their conclusion in 2015. Beyond 2015, it should address the post-2015 development agenda, which will have sustainable development as an underpinning principle, along with a strong focus on poverty eradication and a set of sustainable development goals at its core.

53. In August 2012, immediately after the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the Secretary-General wrote to all the United Nations system principals inviting them to work together to implement Conference decisions and attaching a matrix for following up on the mandates.<sup>8</sup> The implementation matrix is to serve as an accountability framework and a working tool to promote and monitor progress. It is being updated regularly to reflect progress and new initiatives.<sup>9</sup>

54. In the post-Conference phase, the United Nations system continues to remain engaged through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and its subsidiary bodies, as well as ECESA plus. Ad hoc inter-agency mechanisms have been set up to support the work of the Open Working Group on the sustainable development goals<sup>10</sup> as well as the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing.<sup>11</sup>

#### **A. Role of the high-level political forum in strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development**

55. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development created the high-level political forum with the explicit purpose of strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development. The functions of the high-level forum, as defined in paragraph 85 of the outcome document of the Conference and elaborated in General Assembly resolution 67/290, form an ambitious agenda that could contribute to the advancement of sustainable development, including in the United Nations system. The challenge will be to give shape to these functions in a way that strengthens the institutional framework for sustainable development as a whole and serves the objectives supported by the various functions in a concrete way that adds value.

56. The establishment of a strong high-level political forum should proceed in tandem with the strengthening of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, to avoid the fragmentation of their agendas and allow for an integrated consideration of sustainable development. The high-level political forum,

<sup>8</sup> See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1138SG%20Letter%20and%20Rio%20Implementation%20Matrix%20-%202002%20August%202012%20First%20Version.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/unsystem.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1549>.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1557>.

together with a revitalized General Assembly and a strengthened Economic and Social Council, should be part of the strengthened governance for sustainable development. Sustainable development should become the guiding principle of work of all United Nations bodies, and those bodies should work in partnership to advance sustainable development. This could be facilitated through a focus by the Assembly and the Council on the report of the forum and its policy decisions and recommendations. The forum could also help to promote the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda by providing a solid framework for considering the three dimensions of the sustainable development goals as well as through its ability to address new issues and react to immediate challenges that might arise.

57. In its resolution [67/290](#) the General Assembly stressed that the forum should provide a dynamic platform for regular dialogue and for stocktaking and agenda-setting to advance sustainable development, and enumerated other functions. However, it did not fully define how the various functions would contribute to the achievement of the objectives outlined above and to the success of the other follow-up processes to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. The aim of the present section is to do this, focusing on functions that are not fully explored in the resolution.

58. Given that the high-level political forum builds on the Commission on Sustainable Development, it can effectively use lessons learned from 20 years of practice of the Commission to advance and strengthen its work. The present report makes use of the lessons reviewed in the recent report of the Secretary-General on lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development ([A/67/757](#)).

59. The first function outlined in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development. Lessons from the experience of the Commission on Sustainable Development show that the existence of a clear institutional home for sustainable development in the United Nations system played a critical role in furthering the reach and acceptance of the concept from 1992 to 2012.

60. The high-level political forum has a critical agenda-setting role to play. The Commission on Sustainable Development played an important role in setting the international agenda on sustainable development. Furthermore, as the incubator and catalyst for intergovernmental discussions on emerging topics the Commission played a role in creating new intergovernmental processes which resulted in recommendations to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council on such topics as forests, chemicals, energy and oceans. This role of incubator and catalyst should be preserved, as it was specific to the Commission, and the high-level political forum is the most practical and legitimate place in the United Nations system to host such discussions. Lessons from the Commission show that in order for this agenda-setting function to be most effective, the forum must be able to attract high-level decision makers representing the different dimensions of sustainable development. Ensuring that this remains the case beyond the initial sessions of the forum should be a priority. Thought must also be given to how the forum can mobilize United Nations system organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions and other intergovernmental organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, to contribute to its work, as mandated by the General Assembly (resolution [67/290](#), para. 17).

61. The Commission on Sustainable Development has also been the only place where implementation of the outcomes of global conferences on small island developing States has been monitored and reviewed. Support provided to the small island developing States will have to continue, not only through the provision of Secretariat support to the Third International Conference on small island developing States, but also through continued provision of analytical and technical support to build the capacities of the small island developing States and their ability to network with each other. This mandate was strengthened in resolution 67/290 as it underlined the need to discuss the specific sustainable development challenges of the most vulnerable countries, including small island developing States, with the aim of enhancing engagement and implementing commitments and recognized the specific challenges facing the middle-income countries in achieving sustainable development.

62. Lastly, the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, acting on recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development, served as the initial home for expert processes that were later transformed into fully-fledged initiatives, including on sustainable consumption and production, sustainable procurement and environmental management accounting. The forum could continue to provide impetus to nascent processes that are at the forefront of sustainability practice.

63. The functions set out in paragraphs 85 (b) and (g) of the outcome document (resolution 66/288, annex) relate to the need for the forum to enhance integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels and to improve cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system. This has previously been perhaps the most elusive goal, at all levels. Integration faces many obstacles. The main obstacle is the fact that institutional settings at national, regional and international levels continue to be organized along sectoral lines. Over the years, many institutional arrangements have been tried in order to better coordinate decision-making and implementation across sectors. At the international level, those have included the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development with its system of task managers, as well as attempts to increase the role of the regional commissions in increasing regional implementation of Agenda 21. The perception is that mixed results have been achieved thus far. The challenge for the future of the high-level political forum will therefore be to find integrated approaches to the three dimensions of sustainable development in policies and activities both in international policymaking and in the work of the United Nations system. Also critical will be the practical provisions that will be put in place in the Economic and Social Council regarding the Council's role in achieving integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development as mandated by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

64. In this regard, in his report (A/68/79-E/2013/69), the Secretary-General identifies ways for the United Nations system to further mainstream sustainable development. He underlines that commitment at the highest level of the United Nations system bolstered by clear and coherent intergovernmental guidance is an important precondition for further mainstreaming of sustainable development. Such guidance should come, in particular, through the high-level political forum, given its role in guiding the work of United Nations intergovernmental bodies and organizations. This would help Member States to send a unified message to United Nations system organizations, including through their respective governing bodies.

65. One dimension that will need to be explored is how to improve the links between global, regional and national policy processes for sustainable development. This was a weakness of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which, although it was visible soon after the establishment of the Commission, was never satisfactorily addressed; decisions taken by the Commission did not trickle down to the regional or the national level. The reasons for this included the perception in national policy circles that the Commission was an environmental forum. This perception was fuelled by a lack of participation of non-environmental agencies and ministries in the preparatory process for the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development. National and regional preparatory processes did not significantly contribute to the global discussions taking place in the Commission on Sustainable Development, except on special occasions, such as the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, where national inputs were the basis for global negotiation.

66. The forum will inherit this issue from the Commission on Sustainable Development. In particular, inputs from the regional and national levels need to be given an appropriate space in the forum. They should be reflected in the forum's policy decisions. This would increase the ownership of these decisions and lead to improved implementation.

67. Based on past experience, this would likely require a combination of measures to: (a) create a robust preparatory process for the sessions of the forum, including capacity-building for countries to prepare submissions based on national reviews of implementation and of national sustainable development-related strategies; (b) ensure a strong focus from the secretariat of the forum on monitoring of implementation at all levels, including through tighter collaboration with the regional commissions in strengthening sustainable development as an overarching framework for the work of the commissions; (c) conduct robust regional processes to prepare for the forum's meetings under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, geared to discussing issues specific to each region and contributing to global policy outcomes by developing recommendations for the forum and to ensure that global policy decisions are relevant at the regional and national levels; (d) support implementation at national and regional levels; and (e) enhance interregional cooperation, where appropriate, for example through interregional dialogues in the forum, building also on regional dialogues conducted in the Economic and Social Council.

68. It has always been the central role of the Commission on Sustainable Development to monitor and review progress in the implementation of the sustainable development commitments contained in Agenda 21 and in the outcomes of subsequent international conferences, including means of implementation. This was done through dedicated annual reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly; thematic reports of the Secretary-General on the themes of the Commission on Sustainable Development, focusing on review and policy; and specific projects, such as the reviews of implementation of Agenda 21 and the Rio Principles prepared by the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.<sup>12</sup> The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on

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<sup>12</sup> See [sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sd21.html](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sd21.html).

Sustainable Development and resolution 67/290 reaffirm that the forum should play such a role, which will be even more critical after 2015, as it becomes necessary to monitor and review the implementation of sustainable development goals. The monitoring of commitments related to means of implementation, which was a weakness in the past, will also need to be strengthened.

69. An important challenge for the forum will be to sustain and deepen the engagement of major groups and other stakeholders, a domain in which the Commission on Sustainable Development was a pioneer and standard-setter in the United Nations. Major groups have provided invaluable inputs to intergovernmental work on sustainable development. For example, most of the new ideas contained in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development were initially proposed or supported by major groups. In its resolution 67/290, the General Assembly retained the modalities for civil society engagement of the Commission on Sustainable Development for the forum.

70. Another dimension of the forum's work will be to define how it relates to voluntary, multi-stakeholder partnerships for the achievement and implementation of sustainable development. While partnerships ("type II partnerships") were officially recognized at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development generated a significant number of voluntary commitments, the place of such commitments in the institutional framework for sustainable development remains to be fully understood and developed. Important issues include the status of these commitments next to more traditional types of commitments, their monitoring and the accountability of those who made them.

71. Enhancing the science-policy interface was not a function that was explicitly included in the mandate of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1992, but has been emphasized in both the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and in General Assembly resolution 67/290, in response to evidence that a comprehensive assessment across the various dimensions of sustainable development was not being delivered by the existing United Nations institutional framework. This goes well beyond channelling some scientific inputs into the intergovernmental process, as was done in the Commission on Sustainable Development through thematic reports produced by the Secretary-General and interaction of delegates with the scientific and technology community at the Commission sessions. Fulfilling this mandate will be a complex task and will require increased resources, as it involves analysis of hundreds of sectoral assessments and ongoing coordination of the work with many agencies of the United Nations system.

72. Paragraph 85 (l) of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (resolution 66/288, annex) provides that the forum could enhance evidence-based decision-making at all levels and contribute to strengthening ongoing capacity-building for data collection and analysis in developing countries. This is a function that the Commission on Sustainable Development used to assume, along with other United Nations and non-United Nations entities, such as the Statistics Division of the Secretariat. In particular, the Commission both produced normative work and promoted capacity-building on sustainable development indicators and on the design and implementation of national sustainable development strategies. There is still an important gap in

capacity in developing countries with respect to building and implementing systems of sustainable development indicators. This translates into a lack of systematic monitoring and a disconnect between national realities and international work. The forum would have a strong role to play in helping developing countries in this regard. This would also mean strengthening support to help developing countries use the forum to their benefit and inject national and regional realities into its work.

73. The Commission on Sustainable Development also supported technical and policy work at the national level through technical cooperation, in particular for water, energy and small island developing States, often in collaboration with United Nations agencies with sectoral mandates. The value added of the forum compared with the Commission could be to bring an integrated perspective to such work.

74. In summary, the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development lists 12 functions for the forum, which are also reflected in different ways in resolution 67/290. All functions, especially those that are new, require substantive support. Based on this brief overview, and given the objective stated in the outcome document of strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development through the creation of the forum, it seems clear that the forum should receive adequate support and resources if it is to perform these functions. It would be also essential to realize the purpose of the institutional reform that Member States envisioned at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

## **B. The forum as a home for building synergies among follow-up processes to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development**

75. In addition to discharging its agreed functions on a regular basis, the forum will have a critical role to play in the next two years to ensure that all the ongoing processes that were set in motion at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, as reviewed above, contribute in a coherent and efficient way to the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda. The present section examines how these processes fit into the forum, and looks at the synergies that need to be achieved across these processes.

### **Sustainable development goals**

76. It is widely acknowledged, both inside and outside the United Nations system, that the sustainable development goals will provide the new reference framework for development and development cooperation beyond 2015. This represents a significant clarification in comparison with the situation immediately after the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, when it was not clear how the sustainable development goals would relate to potential successor goals to the Millennium Development Goals. This clarification offers the potential, for the first time, to have a unified framework for development and development cooperation under the sustainable development goals, bringing together the thus far estranged streams of traditional development cooperation and international cooperation for sustainable development. It also implies a reconceptualization of development cooperation, linked with the universality of the sustainable development goals.

77. While the elaboration of the sustainable development goals will be done through its own dedicated intergovernmental process (the Open Working Group), linking the sustainable development goals to other work streams has already appeared a necessity within that process. During the discussions of the Open Working Group, many Member States have mentioned the imperative of clarifying the means of implementation of the sustainable development goals. Many have expressed the need for consistency and synergies between the work of the Open Working Group and that of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Financing for Sustainable Development. As these two streams of work progress, coordination by Member States will be critical. The secretariat of the forum, which supports both processes, can also facilitate such coordination.

78. After the sustainable development goals are adopted, it is to be expected that they will serve as the global reference for assessing progress on development and development cooperation issues, in the same manner as the Millennium Development Goals became the reference point for monitoring success on development issues that were linked with the Goals. There will therefore be a critical monitoring function associated with the sustainable development goals. This role could be played by the forum, supported by annual reports integrating the various contributions of the United Nations system as a whole. In addition, there will be a role for the international community in building the capacity of Member States to build appropriate statistical systems for monitoring progress on the sustainable development goals and the targets that will be adopted by countries in relation to the goals.

79. In order for the sustainable development goals to really take hold, it will be critical to link them to national strategies, goals and targets. The high-level political forum can provide guidance to the United Nations and other efforts to design national development strategies and plans so that an integrated approach can be taken to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. This could be linked with capacity-building on sustainable development indicators.

80. Technology, another dimension of the means of implementation for sustainable development, is currently being discussed in the post-Rio context through the discussions of the General Assembly on a technology facilitation mechanism. Going forward, it will be important to enable these discussions to fully support the sustainable development goals, which can be done by the high-level political forum.

#### **Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing**

81. The work of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing provides a timely opportunity to re-examine the role of financing for sustainable development in a changed post-2015 and post-Rio Conference context. In this regard, three aspects will be critical: (a) providing options to devise a financing framework for a renewed partnership for sustainable development beyond 2015; (b) providing solid foundations for the financing of sustainable development goals; and (c) linking the financing discussions for the post-2015 development agenda to the existing discussions on financing for development in follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002 and the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the

Monterrey Consensus, held in Doha in 2008, as well as with the Development Cooperation Forum of the Economic and Social Council.

82. The Commission on Sustainable Development had a mandate to review on a regular basis the adequacy of funding and mechanisms for achieving sustainable development, as well as commitments in the area of technology transfer (see General Assembly resolution [47/191](#)). However, its added value and impact in this area remained limited. The adequacy of financing for meeting the needs and the requirements and commitments identified in Agenda 21 has remained a contentious issue during all of the 21 years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held.

83. Given the importance of financing issues in the overall discussions on sustainable development, it will be critical for the forum to find a way to enable meaningful discussions and progress in this area. This is all the more important as a unified framework for development beyond 2015 would require bringing together the thus far disjointed discussions on, among other things, traditional development financing, climate finance and biodiversity finance. Guiding such discussions would fit the agenda-setting function of the high-level political forum. Thus, the objective would be to provide consistency and coherence to discussions taking place in various thematic forums, while respecting their respective mandates.

84. In a context in which the sustainable development goals are to provide the overarching goals and targets for international development cooperation, it will be critical to clarify issues related to the means of implementation of the goals. As discussed above, this has been articulated repeatedly in the discussions of the Open Working Group. A financing strategy for sustainable development should provide concrete proposals relating to the financing of the sustainable development goals going forward. While the goals will likely be agreed after the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts finishes its work, this should not inhibit the Committee from working on thematic areas that are likely to be included in the sustainable development goals or on a concrete proposal in terms of mobilization of resources for agreed development objectives. After the Committee concludes its work, the forum will have a critical role to play in monitoring and reviewing the means of implementation linked with sustainable development goals and in providing guidance on how to improve them.

85. Lastly, within the context of a unified sustainable development cooperation framework, the forum can have an important role in ensuring the interface between the discussions on the means of implementation for the sustainable development agenda and the financing for development process as the follow-up to the Monterrey and Doha conferences. The 2008 Doha Declaration on Financing for Development called for reinvigorating the global partnership for development in order to effectively address the full range of financing for development challenges facing the world, including additional costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation and damage to the Earth's environment (see General Assembly resolution [63/239](#), annex, para. 80). However, some of those areas have their own dedicated processes within the United Nations, often in the form of independent conventions. Member States, through resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, have stressed the need to reinforce coherence and coordination and to avoid duplication of effort between the work of the Intergovernmental Committee of

Experts on Sustainable Development Financing and the financing for development process.

#### **Other follow-up processes to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development**

86. Other processes mandated by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development will also have to be part of the scope of discussions in the forum, including the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns and the discussions on intergenerational solidarity.

87. Regarding the 10-year framework, resolution [67/290](#) gives the forum the role of providing guidance to the board of the 10-year framework and to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This should be only one component of regular discussions in the forum of sustainable production and consumption as one of the three overarching goals of sustainable development identified at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Clear lack of progress on sustainable production and consumption since 1992 and its critical importance in enabling the achievement of sustainable development goals across the board in the future militate for the strong presence of sustainable production and consumption on the forum's agenda, beyond the review of activities of the United Nations system in that area.

88. Two main angles regarding intergenerational solidarity have been examined by the United Nations system in the past. The first of these relates to issues of intergenerational distribution of income and transfers, such as safety nets for older and younger generations and the creation and viability of pension systems, in particular as they link with demographic change and other related topics. This angle is well covered in social and economic forums in the United Nations. The second angle is more specific to sustainable development and is, in fact, a defining dimension of the sustainable development approach. It concerns the right of future generations to inherit from current generations an Earth that will enable them to satisfy their needs, as highlighted in the definition of sustainable development in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development and in the Rio Principles. This concern directly links with the way the interests of future generations are represented in the legal systems at all levels. On this issue, the forum can continue to play the role of convener of discussions, further reviewing progress and allowing the international community to share lessons learned and reflect on solutions.

## **IV. Conclusions and recommendations**

89. The present report shows that progress has been achieved in follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Particularly noteworthy are the work of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the creation of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, as well as the establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing. The report highlights the fact that the high-level political forum will have the critical responsibility of keeping the implementation of sustainable development commitment under review, and that it will be the main platform for ensuring coherence and coordination in the post-2015 development agenda. It is therefore recommended that the General Assembly call on

Governments, organizations of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, other relevant intergovernmental organizations, including the World Trade Organization, and major groups and other relevant stakeholders:

- (a) To fully engage in and support the work of the high-political forum;
- (b) To make the forum a dedicated platform for implementation of sustainable development commitments, redoubling their efforts to maintain a strong focus on implementation at all levels, including sharing of experiences;
- (c) To ensure that the forum follows up to the processes and outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, by bringing cohesion and complementarity among them, especially in the context of the post-2015 development agenda;
- (d) To enhance integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development by engaging with the economic, social and environmental policymaking communities more intensively and in a more integrative way;
- (e) To maintain a focused, relevant and flexible agenda that will engage actors from all three dimensions of sustainable development and monitor progress;
- (f) To propose possible themes and areas, including new and emerging issues, for discussion at the high-level political forum;
- (g) To maintain a robust preparation process, with support from a stronger United Nations inter-agency process;
- (h) To encourage and strengthen partnerships, initiatives and voluntary commitments;
- (i) To ensure meaningful engagement of major groups and other relevant stakeholders;
- (j) To invite the forum itself to determine how best it can deliver on these objectives through the choice of its thematic focus and by ensuring that its policy guidance draws from solid reviews of implementation, notably implementation at the national level and by the United Nations system, as well as scientific and other evidence;
- (k) To call on the United Nations system to make further efforts to integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in its work. The Secretary-General should continue to report on progress in this regard to the high-level political forum, including by proposing a road map and detailed recommendations concerning how the United Nations system could make rapid advances in this regard.