

Association of World Citizens

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RESPONSE to the REPORT of the HIGH LEVEL PANEL ON UN SYSTEM-WIDE COHERENCE in the areas of DEVELOPMENT, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND ENVIRONMENT

STRENGTHENING THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence is to be commended for the scope, depth, comprehensiveness, and significance of the recommendations that it has made. Still it could have gone much further in suggesting a number of specific actions and recommendations that would make the UN considerably more effective and that would ensure that the agreements and commitments that have been made by the UN Member States are indeed met and achieved.

For example, section 41 of the Report states that, "The visionary blueprint for sustainable development, outlined in Agenda 21 and adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, is underway but has yet to be realized. Even though the General Assembly adopted sustainable development as part of the overarching framework of UN activities, the international community is still falling short in implementation and needs to improve the institutional framework for sustainable development."

One of the primary reasons that implementation is far from sufficient is due to a lack of the funding and resources that would be needed. For example, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives has repeatedly tried to assist with the implementation of Local Agenda 21 Plans in the developing world, only to be stymied by a lack of the required funding. This may be the greatest weakness in terms of the institutional framework for sustainable development. Sufficient funding mechanisms must be developed and funds raised in order to be able to fully implement the National Strategies for Sustainability and Development, Local Agenda 21 Plans, and the ten year SPAC Frameworks, particularly in the developing world where funds for such implementation have ranged from being scarce to non-existent.

Then under section 39 the Panel states that, "Countries should consider integrating

implementation needs of multilateral environmental agreements into their national sustainable development strategies, as part of the One Country Programme.”

I would suggest that the word “should” ought to have been replaced by the word “must”. Integrating implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements into national sustainable development strategies needs to be a requirement and not a request. As it is, only about half of the UN Member States have completed their National Strategy Plans and perhaps only a third have begun to implement them – though all committed to begin implementation by 2005. Thus, a focused review process must be undertaken at the global level to ensure that all UN Member States develop and begin to implement their national sustainable development strategies. Such a review process must ensure that all of these country strategies do include and focus on the integration of the multilateral environmental agreements.

Then going beyond the One Country Programmes, it should also be stipulated that the developed countries have a particular responsibility to develop their National Sustainability Strategies based upon and in conjunction with their Ten Year SPAC Frameworks and that these must be based upon the need to make a rapid transition to full sustainability.

Section 51 recommends that all UN agencies and programmes must support the development of policies, directives and guidelines to integrate human rights in all aspects of the UN’s work. UN Habitat and UNITAR are developing an Initiative on Access to Basic Services for All. The ABSA Initiative should thus be used to provide a framework for ensuring that all people’s basic human needs, as a fundamental human right, can indeed be met; and this must include and be based as well on the fulfillment of our common birth right to a clean, safe, and healthy environment.

Section 40 calls for the Economic and Social Council to establish a sustainable development segment—and for continuing reform of the Commission on Sustainable Development that truly leads to integrated decision-making on economic, social and environmental issues. This recommendation is of such importance that specific recommendations must be developed in order to decide how it can be carried out. A primary focus should be to look at how the development and adoption of sustainable practices can and will indeed lead to improvements in economic and social conditions and must thus be given priority both in terms of sustainable development and more importantly in terms of economic planning at the country level.

THE SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel included some important Recommendations in its Summary Statement such as, “The Secretary-General of the UN, the President of the World Bank and the Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund should set up a process to review, update and conclude formal agreements on their respective roles and relations at the global and country levels.”

Yes, this should be done, however the process should be led and driven by the UN but with input from the other intergovernmental organizations. Given that the UN General Assembly is the most democratic and inclusive of intergovernmental bodies, it should have the primary say in any agreements that are reached. The Panel must clearly state that coherency must mean that the BWIs, WTO, and Trade Agreements are in alignment with the agreements and goals set through UN processes and proceedings and not the other way around. This is essential in order to protect all people's basic human rights as defined by the UN Declaration on Human Rights, the associated conventions, and other UN agreements and treaties.

Another of the key recommendations from the Panel is for the development of a Global Leader's Forum (L27) which would upgrade ECOSOC's policy coordination role and provide leadership and guidance to the international community on development and global public goods issues. The Forum would also develop a strategic framework to secure consistency in the policy goals of the major international organizations in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

With such a broad and important mandate it is essential that the participation of civil society be fully included in all of these proceedings and in the Global Leader's Forum's decision making processes. The role and process of participation should be developed in consultation with the leading UN NGO networks; and the inclusion of civil society in the process is a condition of the Forum's development that must be respected.

GOVERNANCE, FUNDING AND MANAGEMENT

Now let me address the matter of Funding and Financing for Development in more detail. The Panel is to be commended for its statements about the lack of adequate and appropriate means of funding. However, the Panel was not as strong as it could have been in stating what should be done about this. For example, the UN should adopt an outcome and results based process and its funding practices must be based on this.

In other words, the UN Member States need to determine what would be required financially in order to achieve all of the goals and agreements that have been developed over the years. They must then put in place specific funding mechanisms that are sufficient for fully funding and implementing each of the agreements that has been, and is, made; and this must be included as a central part of each of the outcome documents and agreements. Because this has not been done to date and because implementation of our global agreements still does not at all meet the need, a review must now be undertaken and specific means of funding must be added within each of the UN processes sufficient to achieve their full implementation.

Attention must be paid to the Panel's statements about funding deficiencies such as are mentioned in section 37: "As environmental issues have become more clearly defined and interlinked, they have come to influence the work of practically every UN organization, all competing for the same limited resources. In addition, the UN Environment Programme, the UN's principal environment organization—with its

normative, scientific, analytical and coordinating mandate—is considered weak, underfunded and ineffective in its core functions.”

Resources must thus be substantially increased both to strengthen UNEP as well as to provide for environmental and sustainable development activities. Coherency cannot occur unless sufficient funds are made available in order for the UN agencies to be able to fully carry out their work and to ensure that adequate resources are available for implementation.

As the report states, “The Global Environment Facility should be strengthened as the major financial mechanism for the global environment. Its contribution in assisting developing countries in implementing the conventions and in building their capacities should be clarified, in conjunction with its implementing and executing agencies. A significant increase in resources will be required to address future challenges effectively.”

In short, GEF needs an additional funding base that is not negotiated each year and that is sufficient for meeting the program goals defined by the targets and objectives of the international commitments and UN agreements. This would require that GEF funding be increased by several orders of magnitude, thus specific means and mechanisms of new and innovative financing are needed in addition to the present means of funding. However, it must first be determined just how much funding is required in order to achieve full sustainability, to fully implement the environmental conventions, and to provide sufficient resources for access to basic services for all peoples. Then specific means must be developed and agreed to in order to fully meet these goals.

Section 53 of the Panel’s report states that the principles underlying the proposals for reform of governance, funding and management are ownership, effectiveness, transparency and coherence. I would suggest that an additional principle needs to be recognized that requires the full participation of the people and of civil society in the implementation and decision making of all development projects and processes. In addition, support and funding must be provided to ensure that this participation can and will be included at all levels all around the world.

Section 56 calls for a review of Specialized Agencies that would determine whether the current policy of zero real growth can allow UN Agencies to deliver on global mandates. In addition, the review should provide guidance as to how much growth would be needed within each of the UN Agencies in order to fulfill and achieve all of the relevant global agreements and mandates.

It must be recognized as well that the UN Agencies are currently not able to fully carry out many of the programs and activities which they sponsor and promote. For example, the UNDP has created Thematic Trust Funds to support Capacity Development (how ironic) which are greatly under funded. These Funds could go a long way towards ensuring that capacity building and implementation are carried out in local communities

and that funding is made available for effectively implementing the UN Partnership Initiatives.

The Thematic Trust Funds would provide a good mechanism for implementation if sufficient funding was made available. Thus it is essential that such a review be undertaken to determine how much money is needed for each program area and that specific means be developed to ensure that the UN agencies have sufficient funding to fully implement their programs.

In addition, in many cases very little information is available on the UN websites as to which programs truly are underway, are operational, and have a substantial funding base; how civil society organizations can apply for funding; and how good programs can be scaled up. The UN needs to encourage all of its agencies to include such updated information as this on any and all programs which it sponsors and promotes.

INTEGRATION FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Section 71 refers to the relationship between the UN and the BWIs. I would suggest that ECOSOC should be encouraged to undertake a full scale analysis to determine what must be done to ensure that the BWIs activities and policies are geared towards meeting the global agreements developed through UN processes. Again, civil society must be fully included in carrying out and commenting on this analysis.

One of the main problems with the functioning of the United Nations is that all of its efforts are rather piecemeal and do not support one another. Thus the UN must develop guidelines and a process to figure out how such activities as the PRSPs, National Strategies for Sustainability and for Development, the Ten Year Frameworks on Sustainable Production and Consumption, Capacity 2015, UNDP's Thematic Trust Funds, and the work of the Global Environment Facility can be integrated so that they all support one another and duplication of effort is limited.

Similarly, these guidelines must focus on how this work can be integrated at the local level through the use of holistic multi-sectoral community based planning and implementation processes. ICLEI could provide guidance on this for urban communities; while the Global Ecovillage Network and the Sustainable Rural Development and Ecovillage Training Program (a project of the EcoEarth Alliance UN Partnership Initiative) could provide a lot of input in regards to rural communities and regional support processes. (For more information contact Rob Wheeler, robineagle@worldcitizen.org, 1-717-264-5036).

The Panel states in Section 30 that, "There can be no long-term development without environmental care. Because the impacts are global and felt disproportionately by the poor, environmental sustainability is not an option—it is an imperative. The Panel is united in its conviction that addressing worsening trends of environmental degradation is one of the greatest collective challenges for economic development and human welfare."

Section 31 says also that “what is needed now is a substantially strengthened and streamlined international environmental governance structure, to support the incentives for change required at all levels.” However even a strengthened system of environmental governance will not be enough if we do not focus on what is truly needed to make the shift to a **fully sustainable future** and do not ensure that the agreements and commitments that’ve been made can and will be met.

For these reasons we must plan specifically to make a transition to **full sustainability**, and as rapidly as possible, and to provide adequate support for both an annual and five year review process to upgrade and implement the National Strategies for Sustainability and the Ten Year SPAC Frameworks. This shift in focus to concentrate on achieving full sustainability must be spelled out in the agreement on strengthening Environmental Governance to ensure that it is fully integrated into all of the work related to Sustainable Development.

The Panel recognizes in Section 32 that “relatively little headway has been made in integrating the environment in development strategies at the country level, or in implementing internationally agreed goals. Environmental issues and goals must now be better integrated within UN system country operations, as critical components of national poverty reduction strategies and sustainable development plans.”

Thus annual and five year review processes must be developed at both the international and at the country level to ensure that such integration will indeed take place. The first such review should take place during CSD 15 in 2007, as a part of a five year review of the Johannesburg World Summit Plan of Implementation.

THE NEED FOR AN OUTCOME BASED PROCESS and CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

The Panel also recognizes that “environmental sustainability is the foundation for achieving all of the other MDGs, and that there must thus be a strengthening of human, technical and financial capacities in developing countries to mainstream environmental issues in national decision-making...” With this in mind it is essential that the work of civil society and the environmental community be better integrated in governmental and intergovernmental processes so as to ensure that human, technical, and financial capacities are not only strengthened but are also well applied in all countries, and through the National Strategy Plans and the Ten Year SPAC Frameworks.

As the Panel stated in Section 39, “To deliver on the internationally agreed goals and commitments, the UN will require stronger leadership and greater capacity for environmental activities. In this regard, cooperation and partnerships with civil society organizations, including the private sector, are essential.”

Again the development and full implementation of UNDP's Thematic Trust Funds are essential for increasing the level of support for civil society organizations and efforts; and this must include provisions for the establishment of Training Programs and Resource and Service Centers to provide access to information and resources to local communities on a regional basis. Without such support networks, best practices and exemplary programs will probably not be scaled up and effectively implemented to the extent needed.

Thus we need a multi-sectoral approach that will move step by step towards full sustainability in all sectors at the community level, based upon the development of Resource and Service Centers in all regions around the world to provide ready access to sufficient information and resources in all communities. There should be no gaps!! The first projects that are developed in each community should provide a sufficient increase in resources in order to carry out the latter programs and activities.

Section 35 of the Panel's report recognizes that, "Fragmented institutional structures do not offer an operational framework to address global issues, including water and energy. Water is an essential element in the lives of people and societies, and the lack of access to water for basic needs inflicts hardship on more than 1 billion people. Similarly, energy is a main driver of development, but current systems of energy supply and use are not sustainable (more than 2 billion people in developing countries do not have access to modern energy services). More than 20 UN organizations are engaged at some level in water and energy work, but there is little evidence of overall impact."

Again, this statement shows the need for the use and establishment of an Outcome Based Process, sufficient funding, development of a framework integrating all of the Partnership Initiatives, along with a plan to provide access to clean water for all peoples and a full transition to renewable energy as quickly as possible. The calls by civil society for an International Renewable Energy Agency or a Sustainable Energy Fund can no longer be ignored by governments.

The Panel states that the three Rio Conventions (biodiversity, climate, and desertification) have up to 230 meeting days annually. Add the figures for seven other major global environmental agreements (not including regional agreements) and that number rises to almost 400 days. If implementation was based first of all on a results and outcome based process we would probably get better results, with many less meeting days. In other words, all input at meetings should be considered based upon its ability to lead to the achievement of the agreed goals.

One of the very most important recommendations from the Panel is that: "UN agencies, programmes and funds with responsibilities in the area of the environment should cooperate more effectively on a thematic basis and **through partnerships** with a **dedicated agency at the centre** (such as air and water pollution, forests, water scarcity, access to energy, and renewable energy). This would be based on a combined effort towards agreed common activities and policy objectives to eliminate duplication and focus on results."

In other words, **each agency that is given responsibility for a particular goal or project must be mandated to develop a framework integrating all of the inputs from the various actors and stakeholders to ensure that all of the resources needed are made available for full implementation.** There are plenty of programs and organizations that are working on each issue area, now all of our efforts must be integrated in a suitable framework and sufficient resources must be provided to ensure that we can indeed meet our goals.

The Panel states, “Greater coordination at headquarters should promote coherence at country level, and greater coordination efforts at the country level should promote coherence at the international level.” This is very true indeed; and likewise it can be extended down to the local level. Greater coordination at country level should lead to greater coherency at the local level; and greater coherency at the local level should lead to effective implementation at all other levels as well. Thus we can no longer base our development work on individual projects and a single sector approach, but must instead plan for community well-being and development using a multi-sectoral community based approach as well.

Finally, the High Level Panel recommends that, “The Secretary-General should commission an independent and authoritative assessment of the current UN system of international environmental governance. To be completed as soon as possible and taking previous work into account, the assessment would review global needs as well as the specific roles and mandates of UNEP and other UN agencies and multilateral environmental agreements. It would provide the basis for further reforms toward improving system-wide coherence, effectiveness and targeted action.”

This assessment should also include a review and recommendations for integrating all of the various planning and policy development processes that are to be done at the country level. It should make recommendations for ensuring that all of these processes are adequately focused on making a transition to full sustainability as rapidly as possible and on achieving all of the international agreements and commitments that have been made. The assessment must identify specific areas of the Strategy Plans, SPAC Frameworks, Agenda 21 Planning Processes, etc. that need to be strengthened as well as the additional funding that is needed for full implementation.