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WORKSHOP REPORT

**« Africa's preparation in the run-up to the
United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20):
Common Position and Strategy**

Brussels, 27 March 2012



I. Introduction

The Permanent Mission of the African Union organized on 27 March 2012 at the Plaza Hotel in Brussels (Belgium), a workshop on the theme: « Africa's Preparation in the Run-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) : Common Position and Strategy ». The objective of the workshop was to highlight the stakes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brasil from 20 to 22 June 2012 and to raise the Brussels Group of African Ambassadors' awareness of Africa's common position. At a broader level, the workshop also aimed at facilitating an exchange of views on the challenges of sustainable development in Africa, currently and in future. Some forty participants including the African Ambassadors and their representatives as well as representatives of international organizations attended the workshop. The list of attendance is annexed to the present report. .

II. Proceedings of the workshop

H. E .Mr Joël M. Nhleko, Ambassador of Swaziland was the facilitator of the workshop. He first welcomed all the participants before thanking the Permanent Mission for organizing the workshop. He stressed that the initiative was coming at the right time given that the ACP Group of States is to elaborate a common position for Rio+20. He urged the African Ambassadors to take full cognizance of the African common position and to ensure that it tallies with the ACP one, hoping that the conclusions of the workshop would enrich the preparation for Rio+20.

In his welcome statement, Ambassador Ajay Bramdeo, the AU Permanent Representative in Brussels stated that the workshop was organized in the same spirit as the retreat organized by the Permanent Mission in November 2011 in Liege, as a way to popularize the African common positions on sustainable development in general and on the protection of the environment in particular. He also underlined the fact that the workshop would be an opportunity to be updated on the partnership between Africa and the European Union (EU) where sustainable development plays a key role.

2.1. The Africa-EU partnership for a successful Rio+20: promoting the green economy together

This presentation was made by Mr Karl Falkenberg, Director General of DG Environment at the European Commission. In his presentation Mr Falkenberg indicated that the African common position was similar to the European Union's and that both parties should join efforts to achieve positive results at the Rio+20 Conference. On the green economy, he explained that the demographic and economic pressures exerted by man on the planet's natural resources and the consequences thereof have led to a global need for an economic model based on sustainable development to which the green economy is the key. The Rio+20 Conference could result in the green economy being considered as an innovative and new opportunity for sustainable development to benefit seven billion human beings today and nine billion by 2050. Mr Karl Falkenberg concluded his presentation by saying that Europe is advocating for a greater efficiency in the management of resources. The "Europe 2020" strategy and its initiative for "a Resource Efficient Europe" should lead Europe towards such a change. At Rio+20, the EU will emphasize the following themes: access to sustainable development for all, access to drinkable water and sanitation, sustainable management of land and soils, improvement of ocean management and in general, efficiency in resource management.

2.2. From Rio to Rio+20: What results 20 years later and what prospects

The topic was introduced by Mr Chris Vanden Bilcke, Head of the Liaison Office with the EU, in Brussels, of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Mr Vanden Blicke first recalled the background to the negotiations on sustainable development. He further recalled that in Johannesburg, NEPAD had been recognized as a key programme for the promotion of sustainable development in Africa. He added that UNEP's contribution to the compiled document for Rio+20 includes, among other points, a programme of action for the green economy whose main elements are contained in the report "Towards a Green Economy". UNEP has thus proposed a conceptual definition of the green economy which had been lacking, so far. Mr Chris Vanden Blicke then dwelled on the broad lines of the UNEP report on "Keeping Track of our Changing Environment: from Rio to Rio+20" which takes stock of twenty years of sustainable development worldwide. To conclude, he said that the chances of success for Rio+20 could become real if the political will prevails. Rio+20 should be a decisive turning point for the green economy, failing which the outcome of the Conference may be mitigated.

The main observations and questions raised by the participants can be summarized as follows:

- The United Nations advocacy for access to energy for all was favorably echoed by the international community and access to energy will be one of the discussion themes of Rio+20. A high level panel on access to sustainable energy has been established and identified three main objectives: universal access to modern energy supplies; doubling the improvement rate of energy efficiency and doubling the share of renewable energies in the world energy mix by 2015. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has been mandated by the United Nations Secretary General to ensure that the three objectives are fulfilled.
- There is a need to clarify issues relating for instance, to the success of Rio+20, the transfer of green technologies, funding and the world environment governance reform.
- The notion of green economy seems to pose a problem: how can a suitable definition be found and be approved by all?
- The international community's commitments to sustainable development are not sufficiently respected and the amplified drought in the Sahel and the progressive desertification of the region are a proof of it.
- What strategy should the EU adopt vis-à-vis the other stakeholders in the negotiation?

The following clarifications were given to the questions raised:

- As the common African position is similar to the EU's both partners have the duty to intensify their efforts to ensure a satisfactory outcome of the Rio+20 Conference. There is however a 50/50 chance of success of Rio +20 because many developed countries (United States, Canada) and some emerging countries (China, Brasil, India) do not share Africa and Europe's views on the notion of green economy and on the issue of a world environment governance.
- The transfer of technologies and capacity building are fundamental to Africa's progress towards a green economy. The EU is in favor of a full commitment being made at Rio+20, to include the definition of the components of a roadmap focused on concrete, measurable steps with a guide on best practices. UNEP's proposal for a green economy points in the same direction.
- The issue of funding is a sensitive one as Europe is currently facing major financial difficulties. However, possibilities exist for new sustainable development financing mechanisms. Such possibilities include the participation of the private sector.
- In spite of the increased commitment of state parties to the United Nations' Convention for the Fight against Desertification, one must unfortunately observe that

in some regions in Africa, including in the Sahel, the situation seems to be becoming worse. At Rio+20, the international community should set for itself firm objectives and should abide by them to build a new paradigm for land management based on scientific know-how and consistent financial investments.

- In spite of some divergences, a consensus could nonetheless be reached at Rio+20 on the notion of green economy as proposed by UNEP.

2.3. The African common position for the Rio+20 Conference

Dr. Mohamed Khalil Timamy, Head of the Environment Division at the AU Commission introduced the topic. Dr Timamy first recalled that the notion of sustainable development is not new to Africa. Indeed, the African Convention on Nature and Natural Resources Conservation adopted in 1968 in Algiers by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and reviewed in Maputo in 2003 aimed at boosting sustainable development in Africa. He then indicated that through “Africa’s Consensus Statement for Rio+20” adopted by the African Union Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa in July 2012, Africa will speak in one voice. The common position builds mainly on the need to promote a new development model based on the green economy as an effective way forward towards sustainable development. The move to a green economy in Africa must however be facilitated by an international investment strategy to be adopted by the international community and based on access to technologies and capacity building. As regards the institutional and strategic framework for sustainable development, Africa has proposed that UNEP become a Specialized Agency of the United Nations with headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

2.4. Global environment governance viewed from the South

Dr Mariama Williams, senior programme manager at South Centre presented this theme. She first underlined that one of the main components of this reform will consist in a better articulation of the social, economic and environmental objectives which constitute the three pillars of sustainable development. To reach such an objective the negotiations should focus on the establishment of an institutional framework to ensure the representation of developing countries, the promotion of a green economy, funding, capacity building and access to technology including its transfer. The new institutional framework should also ensure that the Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Action and other sustainable development objectives are implemented. An ideal scenario would be the establishment of a United Nations body for sustainable development with a clear comprehensive mission encompassing all the sustainable development pillars and with a Secretariat to absorb all or some other secretariats of United Nations Departments or bodies dealing with funding and programmes. It will of course take many years to reach such a goal. The most probable outcome of Rio+20 could be a mere recognition of the need to improve the Sustainable Development Commission, UNEP as well as other bodies.

The debate which followed the presentation focused on the following issues: the need for a clear numerical assessment of Africa’s needs in terms of sustainable development, the relevance and strength of the African position, the consultations for the preparation of Rio+20.

The two experts stressed the following in their response:

- Sustainable development financing partly depends on the commitment of developed states to allocate 0.7% of their GNI to developing countries as Public Aid for Development.
- So far, Africa has shown determination and willingness to unite and prepare itself for Rio+20 and has agreed to defend a common position by speaking in one voice. To follow suit, the AU mandated H. E. Mr Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo, in his capacity as Africa’s Political Coordinator for Rio+20, to

engage in consultations with other States, regional groupings and international organizations to seek their support for the African Common Position.

- In general, important efforts will be needed for Rio+20 to lead to renewed international commitments featuring high on the global development agenda.

III. Conclusion

In his closing statement, the Ambassador of Swaziland commended the quality of the presentations and of the exchange of views facilitated by the workshop. He added that the African Group of Ambassadors in Brussels will follow with special attention the Rio+20 negotiations on sustainable development and hopes that the recommendations of the workshop will contribute to the negotiation process.

Summary of the recommendations

- As the African common position is similar to the EU's, the two partners should join efforts to ensure a satisfactory outcome of Rio+20.
- The progress towards a green economy in Africa can only be facilitated by the international community's support coupled with a transfer of technology. Consequently, Africa and Europe should ensure that the transfer of technology and the green economy remain focal issues in the Rio+20 discussions and that an equitable agreement for all participating parties is found.
- Africa must defend vigorously and with conviction the idea of transforming the United Nations Environment Programme into a Specialized Agency of the United Nations with headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.
- Africa should insist on the establishment of a new institutional framework to ensure the representation of developing countries, the promotion of the green economy, secure funding and capacity building as well as access to technology and its transfer. The new institutional framework should also ensure that the Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Action and other sustainable development objectives are implemented.
- The African Group of Ambassadors in Brussels should ensure that the common position of the ACP Group of States for Rio+20 is consistent with if not similar to the AU's.

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