Concept Paper

High-Level Symposium on the United Nations Conference
on Sustainable Development

Introduction

The High-Level Symposium on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) is co-sponsored by the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). This Symposium will be held in Diaoyutai State Guesthouse, Beijing, China from 8 to 9 September 2011.

The Symposium is co-hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Development and Reform Commission of China. It will consist of opening and closing sessions, plenary sessions as well as panel discussions. The Symposium will be conducted in both English and Chinese.

Background

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 is of vital importance to international development cooperation. It offers a timely opportunity for the international community to renew political commitment for sustainable development, assess progress and gaps and address new and emerging challenges. Two themes that will provide a focus of the Conference are: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development. In the preparatory process for Rio+20, in-depth discussions of the objective and the two themes of the Conference have taken place at two PrepComs and one intersessional meeting, as well as at other national, regional and international meetings.

China strongly supports the convening of Rio+20 and expects a positive outcome conducive to the international sustainable development process. To contribute to the success of Rio+20, the Chinese Government, together with the Secretariat of Rio+20, is co-sponsoring this Symposium.

Objective

The purpose of this Symposium is to have frank and open high-level discussions on the objective and two themes of Rio+20, with a view to formulating concrete proposals as a contribution to the preparation of the Conference. On the first theme, the discussion will focus on a better understanding of a greener economy approach, its goals and desirables, and how to link this approach with poverty eradication, sustainable development, employment and decent work while preserving the policy space and not imposing additional constraints on developing countries.
On the second theme, the discussion will focus on the gaps and challenges in establishing and strengthening an effective and efficient institutional framework for sustainable development at all levels that will also support regional and national efforts.

Regarding the objective of the Conference, the discussion will focus on how Rio+20 could reinforce support for sustainable development and contribute to an acceleration of progress on meeting commitments and addressing new and emerging challenges.

**Structure and Suggested Topics**

Under the theme of *Green Economy in the context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*, the High-level Symposium will seek to advance understanding and promote the achievement of consensus on key issues related to 1) social, employment and livelihood aspects of a green economy, 2) sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and eco-efficiency, and 3) a menu of policy options and toolkits and their trade and investment implications.

1) Social, employment and livelihood aspects of a green economy should address the following questions:

- How to ensure that building a green economy results in the creation of significant numbers of decent jobs and contributes to eradicating poverty?
- Will the potential benefits of a green economy be equitably distributed among countries and different social sectors?
- How can we ensure that the poor benefit from a green economy and green jobs?
- What are the social protection policies that countries could consider?
- Will a green economy contribute to creating sustainable livelihoods in LDCs?
- Should developing countries focus on critical sectors, such as energy, food, water, sustainable urbanization, and disaster management, or should the focus be on economic policies, targets, and indicators, i.e., a more systemic perspective?
- How can Rio+20 ensure that negotiations are targeted and effective in such a way as to make a green economy an effective path to sustainable development and a more attractive and realistic option for developing countries?

2) Sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and an eco-efficient economy should address the following questions:

- How concretely will a green economy advance sustainable consumption and production?
- How can a green economy reduce emissions, wastes and environmental impacts at low or even negative cost?
• What are the challenges and lessons from experience in enhancing resource efficiency and de-linking economic growth from environmental impact?
• What are the strategic sectors and associated finance and technology challenges for promoting sustainable consumption and production?

3) Green policy options and their trade and investment implications should address the following questions:

• What are the main elements of a possible toolkit for promoting a green economy? How to design tools and policies that are flexible enough to be tailored to different circumstances and levels of development?
• How to ensure that promoting a green economy is consistent with a fair, open, equitable, rules-based, non-discriminatory multilateral trading system which ensures market access for developing countries and which narrows rather than widens the technology gap between developed and developing countries?
• What are the most important dimensions of policy space which need to be expanded, safeguarded?

Under the theme of *Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development*, the High-level Symposium will seek to advance understanding and promote the achievement of consensus on key issues related to 1) strengthening existing institutions, 2) integrating better the three pillars of sustainable development at local, national and regional levels, and 3) enhancing implementation, monitoring and accountability.

1) Strengthening existing institutions should address the following questions:

• How can Rio+20 enhance coherence and coordination of the institutional framework for sustainable development at the international level?
• How can Rio+20 strengthen the governance of each of the three pillars of sustainable development within the UN system and more broadly, including the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) as well as non-state actors including the private sector?
• What would be the best options for strengthening key international institutions, including the CSD, ECOSOC and UNEP?

Integrating better the three pillars at local, national and regional levels should address the following questions:

• How can regional institutions be enhanced to advance sustainable development, and what should be the respective functions of regional versus international institutions?
• What needs to be done to promote more effective sustainable development governance at national levels?
• How can existing partnerships and initiatives among local authorities to share experience and launch joint initiatives be strengthened and encouraged?
• What could be done through the Rio+20 process?

2) Enhancing implementation, monitoring and accountability should address the following questions:

• How to strengthen coherence and effectiveness of UN system and other international actors in supporting implementation of national strategies, processes, plans and actions for sustainable development, including through enhanced means of implementation?
• What reforms or institutional arrangements could strengthen monitoring and accountability with regard to sustainable development commitments

Under the objective of Rio+20, the High-level Symposium will seek to connect the past, present and future of sustainable development and address the following questions:

• What should “renewed political commitment” entail?
• What have been the main areas of “progress” and “gaps” in the implementation?
• What are the “new and emerging challenges” and how they should be best dealt with?
• How to reflect the objective of Rio+20 in the outcome of the Conference, which is mandated to be “a focused political document”?

Format

The Symposium will begin with an inaugural session, followed by plenary discussions among government officials, eminent experts and representatives of the UN system and Major Groups on the two themes of Rio+20. On the second day, two parallel panel discussions will focus on the objective of Rio+20. Each discussion session will kick off with introduction of the subject by one or two eminent speakers.

The goal of the discussions is to enable participants to assess the options from a policy as well as a practical and operational perspective, and to discuss proposals which could inform the Rio+20 preparatory process and the Conference outcome.

Participation

Invitations will be sent to high-level officials representing developing countries, developed countries and countries with economies in transition. A high-level official plus a senior advisor formula will be followed. In addition to high-level officials and senior level advisors, leading international experts and representatives from the UN system and Major Groups will also be invited.

Documentation for the Meeting
A short issues paper on the objective and themes of Rio+20 will be prepared and distributed in advance of the Symposium. In addition, relevant studies and reports related to the objective and themes will be compiled as background documentation for the meeting.

**Expected Outcome**

A Chair’s Summary highlighting specific recommendations on the two themes and the objective of Rio+20 and reflecting views of participants will be issued after the Symposium. The outcome will be transmitted to the Secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and will serve as an input to the preparation of the Compilation document for Rio+20. A web link for the meeting will be created, and the registration form, documentation, statements and presentations will be posted there.