Developed and developing countries made many promises on the environment and development at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and when drawing up the UN-agreed Millennium Development Goals in 2000. Now, on the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, it is time to deliver on those promises.

The EU views the World Summit as an opportunity to rekindle the spirit of sustainable development and to ensure an effective institutional framework for the future. The Plan of Implementation to be finalised in Johannesburg should recognise the importance of strengthening governance for sustainable development at all levels – local, regional, national and international – and of improving and better integrating the environmental and social dimensions.

The world over, government structures and institutions in the economic, social and environmental fields need to identify the gaps that exist and fill them, and to eliminate duplication of functions, improve the efficiency of their efforts and continue to strive for greater coherence.

The European Union, as a major economic marketplace and the world’s leading provider of Official Development Assistance, is fully determined to play its part in helping developing countries integrate their economic, social and environmental policies in the most effective way. And, indeed, developing countries must help themselves by improving their internal policies, domestic governance and the overall climate for investment.

But what is good governance?

Although no nation’s governing structures and institutions are perfect, and all can be continuously improved, the development of democratic states should be supported when they are shown, for example, to:
- respect human rights;
- enforce legal claims and facilitate effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings;
- provide access to information and protect the freedom of the press;
- be transparent, open and accountable;
- respond adequately to civil society participation in decision-making processes, and
- mobilise effectively against corruption and terrorism.

The EU comes to Johannesburg with proposals for improving the framework of governance through stronger democracy and stakeholder involvement. Forming stronger partnerships with civil society is firmly on the agenda. We aim to support a wide range of partnership activities at the World Summit, specifically targeted at improving governance and stakeholder participation in decision-making processes, and monitoring progress.

A vital element of the strategy is the encouragement of multi-stakeholder coalitions for sustainable development through voluntary codes for corporate responsibility and accountability. This builds on acts such as the UN Global Compact stakeholders’ platform, the economic, environmental and social Global Reporting Initiative and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) guidelines for multinational enterprises.

But what is good governance?
the social dimension in global sustainable development should benefit from enhanced cooperation between UN agencies, funds and programmes, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the WTO. An important part of the work of these organisations will be to ensure that core labour standards, as defined by the International Labour Organisation, are respected throughout the world;

the role of the United Nations Economic and Social Council should be strengthened in the follow-up from the World Summit

• a) to give more emphasis to implementation issues in the work of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and
• b) to reinforce cooperation between the UN bodies, the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO.

The EU believes that concrete steps should be taken at the WSSD to ensure full implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum on strengthening international environmental governance (IEG) and to enhance linkages between IEG and governance for sustainable development as a whole. Improving UNEP’s finances is a priority for the EU.

At the financing level, the basic assumption has not changed since the time of Rio: the bulk of development funds will have to come from mobilising domestic resources in developing countries themselves.

In this respect, there is a close correlation between a country’s capacity for attracting investment and the way in which it is governed: state under the rule of law, sound economic policy, anti-corruption policy, transparency and institutions which operate responsibly and professionally.

Developing countries must intensify their efforts to create an enabling domestic environment, which is essential for mobilising domestic resources, increasing productivity, reducing capital flight, encouraging the private sector, and attracting and making effective use of international investment and assistance.

Regional, national and local initiatives

Regional governance also needs to be improved, for example by the transformation of UN regional commissions into regional commissions for sustainable development.

The implementation of sustainable development goals must be pursued by integrating them into regional and sub-regional institutions, including through the development of strategies, peer review and monitoring, and region-to-region cooperation.

At the national level, all countries should, by 2005, have started to implement a national sustainable development strategy. Countries should also enhance the role of civil society, local authorities and the private sector, through business coalitions. They should also develop more effective institutional frameworks for sustainable development at regional and sub-regional level.

The EU will develop and launch in Johannesburg an initiative on local-level exchanges, twinning towns and cities from Europe and third countries, with a regional focus on Africa, so that local authorities have an opportunity to swap knowledge with, and learn from, their counterparts in the EU.

Regional sustainable cities initiative

The European Commission is launching an initiative in Johannesburg – called Regional Sustainable Cities: Campaigns Promoting Local Agenda 21, to advance sustainable development at a local authority and community level, supporting regional networking, exchanges and transfer of best practices.

Small established entities will, through their member networks, reinforce capacity at the local level, with respect to technical sustainable development issues and the promotion of good governance practices.

The major pillar of these actions will be an efficient and targeted system of exchanges between practitioners in cities and towns, both within the region and the EU.

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