Speaking Points on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development

Delivered by Daniel Ziegerer, Head of Section Global Affairs, International Affairs Division, Federal Office for the Environment

• It is Switzerland’s view that the Rio+20 conference should agree upon comprehensive reform measures for improving the institutional framework for sustainable development.

• Our proposals have the following main thrust: First, approach governance for sustainable development in a holistic manner, second, improve governance in the environmental pillar, and third, enhance governance on the national and local level.

• There is a need for stronger global governance for sustainable development at the international level. The Commission on Sustainable Development has not succeeded in playing the role it was meant to play.

• We propose to reform international sustainability governance by measures such as establishing a peer review mechanism, more effective involvement of civil society including business as well as regular high-level meetings:
  • Peer reviews of actions undertaken for implementing sustainable development at the national level shall be designed as open and interactive dialogues.
  • The involvement and commitment from local governments and civil society including business is critical to the achievement of results. In this regard, access to information, participation in decision making and collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders for the implementation of sustainable development is crucial. Switzerland therefore suggests to involve civil society including business in the work of the bureau. In this regard, we should learn from the experiences of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management or the committee on World Food Security.
  • Regular high-level meetings would underline that Sustainable Development in its economic, social and environmental aspects is a key element in policy formulation at the national, regional and international level.
  • We propose to put these reforms in practice by replacing the CSD with a Global Sustainability Council as a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly. This can be done without amending the UN Charter.
  • Switzerland welcomes the idea of universal Sustainable Development Goals which address all dimensions of sustainable development and their interconnectedness. Such goals should build on the experience of the MDGs as
well as the numerous international environmental goals that have been agreed upon by the international community over the last years. The process for the detailed elaboration of the SDGs needs to be clarified. In any case, the goals should result from a process led by the UN secretariat and not from intergovernmental negotiations.

- Switzerland further considers it crucial for the Rio+20 conference to settle on an ambitious reform package for strengthening international environmental governance. Such a reform package should build on the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome and should result in a stronger anchor institution for the environment. We deliberately use the term IEG anchor institution, because it leaves it open whether it is best done through a strengthened UNEP or a specialized agency. This institutional aspect can be dealt with at a later stage.

- A strengthened IEG anchor institution could in particular achieved through the following:
  - Universal membership of the IEG anchor institution. This would strengthen the authority to provide overarching policy guidance on environmental matters. It would also allow for a more coherent, effective and efficient policy making and for a normative approach to address the environmental challenges.
  - The relationship between a strengthened IEG anchor institution and the MEAs has to be reinforced. The governing body of an IEG anchor institution should be enabled to provide oversight, guidance and coordination of MEAs with a view to avoiding or, where necessary, addressing potential inefficiencies and conflicts.
  - Cooperation, coordination and synergies within thematic clusters have to be strengthened, building on the very positive experience from the international chemicals and waste cluster. There are already some clear indications that more resources are being made available for implementation due to enhanced efficiencies resulting from the synergies process. There will be even much greater benefits in the longer term once the new structures are fully operational.
  - The science-policy interface needs to be strengthened, including by providing reliable scientific information and by assessing progress towards the achievement of agreed environmental goals and targets.
  - Implementation should be strengthened by ensuring a closer cooperation with UNDP, the World Bank and the development banks.
  - Finally, Switzerland propose to renew the political commitment for national and local sustainable development governance. This should be done through the development or renewal of sustainable development strategies and through the participation of civil society in decision making.