



JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT

2002 WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE FOR CENTRAL & SOUTH ASIA

REPORT

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

30 July – 1 August 2001

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its Millennium Session in 2000, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the decision to undertake a ten-year review of progress in the implementation of the outcomes of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). This review will take place at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in the year 2002 - the Johannesburg Summit. An important challenge is to ensure that the outcome of the Summit is not limited to a review but also leads to new visions, commitments, partnerships and plans for practical implementation to make sustainable development real at all levels.
2. As a unique and major feature of the preparations for the 2002 Summit, it was agreed that the main issues for the Summit would arise from participatory national and regional assessments and discussions drawing from all segments of society and regions of the world.
3. The global inter-governmental process, which will involve three preparatory meetings to be held in the first half of 2002, will benefit from Regional Inter-governmental Preparatory meetings ("PrepComs") to be held in all regions of the world in the second half of 2001. In order to support this process and to take advantage of the views of independent experts, the United Nations is convening Regional Roundtables of eminent persons and leaders of civil society in five regions of the world.

4. The Central and South Asia Eminent Persons Regional Roundtable was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from 30 July to 1 August 2001. This report attempts to capture the key concerns expressed and proposals for action made by the participants. The participants attended in their personal capacity and provided their perspectives on the progress achieved and the obstacles and challenges faced by the region, major constraints on sustainable development as well as proposals for action to address the specific issues identified.

5. The report is intended to provide the preparatory process leading up to the Summit with new ideas, based on the participants' practical experience and interest in sustainable development, to develop a platform, which outlines key policy issues, priorities and follow up actions for the region as well as at the global level.

6. This report will be forwarded to all of the regional and sub-regional PrepComs. It will also be made available to the global preparatory meetings. Furthermore, the Roundtable report will be posted on the Johannesburg Summit web site.

7. The Central and South Asia Roundtable was organized by the Secretariat of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in collaboration with the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. The Roundtable was chaired by Dr. Asylbek A. Aidaraliev, Academician of the Kyrgyz National Academy of Sciences, Adviser to the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. A full list of participants is attached as an Annex to this report.

8. At the opening of the Roundtable, an introductory statement was made by H.E. Mr. Osmonakun Ibraimov, State Secretary of the Kyrgyz Republic, on behalf of the Government of Kyrgyzstan and a message was delivered from Mr. Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations.

9. The report of the Roundtable will be made available to governments of the region prior to the regional intergovernmental preparatory meetings that are relevant for the region, namely the one which will take place in Geneva, Switzerland 24-25 September 2001 for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Region and the one which will take place in Siem Reap, Cambodia, 27-29 November 2001 for the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Region. Participants of the Roundtable were urged to submit the report to their respective constituencies. The Secretariat of the World Summit on Sustainable Development will post the report on its website, which can be accessed at "<http://www.johannesburgsummit.org>"

II. OVERRIDING CONCERNS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNT

10. The region and the world have seen a change both in the concept and approaches to development. Human beings are at the core of sustainable development - as agents for their self-empowerment and for ensuring the sustainability of the environment, in which they live and act. Progress towards sustainable development in this region has not taken a linear path since 1992. Sustainable development efforts have been slowed and in some cases interrupted by financial crises, environmental and natural disasters, armed conflicts and some of the negative consequences of globalization.

11. An overriding challenge is to address the question of how this region, with such a varied set of natural and developmental conditions, can move towards sustainable development in practice - how it can now take action and move on to implementation. The actual interventions will vary greatly within the region depending on geographic location, natural resource base, levels of social and economic development and physical and political infrastructures. Some concerns of sustainable development are most effectively dealt with internally, others have a potential for more regional and South-South co-operation and still others are most appropriately dealt with

through international co-operation. The region can serve as an example to others from the richness of its cultures and the sustainable livelihoods that it does practice.

12. The challenge is to maintain a sense of direction towards sustainable development in the long-term, while addressing the need for more immediately felt economic and social benefits. Sustainability needs to be ensured not only of financial markets, which is important for external relations and balance of payments, but also of economic development in terms of livelihoods and employment, social stability, as well as the protection of the natural environment and resources on which the others depend.

Concerns

13. This region has seen considerable political change in the past ten years. Countries, which were formerly part of the Soviet Union have become independent and are moving from centrally planned to market based economic systems. The struggles of adapting to market based economies have in some cases meant facing acute and severe problems and hardships.

14. The role of government has changed dramatically. Privatization of government owned industries and the opening up of markets have induced profound changes. In spite of these changing roles, governments face the enormous task of satisfying basic human needs of growing populations. Poverty and marginalization of the rural poor, in particular in remote areas, due to a lack of capability to participate in national economic development processes compounded by an exclusion from reaping the benefits of the globalization process, have in some cases led to severe hardships, protests and even armed conflicts, diverting badly needed resources from development efforts to military spending.

15. Peace and security are fundamental for achieving the objectives of sustainable development so that people can live under conditions where their personal safety is not compromised and the natural resource base and physical infrastructure can provide for sustainable livelihoods. The complex relationships between political conflicts and unrest and sustainable development are often underestimated and are not properly addressed, both at the local, as well as regional and international levels. Not only are economic development, social progress and protection of environment impossible during times of conflict, but a lack of natural resources, such as land or water, along with poverty and social marginalization often represent the true underlying causes of conflicts. At the same time poverty and social hardships could lead to involvement of some local people in terrorist activities, organized crime and drug trafficking. Mountain areas, along with some arid and coastal areas in the region, where there are particularly fragile eco-systems, arable land is particularly scarce and the population often direly poor and lacking access to basic social services, are unfortunately areas where conflicts and unrest are common. Addressing the underlying economic, social and environmental causes of conflicts is the best possible way of preventing them. Thus, development and security are inalienable concepts.

16. Another challenge in the region is the growing narcotics problem, both in terms of increasing supply and demand, particularly by youth, as well as in terms of drug trafficking in and through the region. Serious health, social and criminalization problems associated with narcotics are acutely felt concerns of many countries in the region. Countries of the region cannot deal with this most serious problem alone and much more effective regional and international cooperation is required. Concurrently with efforts to decrease and replace the production of illegal crops with other crops that can provide sustainable livelihoods for farmers, rigid measures are needed aimed at curtailing the demand for narcotic drugs in richer European countries which often are the final destination of drugs emanating from Central and Southern Asia. In addition, developed countries together with international organizations should support more actively national efforts to combat drugs-related problems. The close link between poverty and production, trafficking and consumption of drugs was also underscored.

17. Serious concerns such as the growing interrelated problems of crime, human trafficking, particularly of women and children, and arms trafficking as well as terrorism were also highlighted during the discussions. The problem of international terrorism, which became a transnational threat in the region, does not have national identity and does not recognize national borders and can only be effectively addressed through joint regional and international action.

18. This region contains the two most populous countries in the world. These, together with the rest of the region face the daunting challenge of creating livelihoods for their growing populations now and in the future. Those sectors of the society that can create more employment, such as industry, the environment and service sector, along with the now dominant agricultural sector, need to be developed and nurtured. A large share of the population living in rural areas depends on agricultural production for their livelihoods. The natural resource base on which this production depends has to be maintained and protected. Sustainable traditional practices of resource management and utilization should be nurtured and replicated. Degraded and polluted soils, desertification, silting and salination all affect the region. Intense irrigation and deforestation of the watershed areas have affected the freshwater supplies, coastal development and the quality of the region's seas. The ability of the region to maintain sustainable agricultural production stands in question if the quality and carrying capacity of the natural resource base is not addressed.

19. The region also contains some unique eco-systems that need to be protected and sustainably developed such as alpine pastures, mountain forests and deserts, which also harbor populations with traditional lifestyles and unique cultures as well as large centers of global biodiversity.

Proposals for action:

- Much more effective regional cooperation is required to deal with the narcotics problem as the countries from the region cannot deal with this most serious problem alone.
- Rigid measures are needed aimed at curtailing the demand in richer European countries concurrently with efforts to decrease and replace the production of illegal crops with other crops that can provide sustainable livelihoods for farmers.
- Developed countries together with international organizations should support more actively national efforts to combat drugs-related problems.
- The natural resource base on which agricultural production depends has to be maintained and protected.
- Sustainable traditional practices of resource management and utilization should be nurtured and replicated.

Achievements and lessons learnt

20. The region has in the past ten years seen an impressive increase in awareness of the concept of sustainable development. Civil society, NGOs, policy makers and the private sector have an increasing understanding of the need to integrate economic development, social development and environmental protection and have developed models that can be built upon and adapted. There are now sustainable development strategies and regulations in almost all countries in the region. The institutional and regulatory framework for sustainable development is in place but the region has so far lacked the political will for effective sectoral policy integration as well as for internal financial and technical resources allocation to implement them properly. The domestic resources that are allocated towards sustainable development activities often do not reach the beneficiaries in the most efficient manner. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, which was part of the partnership and commitments initiated between developed and developing countries in Rio ten years ago, has not led to anticipated transfers and co-operation in this area.

21. Some countries in the region have seen improvements in such indicators as economic growth rates, better literacy rates and levels of education, slower population growth rates and there is an increasing awareness of the environment and development interrelationships. However, improvements are often undone by calamities and natural disasters that are often irreparable due to a lack of fundamental economic and social safety nets. Democratization processes and improvements in the rule of law have had positive effects in some countries of the region.

22. While women are often most affected by the negative consequences of environmental degradation and natural resources depletion, the region has had very positive and effective results when women are engaged as agents of change. The region has seen slow but discernible positive effects of increased attention to the education and empowerment of women. Women are becoming powerful engines of sustainable development where they have exercised control over use of natural resources.

III. MAIN CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITES

1. NEW APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development policies and requirements

23. There is a need to change concepts and approaches to development so that it integrates economic, social and environmental values and dimensions and also meets the challenges of globalization, but which at the same time is consistent with the region's cultures and values. Specific approaches will vary among countries in the region depending on whether the economy is primarily agricultural or primarily industrial; whether the economy is large or small; and, whether a country is land -locked or has access to the sea.

24. Market forces and free enterprise have become the dominant economic system. Technology together with human capacity and values have always been critical for development. Human and institutional capacity (e.g. free media, democratic institutions) are essential to implement sound policies. These factors are important in order to implement sustainable development. However it is not appropriate for the region to rely solely on western based market approaches as these will not meet all the needs of the people of the region or of its environment.

25. An important development capacity issue for many countries in the region is the 'brain drain' of scientists and technical experts to countries outside the region, particularly to developed countries. Countries in the region should implement policies and programs, which develop human capacity and retain skilled workers.

26. People should be at the center of sustainable development concerns. At the same time it is people and their institutions who have knowledge, capacities and the responsibility to make this world more safe and sustainable. Of particular importance to Central and South Asian countries is the need for development paths that are sympathetic with, and supportive of, traditional cultures and practices of the region. In addition, development models for the region must promote and not undermine individual and organizational values of integrity and concept of shared responsibilities. Without such values it will not be possible to achieve a more equitable society. There is an ongoing need to promote values and behavior through education and public awareness programs that support sustainable development at all levels, including political decision-making levels.

27. In considering the most suitable sustainable development path for a country there is a need for countries and communities to have a clear consensus on what are the goals of their development efforts. It may be completely undesirable from a cultural and environmental viewpoint to pursue a western level of affluence. Notions of 'rich' from a western viewpoint, may

not be sustainable and may not provide any more satisfying lifestyles for people in developing countries than for those in developed countries.

28. Developing countries have to some extent been used as laboratories for a plethora of development models of the West. People in developing countries need to be fully consulted on development paradigms so as to have ownership of the development approach adopted.

29. Current market systems do not adequately value human and natural resources. This has led to a situation whereby it is more profitable to deplete and degrade resources rather than protecting them. Further national and corporate measures and policies aimed at internalization of social and environmental costs need to be complemented by a more fair international economic and trade system that takes full account of interests of countries rich in natural and human resources and which creates markets for global environmental services.

30. For the region, a needs-based valuation of goods and services is required. In this context, countries should increase the use of market based instruments to guide decision-making.

31. A key issue is also to elaborate national, regional and international indicators and targets that would allow measuring progress towards sustainability and increased human welfare. For example: Is household food security a better indicator of sustainable development or the amount of pesticides used in agriculture? Are the number of internet connections (and we know most of these are used for entertainment) the face of sustainable development or the number of internet users and the content of internet packages?

32. All countries of the region should develop, support and use indicators of sustainability. The international community should support this effort. The United Nations should continue work on criteria and indicators for sustainability and human development, which are appropriate to different economic and social cultures.

Proposals for action:

- There is a need to change concepts and approaches to development so that it integrates economic, social and environmental values and dimensions and also meets the challenges of globalization, but which at the same time is consistent with the region's cultures and values.
- Countries in the region should implement policies and programs, which develop human capacity and retain skilled workers.
- Of particular importance to Central and South Asian countries is the need for development paths that are sympathetic with, and supportive of, traditional cultures and practices of the region.
- Development models for the region must promote and not undermine individual and organizational values of integrity and concept of shared responsibilities.
- People in developing countries need to be fully consulted on development paradigms so as to have ownership of the development approach adopted.
- Further national and corporate measures and policies aimed at internalization of social and environmental costs need to be complemented by a more fair international economic and trade system that takes full account of interests of countries rich in natural and human resources and which creates markets for global environmental services.
- Needs-based valuation of goods and services is required for the region. In this context, countries should increase the use of market-based instruments to guide decision-making.
- To elaborate national, regional and international indicators and targets that would allow measuring progress towards sustainability and increased human welfare.
- All countries of the region should develop, support and use indicators of sustainability.

- UN should continue work on criteria and indicators for sustainability and human development, which are appropriate to different economic and social cultures.

Globalization

33. Increased globalization of various sectors has become a significant element of current society in various parts of the world. Globalization could assist implementation of sustainable development, or could hinder efforts in this direction. Countries of the region will have to consider what globalization means for them in regard to sustainable development, how they may benefit from globalization, and minimize adverse consequences. The international community should strive to ensure that globalization processes support the goals of sustainable development of all countries.

34. Globalization has brought benefits to some sectors in some countries in the region. However globalization has adversely impacted on the region's cultures and values and can foster greed and corruption. Globalization has sometimes led to a decline of local industry, a rising import of western goods and closure of many small-to-medium-size enterprises, with rising unemployment and destitution as a consequence. Rising unemployment is becoming a more significant problem for a number of countries in the region and how to provide new employment and sustainable livelihood opportunities as well as some form of protection of the unemployed is an increasing challenge for the region. On this latter matter, trade unions and workers associations need to be promoted so that they can play an active role in protection of workers and labor rights. These organizations should actively participate in the development and implementation of social protection policy.

35. For countries that do not have some of the institutional, regulatory and physical infrastructure as well as the industrial and human capacities necessary to participate in recent market liberalization, globalization has in fact reduced market access. Land locked countries of Central Asia are facing particular difficulties in meeting the challenges of globalization. The establishment of a dynamic and competitive private sector in countries of the region is essential if they are to be part of the globalizing world economy.

36. Along with the growing globalization trend there has also been an increasing localization trend, that is, a rise in local and community and civil society power and voice. The globalization and localization trends need to be brought together. Globalization will cause increasing civil dissatisfaction and strife if people cannot make their own choices as part of the globalization process.

37. The Rio Earth Summit did not consider the complex dimensions of globalization, as we know it today. The Johannesburg Summit should include on its agenda the impacts of globalization from sustainable development perspectives.

Proposals for action:

- Countries of the region will have to consider what globalization means for them in regard to sustainable development, how they may benefit from globalization and minimize adverse consequences.
- Trade unions and workers associations need to be promoted so that they can play an active role in protection of workers and labor rights. These organizations should actively participate in the development and implementation of social protection policy.
- The establishment of a dynamic and competitive private sector in countries of the region is essential.
- The Johannesburg Summit should include on its agenda the impacts of globalization from sustainable development perspectives.

Poverty eradication

38. In many countries of the region there are persistent high levels of poverty. As well, all countries face 'sudden destitution' brought about by natural disasters. An important reason for persistent poverty in the region is the rising levels of income inequality. Another important cause of poverty is lack of natural resources.

39. While the regions face significant short-falls in resources with which to support sustainable development, such limited resources that are available are often used inefficiently and fail to trickle down to levels in a community that really require the resources. Poor people also face the problem of access to capital. To improve their prospects they need diverse sources of capital.

40. Increasing population particularly in rural areas, where carrying capacity of the natural resources is under heavy pressure and employment potential is low presents a severe challenge for the whole region. Management of population levels, as well as creating the necessary basic infrastructure for job creation is fundamental to poverty reduction in the region.

41. Continuing action is required by countries in the region and the international community to tackle absolute poverty and income inequality through an inclusive process of development, with equity considerations underpinning economic/market, social, and political processes.

42. There should also be a continuing global effort to define a minimal level of human welfare, which no person should fall below. In this context the international community should consider the development of a global social security system.

Proposals for action:

- Management of population levels, as well as creating the necessary basic infrastructure for job creation is fundamental to poverty reduction in the region.
- There should be a continuing global effort to define a minimal level of human welfare, which no person should fall below. In this context the international community should consider the development of a global social security system.

Financial resources and technology transfer

43. The internationally recognized responsibility of developed countries to assist developing countries has not been properly realized in the region and the Rio commitments on finance and technology transfer have not been met. On the basis of human equity and on the basis of ecological services provided by developing countries, amongst other factors, there is a need for transfer of funds from the North to the South. It is recognized however that for the time being, because of northern attitudes and because of economic conditions in developed countries, this significant transfer of funds is not occurring. Therefore countries in the region will have to also rely on their own resources and technology. Nevertheless the global partnership between developed and developing countries to support sustainable development must be reinvigorated and developed countries must meet their commitment to increase ODA to 0.7% of GDP.

44. With decreasing aid flows there is a need to for more targeted assistance. New models of donor /recipient collaboration could be examined. For example, Bhutan, Netherlands, Costa Rica and Benin have adopted a collaborative approach to sustainable development. Under the four country agreement the Netherlands is providing financial assistance for the other three countries efforts to establish sustainable development activities, in turn for example, Bhutan has promoted sustainable agricultural practices in the Netherlands. This model of bilateral cooperation between donors and recipients on sustainable development could be extended in the region.

45. Growing external debt is an increasing problem for many countries of the region. A significant part of a country's GDP is being spent in debt servicing leaving scant resources for sustainable development.

46. Given the importance of the debt issue, the Summit needs to agree on a process that would lead to a global scheme for restructuring of foreign debt. This should include aspects related to debt swaps for poverty reduction and for new environmental programs.

47. Various actions should also be taken by countries at the national level. In particular, countries need to reduce spending on military and arms and redirect such expenditure to social and environmental programs and countries need to promote more environmentally friendly economic systems.

48. While countries in the region will continue to obtain technology from developed countries it is important that such technology is the most effective for their needs and is not necessarily 'old' technology. For example, it may be preferable for developing countries to obtain internet technology, rather than focusing on telephone technology. Local technology may often be preferable to imported technology. Countries of the region should not feel they are only limited to western technology. Technology should be customised to the specific needs of a country or sub-region, or even a village. Countries should consider developing policies and legislation that require imported technology to be environmentally sound.

Proposals for action:

- The global partnership between developed and developing countries to support sustainable development must be reinvigorated and developed countries must meet their commitment to increase ODA to 0.7 % of GDP.
- There is a need for more targeted assistance in view of the decreasing aid flows. New models of donor/recipient collaboration could be examined.
- The Johannesburg Summit needs to agree on a process that would lead to a global scheme for restructuring of foreign debt. This should include aspects related to debt swaps for poverty reduction and for new environmental programs.
- Countries need to reduce spending on military and arms and redirect such expenditure to social and environmental programs.
- Countries should consider developing policies and legislation that require imported technology to be environmentally sound. Technology should be customized to the specific needs of a country or sub-region, or even a village.

Regional issues and regional /international cooperation

49. South /South cooperation on sustainable development, for example, as has been undertaken between South Asia and Africa has been useful and could be further promoted, for example between South and Central Asia. Opportunities for increased cooperation between Central and South Asia on sustainable development and security issues should be actively explored. There is much merit in the United Nations developing guidelines for South /South meetings and also convening further meetings between South and Central Asia on sustainable development issues.

50. Countries in transition in the Central Asian region have in recent years, in the context of independence and meeting the impacts of globalization, suffered in various ways. This includes reduction of economic capacity; increased levels of income inequality; over exploitation and degradation of natural resources; decline in moral values; loss of intellectual capacity; and, increase in foreign debt.

51. Small island states have successfully collaborated over a number of years, including on international policy issues. Following this example, there could be scope for increased political collaboration and partnerships between land locked countries on sustainable development issues. The Johannesburg Summit should give special attention to the sustainable development problems of land-locked countries, including the problem of transit, as well as the scope for international agreement on preferential access for land locked air carriers, to international airports.

52. Greater awareness and stronger regional and international cooperation on the issue of nuclear wastes is another important area of attention.

53. Central and South Asian countries should be actively involved in negotiations on the reform of the World Trade Organization.

Proposals for action:

- Opportunities for increased cooperation between South and Central Asia on sustainable development and security issues should be actively explored. There is much merit in the UN developing guidelines for South/South meetings and also convening further meetings between South and Central Asia on sustainable development issues.
- The Johannesburg Summit should give special attention to the sustainable development problems of land-locked countries, including the problem of transit, as well as the scope for international agreement on preferential access for land-locked air carriers to international airports.
- Greater awareness and stronger regional and international cooperation on the issue of nuclear wastes is another important area of attention.
- Central and South Asian countries should be actively involved in negotiations on the reform of the WTO.

2. BETTER GOVERNANCE, STRONGER INSTITUTIONS, PARTICIPATION AND INFORMATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

54. Globalization has led to significant changes in the role governments play in economic, social and environmental affairs. While the role of governments continues to be critical in adopting laws and regulations, creating conducive environment for investment and supporting social safety nets, new powerful actors have emerged whose role in achieving sustainable development is comparable, and sometimes is even stronger than the role of the government. This new situation, which has led to some positive developments, has also for many countries led to a sense of loss of ability to choose one's own development path, cultural identity, and value systems. Greatly improved transparency is needed in dealings with international financial institutions and multi-national corporations in order to restore a sense of trust and ability to influence.

55. This calls for an evolution of the whole concept of governance - both at the national, regional and international levels - which meets the new realities and challenges. Decision-making structures and institutions need to provide for meaningful involvement in policy formulation and implementation by representatives of the private sector, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, trade unions and other major groups. There is growing evidence that "bottom up" and multi-stakeholder approaches in decision-making may prove to be most effective for finding the right long-term solutions.

56. An important challenge is to ensure that decision-making processes carefully balance short-term economic benefits with medium- and long-term objectives, particularly in the social and

environmental areas. Greater understanding and scientific knowledge of long-term consequences of actions, or in-action, is most important. However much stronger awareness and involvement of the general public and other actors is crucial for progress. Otherwise there is a strong risk of "what we know" is not being translated in "what we do".

57. Sustainable development needs to become an organizing principle for policy formulation, integration and implementation. Countries should consider incorporating sustainable development principles in their Constitutions or adopting frameworks for sustainable development legislation. This, along with other benefits, will allow for a better link between sustainable development and other strategically important issues, such as peace and security. This work, however, need to be accompanied by much more effective measures aimed at enforcement and compliance.

58. An important role in promotion of sustainable development is played by the judiciary and needs to be further supported. Historically, in some countries, judges acted as stronger advocates of sustainable development and peoples' concerns than the legislative and executive branches of government.

Proposals for action:

- Decision-making structures and institutions need to provide for meaningful involvement in policy formulation and implementation by representatives of the private sector, local authorities, NGOs, trade unions and other major groups.
- To ensure that decision-making processes carefully balance short-term economic benefits with medium- and long-term objectives, particularly in the social and environmental areas.
- Countries should consider incorporating sustainable development principles in their Constitutions or adopting frameworks for sustainable development legislation.

Access to information and information technologies

61. All policy formulation and decision-making processes related to sustainable development need to be open and transparent. There is a need to guarantee free access to updated and reliable information and improve the capacity of the general public to access sources of such information, including through Internet. Provisions of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was cited as a laudable initiative and as a possible basis for national legislation in the region.

62. The problem of the so called 'digital divide' which exists between the region and developed countries, between countries in the region and between different parts of a country, e.g. urban and rural areas, was identified as a significant issue for the region. The speed at which information technologies have been developed and disseminated in the past ten years is unprecedented. This has induced dramatic changes in the lives of those that have access to these technologies. There is need for developing effective modalities for broadly disseminating the application of these technologies to those segments of the population that can greatly benefit from greater access to information on successful implementation of sustainable development practices.

63. However, the very pace at which these technologies and applications are developed makes it particularly difficult to bridge this "digital divide". There is a need for building up a critical mass of a cadre of scientists, professionals and entrepreneurs as well as product and content developers in this area. The innovative capacity of this region's scientists, engineers and business community should be pooled and advanced so that the full potential in the area of information technology can be fully utilized. If the digital divide is not bridged, problems of marginalization can become exponential between and within countries.

Proposals for action:

- Provisions of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was cited as a laudable initiative and as a possible basis for national legislation in the region.
- There is need for developing effective modalities for broadly disseminating the application of ITs to those segments of the population that can greatly benefit from greater access to information on successful implementation of sustainable development practices.
- The innovative capacity of this region's scientists, engineers and business community should be pooled and advanced so that the potential in the area of information technology can be fully utilized.

Role of media

64. Media has a crucial role to play in raising awareness and promoting objectives of sustainable development. Freedom of the press as a custodian of reporting on rights and concerns of people is an essential tool in fighting malpractice, crime, corruption and injustice. It is the voice of the voiceless and the power of the pen should challenge governments and civil society to live more sustainably by promoting reportage of the environment and social issues. Media organizations, in particular at local and "grass-roots" levels, need to be supported.

65. At the same time international media often is increasingly playing a negative role through promotion of unsustainable consumption patterns and life styles. The media often creates the impression that "anything coming from the West" is always better than "anything coming from the South" and often ignores good practice and knowledge available there.

Development of Civil Society, NGOs, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and Private-public partnerships

66. Activities of international agencies and donors in support of development of civil society, NGOs and CBOs should be actively supported by coordinating with relevant activities of legislative and executive powers /bodies. Priority should be given to legislative opportunities and tax policies that will promote investments by the private sector (both individuals and companies) in development of civil society, NGOs and CBOs. It is also very important to create competitive windows for access of NGOs and CBOs to social and environmental programs funded by national and local governments.

67. Stronger incentives are required to promote social and environmental responsibilities by private corporations. While the Global Compact initiative of the UN Secretary-General is an important step in this direction, much more remains to be done at the national and local levels. Stronger partnerships involving local authorities and communities, grass root organizations and private companies are required and need to be supported by governments. Consideration should be given to elaboration of broad guidelines for forming public-private partnerships on the basis of good practice and lessons learnt so far. Examples of private sector engagement in social and economic development of the poorer parts of society include the "adopt a village" initiative.

Fighting corruption

68. An important challenge is to find effective ways of fighting corruption. Corruption, however, is not a problem limited to developing countries and economies in transition, but is a global phenomenon. Labeling governments and institutions in developing countries and economies in transitions as "presumably corrupt" is unfair, insulting and not conducive to international cooperation. Foreign countries and corporations interested in doing business and

supporting projects in the region should review their own, often "seductive" practices related to promotion of their investments and other economic interests which often result in corruption.

Support from donors and international institutions

69. Donors, international agencies and financial institutions need to critically review their policies and practices in providing assistance to recipient countries. There is strong evidence that the present system of international aid has failed to achieve its objectives, since over the last two decades living conditions in poorer countries have shown little improvement. Among the reasons for such a set back is the failure of the donor community to recognize genuine priorities of and conditions in the recipient countries. In order to change this situation consideration needs to be given to creation of a "common sustainable development fund" in each of the recipient countries, which would be jointly governed by representatives of donors, government and local communities.

70. Donors and international financial organizations need to reverse the current practice that assistance projects are usually managed and implemented by their own nationals and international contractors. This results in a perverse situation that a large portion of aid returns to the donor. More importantly, however, is that greater reliance on national expertise would increase the overall impact of assistance through building stronger human capacities and experiences in recipient countries. Resources should be allocated by donors to implementation and replication of successful aid projects. Over-bureaucratic and time-consuming procedures of donor agencies and financial institutions also need to be critically reviewed.

71. Governance and mandates of international financial institutions, including the GEF, needs to be reformed so as to promote greater transparency and accountability and in order to make it possible for these institutions to interact with a broader set of actors. Furthermore, international development institutions need to focus on helping countries to implement and finalize existing projects rather than designing new ones.

72. The United Nations needs to compile information on sustainable and environmentally sound knowledge, life styles and practices available in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Such information can be submitted by governments, local authorities and communities and broadly disseminated so that others can benefit and learn from good practices.

73. Governments need to give serious consideration to launching a process leading to elaboration of an overarching international treaty on sustainable development that will provide an "umbrella" to more specialized treaties and instruments dealing with specific environmental, social and economic issues. This work could build on IUCN's Draft International Covenant on Environment and Development, and the Earth Charter elaborated by the Earth Council. The treaty could also encompass the use of sustainability criteria and indicators and the use of market based instruments.

Proposals for action:

- Donors, international agencies and IFIs need to critically review their policies and practices in providing assistance to recipient countries.
- Consideration needs to be given to creation of a "common sustainable development fund" in each of the recipient countries, which would be jointly governed by representatives of donors, governments and local communities.
- Donors and IFIs need to reverse the current practice that assistance projects are usually managed and implemented by their own nationals and international contractors.

- The UN needs to compile information on sustainable and environmentally sound knowledge, life styles and practices available in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.
- Governments need to give serious consideration to launching a process leading to elaboration of an overarching international treaty on sustainable development that will provide an “umbrella” to more specialized treaties and instruments dealing with specific environmental, social and economic issues.

3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

74. All participants recognized the need to conserve, protect and sustainably use the natural resources of their countries and regions. An integrated, ecosystem approach to natural resource management and development was urged, with dissemination of "good practices" or lessons learned made available to developing countries. The skills, knowledge and experience of local people should be better used. It was noted that achieving economic development in developing countries and countries with economies in transition usually resulted in some adverse consequences for the natural resource base and the environment. Common issues of concern were identified for both Central Asia and South Asia, as well as some specific problems unique to individual countries. The main concerns requiring further attention were seen to be the following:

Mountains

75. Sustainable mountain development was first accepted as a global priority by the inclusion of chapter 13 of Agenda 21. Mountains contain fragile ecosystems and centers of biodiversity and play a crucial role as "water towers of the world" in supplying freshwater and moderating river flows. Mountain people, who represent diverse cultures and traditions, as well as indigenous knowledge, are overwhelmingly poor due to their isolation and lack of opportunities for employment and income-earning activities, worsened by insufficient investments and arable land. For Central Asia, it was suggested that a comprehensive framework to assist the mountain poor and protect and respect the highlanders' way of life should be elaborated in cooperation with international agencies. The need to integrate sustainable mountain development into overall sustainable development programs was also urged. Other issues of concern in mountain areas were identified, including natural disasters, cross-border problems, deforestation, land use and agriculture, and the promotion of eco-tourism. It was noted that mountains are also particularly sensitive to climate changes.

76. An important opportunity to further raise public awareness and support for sustainable mountain development will be the International Year of Mountains, which the United Nations has declared for 2002, at the initiative of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. Kyrgyzstan is preparing for a Global Summit on Mountains to be held in Bishkek in late 2002 as a final event for the Year. A regional strategy for the sustainable development of mountains, recently agreed to by several Central Asian countries, could be further elaborated for consideration as a global action plan on mountains for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Bishkek Summit on Mountains. Such an initiative, along with similar action programs from other parts of the world, would contribute to the International Year of Mountains.

Proposals for action:

- For Central Asia, it was suggested that a comprehensive framework to assist the mountain poor and protect and respect the highlanders' way of life should be elaborated in cooperation with international agencies.
- A regional strategy for sustainable development of mountains, recently agreed by several Central Asian countries, could be further elaborated for consideration as a global action plan on mountains at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit and the Bishkek Summit on Mountains.
- The 2002 International Year of Mountains should provide opportunity to raise public awareness and support for sustainable mountain development.

Desertification

77. Desertification is a major threat to sustainable development in the region. A recent study was cited that estimated 87 percent of desertification is caused by human activities (such as unsustainable water use and land degradation), while about 13 percent is related to natural disasters. The tragic example of the Aral Sea was cited as evidence of the former. In Central Asia desertification is found in both desert areas and the mountains. It is essential to draw on the knowledge and traditional practices of the local people living on the land to build awareness about the causes and consequences of desertification. Scientific, technological and financial support, including Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to people living in the drylands, who suffer chronic food insecurity, malnutrition and other health problems, was urged.

78. The United Nations system could also strengthen its support to efforts to monitor anthropogenic environmental disaster zones, both actual and potential, as a means to assist the countries affected.

Proposals for action:

- Scientific, technological and financial support, including ICTs to people living in the drylands, who suffer chronic food insecurity, malnutrition and other health problems, was urged.
- The UN system could also strengthen its support to efforts to monitor anthropogenic environmental disaster zones, both actual and potential, as a means to assist the countries affected.

Agriculture and food security

79. Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development is essential for ensuring food security and reducing poverty in the countries of South and Central Asia. While the numbers of the hungry and poor are unacceptably large in most parts of the world, there have been some positive developments in some regions, in particular South Asia where both the percentage and absolute numbers have declined in the decade of the 1990s. On the other hand, the figures indicate that hunger and malnutrition in the CIS countries have increased during this same period of transition. Population pressures on a limited amount of arable land is a continuing constraint to agricultural production in many parts of the world. Natural disasters and land degradation are also negative factors. It is important to increase public awareness to achieve sustainable agricultural development and minimize the destruction of land and other natural resources, and to facilitate rural development through, inter alia, access to land and opportunities for rural employment. Support for traditional organic methods of farming can contribute to more sustainable agricultural practices.

Freshwater

80. Protection of the quality and supply of freshwater resources is a common priority for all countries in Central and South Asia, although the extent of vulnerability varies. The need for clean water for human and other life and the increasing global imbalance between demand and supply have led to national, regional and international problems and sometimes conflicts. Water shortages are also caused by seasonal patterns such as monsoons and droughts. It was suggested that water be treated as an economic good (if it is not already the practice), keeping its social implications in perspective, and that integrated water resources management practices be developed and put in place, taking into account the various uses of water and the dynamics of water availability in each country. Regional cooperation in this context can play a mutually beneficial role for the participating countries.

81. Groundwater is also a very important source of drinking water. In some cases, however, mining practices have led to major health hazards, including arsenic poisoning in underground wells. Health and sanitation issues also extend to coastal pollution caused by dirty rivers and streams. Investments in new technologies and affordable technologies are required to provide pure drinking water for the people of the region, especially the poor.

82. In support of global concerns regarding the importance of freshwater crisis, and at the initiative of the Government of Tajikistan, the United Nations has declared 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater.

Proposals for action:

- It was suggested that water be treated as an economic good, keeping its social implications in perspective.
- Integrated water resources management practices be developed and put in place, taking into account the various uses of water and the dynamics of water availability in each country.
- Investments in new and affordable technologies are required to provide pure drinking water for the people of the region, especially the poor.

Climate change

83. The growing evidence of climate change and global warming, recently documented by the third assessment study of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), raises serious concerns for agriculture and food security, mountain glaciers and water supplies, land degradation due to natural and other disasters, fisheries and other ocean resources and the rise of sea levels. While mitigation efforts must be continued, it is very important, particularly from the point of view of the countries of South and Central Asia as well as of developing countries in other regions, to promote and undertake country-specific, regional and international activities (including research and action) to advance understanding of the likely consequences of and adaptation to climate change. Resources--both financial and technical--from the richer countries to the countries of Central and South Asia to facilitate the study of the problems and potential solutions are required.

Energy and Transport

84. Like other areas of concern, the sustainable development of energy resources is a long-term process, requiring 20-30 years for planning and results. An important consideration is who takes accountability for--and pays for--actions taken in the energy sector to balance economic and environmental costs and benefits. Governments should be encouraged to support the development and efficient use of energy and the optimum use of

renewable energy sources, taking into account long-term benefits and sustainability. Financial assistance from donor organizations such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the provision of appropriate energy technologies to developing countries is needed. Environmentally-friendly and energy-efficient transport projects, such as help in building bicycle paths and improved mass transportation systems, should also be supported. In this connection, several South-South initiatives could provide good examples.

Forests

85. The sustainable management of forests and the problems of deforestation are also of great concern to the countries of South and Central Asia. Deforestation is linked with land degradation, the loss of biodiversity and soils, with climate change and with natural disasters. Reforestation and afforestation, which would also create new jobs, would be important to restore lands and prevent soil degradation and protect watersheds and catchment areas particularly in the mountains, as well as provide for oxygen regeneration. Forest plantations can also be a major source of primary energy for people living in rural areas who already depend heavily on biomass as the main source of energy.

Coastal areas and fisheries

86. The threats to coastal areas and fisheries from unsustainable practices and exploitation of limited resources are of great concern to many of the countries in the region. Marine and coastal fisheries, including aquaculture, provide a substantial proportion of human nutritional needs in developing countries, especially in South Asia. Fisheries also provide a large, and expanding, share of exports for some countries of the region, but their future potential is limited by reductions in yields. It is important to safeguard and enhance the traditional knowledge and interests of fishing communities, small-scale artisanal fishers and indigenous people in the development and management of fish stocks. The land-locked and arid countries of Central Asia are also affected as their inland fisheries yields have been significantly reduced. This is especially the case for sturgeon, which has considerable market value as the source of caviar. Exports and income-earning opportunities for local fisherfolk have been drastically reduced. Even worse, the drying up of the Aral Sea has ended all commercial fishing there, resulting in the unemployment of entire fishing communities.