



UNITED NATIONS

# JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT 2002



WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT | JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA | 26 AUGUST–4 SEPTEMBER 2002

## Press Summary of the Secretary-General's Report On Implementing Agenda 21

In preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has issued a 63-page report analyzing progress over the past decade in implementing Agenda 21, the global plan for sustainable development that was adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The report assesses economic, social and environmental trends over the past ten years and offers suggestions on how the international community can realistically redirect its efforts to realize the goals set forth in Agenda 21. The following is a summary of the report.

### Agenda 21 and Sustainable Development—Good Plan, Weak Implementation

The world's environment is still too fragile and existing conservation measures are far from sufficient. There has been only very limited progress in reducing poverty in the developing world and globalization, by itself, has not benefited most people in the world.

Attempts to promote human development and to reverse environmental degradation have not, in general, been effective over the last decade. Too few resources, a lack of political will, a piecemeal and uncoordinated approach and continued wasteful patterns of production and consumption have conspired to thwart efforts to implement sustainable development, or development that is balanced between people's economic and social needs and the ability of the earth's resources and ecosystems to meet present and future needs.

Despite a decade of far from satisfactory results, Agenda 21 — the agreement that was unanimously adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro — remains a powerful, long-term vision that is still valid today.

The world has changed in the ten years since Rio, with new demands and challenges created by globalization, the information and communications revolution, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Still, sustainable development remains a viable alternative to the present business-as-usual approach to development.

There are opportunities ahead. The World Trade Organization, at its meeting in Doha, put development at the centre of new negotiations, and governments will meet in Monterrey, Mexico, in March at the International Conference on Financing for Development. One of the primary objectives of that conference is to bring a development orientation to the world of finance.

In August, governments, along with representatives of all sectors of society, will gather in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The focus of the Summit is to reinvigorate the political commitment and determination to implement the plan of action on sustainable development through new initiatives that are both practical and based on partnerships.

### Present Trends

#### ***Economic***

- ◆ The 1990s were a far less turbulent decade than the 1980s, with most countries enjoying economic growth during the first half. The average rate of growth of gross domestic product (GDP) for all developing countries increased to 4.3 per cent, compared to 2.7 per cent in the 1980s. Developed countries registered average growth of about 2.3 per cent, down from 3 per cent in the previous decade.
- ◆ Not all countries benefited. While economic growth in Africa marginally improved, high population growth eroded the gains, and the gap in the standard of living between Africa and other regions widened. Other regions suffered

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as well, as economic and social conditions in the transition economies deteriorated. While the economy in these countries grew in the 1980s by 1.8 per cent a year, in the 1990s these economies declined by an average of 2.5 per cent per year.

- ♦ International trade flourished in the 1990s, with global exports growing at an average rate of 6.4 per cent, reaching \$6.3 trillion in 2000. Developing countries as a whole benefited, with their exports growing at a rate of 9.6 per cent a year. But Africa, in particular, did not gain, as its share in world trade dropped from 2.7 per cent in 1990 to 2.1 per cent in 2000.
- ♦ Globalization also proved to have an extremely volatile side. While many countries benefited from an infusion of external private capital, the reversal of these flows caused financial crises, first in Mexico in 1995 and then in East Asia and other countries in 1997.
- ♦ Official development assistance (ODA) flows have fallen during the 1990s, from \$58.3 billion in 1992 to \$53.1 billion in 2000. ODA, as a proportion of gross national product, fell from 0.35 per cent in 1992 to 0.22 per cent in 2000. Only five countries—Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden—met the aid target of 0.7 per cent of GDP in 2000. Most of the least developed countries suffered a decline in ODA of at least 25 per cent, and seven countries, all in Africa, saw ODA reduced by more than 50 per cent.
- ♦ Foreign Direct Investment flows to developing countries have grown steadily, with the net portfolio investment in developing countries reaching a peak of \$91 billion in 1994 before falling to \$25 billion in 1998. This has slightly rebounded in 1999 and 2000.
- ♦ Estimates of government subsidies, in all countries, range from \$650 million to about \$1.5 trillion a year. Removal of these subsidies can contribute to sustainability while generating financial savings for government.

### ***Population and Poverty***

- ♦ The world's **population** reached 6 billion in 2000, a significant rise from 1950 when it was 2.5 billion, and 1980 when it was 4.4 billion. It is expected to grow to about 8 billion by 2025 and 9.3 billion by 2050, ultimately stabilizing between 10.5 and 11 billion. The rate of population growth peaked in 1965 at 2 per cent annually and is now declining.
- ♦ Only 15 per cent of the world's population, in high-income countries, account for 56 per cent of the world's total **consumption**, while the poorest 40 per cent, in low-income countries, account for only 11 per cent of consumption. While most people consume more today, the consumption expenditure of the average African household is 20 per cent less than it was 25 years ago.
- ♦ The overall **poverty** rate in developing countries, based on an income poverty line of one dollar a day, declined from 29 per cent in 1990 to 23 per cent in 1998. The total number of people living in poverty dropped slightly from 1.3 to 1.2 billion. Substantial progress in reducing poverty has been achieved in East and Southeast Asia through rapid economic growth, and some success has been achieved in South Asia and Latin America. Virtually no progress was made in sub-Saharan Africa, where almost half the population lives in poverty.
- ♦ By 2025, it is estimated that about 54 per cent of the population in developing countries will reside in **urban areas**. As the number of people moving to urban areas increases, so does the number of poor people living in cities. In Africa, over 40 per cent of urban households live in poverty.
- ♦ There are at least 1.1 billion people who still lack access to **safe drinking water** and 2.4 billion who lack adequate **sanitation**. There have been some positive developments during the 1990s, as about 438 million people in developing countries gained access to improved drinking water supply and about 542 million people in urban areas gained access to proper sanitation. However, due to rapid growth in these areas, the number of urban dwellers who lack access to safe drinking water increased by nearly 62 million.
- ♦ More than 8 per cent of **children** in developing countries still die before the age of five, and in some of the poorest countries, one in five children die before their first birthday. More than 113 million school-age children in developing countries are not in school, over 60 per cent of them girls.
- ♦ About 815 million people in the world are undernourished — 777 million of them live in developing countries, 77 million in transition countries, and 11 million in industrialized countries. **Hunger** in South Asia, where it is most prevalent, is declining, while in Africa, about one third of the population is undernourished and the numbers are increasing.

- ◆ **Health** conditions have generally improved during the 1990s, with average life expectancy rising and mortality rates declining. There have been several notable successes, such as the virtual elimination of polio and other infectious diseases. However, in many developing countries, poor health conditions prevail as a result of contaminated water, poor sanitation, severe indoor air pollution, malaria and other infectious diseases, and the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ **HIV/AIDS** has rolled back life expectancy in some countries to pre-1980 levels, and in 9 countries, life expectancy declined by 6.3 years. There are 36 million people living with HIV/AIDS, 95 per cent of them in developing countries, and 25 million of these people live in sub-Saharan Africa. More than 12 million Africans have died of AIDS and 13.2 million children have been orphaned.

## Managing Ecosystems

- ◆ Agricultural expansion to meet the growing demand for food has had a major adverse impact on forests, grasslands and wetlands. **Soil degradation** affects at least 2 billion hectares worldwide, and about two thirds of the world's agricultural lands.
- ◆ **Freshwater** is becoming scarcer in many countries due to agriculture, which consumes 70 per cent of the world's exploited freshwater. However, only 30 per cent of the water supplied is actually used by plants and crops — the remainder is wasted. The problem is already acute in North Africa and West Asia and by 2025, as much as two thirds of the world's population could live in countries with moderate or severe water stress. In the next two decades, it is expected that 17 per cent more water will be needed to grow food in developing countries and that total water use will increase by 40 per cent.
- ◆ More than 11,000 **species** are now considered threatened and more than 800 species have already become extinct due to loss of habitats. Another 5,000 species are potentially threatened unless efforts are taken to reverse their population declines.
- ◆ About a quarter of the world's **fisheries** are over-fished and half are fully utilized. Marine catches from the Atlantic Ocean and in some parts of the Pacific Ocean reached their maximum potential years ago. Only one per cent of the world's oceans are protected reserves, or "no-take" zones.
- ◆ Natural **forests** are rapidly being converted to agricultural and other land. The rate of global deforestation during the 1990s is estimated at 14.6 million hectares per year, a net loss of 4 per cent of the world's forest in the last decade, mostly in developing countries. Net deforestation rates were highest in Africa and South America. There have been some areas where reforestation has taken place, in some developed and developing countries. Reforestation has occurred at an estimated rate of 5.2 million hectares per year, attributed to natural forest succession on abandoned farmlands and to forest plantations.
- ◆ About half of the wood harvested in the world is used as **fuelwood**, and 90 per cent of this is consumed in developing countries. The total woody biomass of the world's forests is also declining, reducing the capacity for forests to mitigate climate change.
- ◆ About 27 per cent of the world's **coral reefs** have been lost due to both direct human impacts and the effects of climate change, and it is estimated that another 32 per cent of reefs may be functionally destroyed within the next 30 years if no corrective action is taken.
- ◆ Emissions of **ozone** depleting substances have peaked and are now slowly declining. Total consumption of chlorofluorocarbons has decreased from about 1.1 million tons in 1986 to 156,000 tons in 1998.
- ◆ Global consumption of **fossil fuels** has increased by 10 per cent from 1992 to 1999. Per capita use remains highest in developed countries where people consumed an average of 6.4 tons of oil equivalent per year in 1999, or ten times the consumption in developing regions. Global carbon emissions doubled between 1965 and 1998, amounting to an average increase of 2.1 per cent per year.
- ◆ The greatest increase in **energy use** occurred in transportation, where 95 per cent of the energy consumed is derived from petroleum. Energy consumption in this sector is expected to rise at a rate of 1.5 per cent a year in developed countries and 3.6 per cent in developing countries. Carbon dioxide emissions from this sector are expected to rise 75 per cent between 1997 and 2020.
- ◆ More than 2 billion people in developing countries rely on traditional **biomass energy**, which includes firewood, animal dung and agricultural residues.

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## How the World Summit on Sustainable Development Can Make a Difference: A Ten-Point Plan for Action

Considering the global situation, the emerging trends and the globalization phenomenon, practical steps are needed to advance the sustainable development agenda. Rather than a place to negotiate or renegotiate another set of principles, the World Summit on Sustainable Development is expected to be a forum where various partners from different sectors of society can determine programmes for action and projects that have attainable goals in a realistic timeframe. To focus efforts on achievable results, the Secretary-General's report offers a suggested ten-point plan for action:

- ◆ **Make globalization work for sustainable development.** The benefits of globalization have been distributed unevenly, and the world's poorest countries have been left behind. Among the actions suggested are the elimination of trade-distorting subsidies and improved access for products and services from developing countries to the markets of developed countries, particularly in areas such as agriculture and textiles.
- ◆ **Eradicate poverty and improve livelihoods** in rural and urban areas. Large numbers of very poor people live in areas facing severe ecological stress. Efforts must be made to improve conditions and opportunities for the poor, such as through land tenure, sustainable livelihoods, credit, education, agricultural improvements, and efforts to minimize waste and encourage recycling.
- ◆ **Change unsustainable patterns of production and consumption**, including by increasing energy efficiency four-fold over the next two to three decades, enhancing corporate responsibility, and providing incentives for cleaner production.
- ◆ **Improve health** through safe and affordable access to freshwater, a reduction in lead in gasoline and improved indoor air quality.
- ◆ **Provide access to energy** and improve energy efficiency by developing and using more renewable and energy efficient technologies and changing unsustainable energy consumption patterns.
- ◆ **Manage ecosystems and biodiversity** on a sustainable basis, addressing the problems of over-fishing, unsustainable forestry practices and land-based marine pollution.
- ◆ **Improve freshwater supply management** and arrange more equitable distribution of water resources.
- ◆ **Provide financial resources**, through increases in official development assistance and private investment, and by the transfer and sharing of environmentally sound technologies.
- ◆ **Support sustainable development in Africa** through new and extensive programmes that can build institutions and systems that can address hunger, health and environmental protection and resource management.
- ◆ **Strengthen international governance** for sustainable development to promote an integrated, global approach, rather than the present, compartmentalized approach.