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**Background Paper: Priorities and Approaches for the 2012 UN Conference
on Sustainable Development**

Paper for the Commonwealth Secretariat*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) held in Stockholm is credited with launching the global environmental governance (GEG) system, including the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The Rio Earth Summit, officially called the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in 1992, brought renewed commitment to establishing the concept of sustainable development as a driving principle in international governance and launched two of the seminal instruments of environmental governance, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The year 2012 marks the 20th anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit, and the UN has committed to hosting the ‘Rio+20’ Summit, formally called the UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012. The Commonwealth has a long track record of work on global governance and is working to strengthen Commonwealth members’ contributions to the preparations for the Rio + 20 Summit. This paper, together with the ensuing Ministerial discussion at the Commonwealth Consultative Group Meeting in New York on 14th May 2010 may usefully contribute to this endeavour.

2. Two main themes have been identified for the conference:

- **Green Economy** within the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction, and;
- **Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development**

3. The 2012 summit cannot be simply another ‘review’ exercise. While sober reflection is a necessary undertaking, it does not provide sufficient justification for a summit of global proportions, nor will it alone result in any groundbreaking progress in meaningfully addressing any of the persisting challenges with the GEG system.

4. In trying to imagine how Rio+20 might muster the political momentum to make a significant breakthrough on GEG, there is one element that was absent both in Stockholm in 1972 and in Rio in 1992: the vulnerable state of the world economy. Renewed discussions of a Green Economy are an encouraging sign. If the Rio+20 process were to harness that momentum, it could provide a venue in which discussions could take place, in detail and with full candidness, about how the transition to a green economy might genuinely take place.

5. In further contributing to the Rio+20 process, particularly in relation to the second theme of the summit, ‘an institutional framework for Sustainable Development’, we provide 3 suggestions where contributions from Commonwealth Ministers are most needed:

- **Increasing Accountability:** Improving accountability—essentially reformulating the very culture of the GEG system—will not be easy, but it is absolutely necessary. The Rio+20 Summit provides a key opportunity to address which immediate steps, from more transparency in information to performance monitoring, could be taken to begin recalibrating the GEG system towards a culture of accountability.
- **Coherence and Consolidation:** Many of the current challenges in the GEG system stem more from an overabundance of institutions than from a lack of organizations altogether.

As such, perhaps an ambitious goal for the Rio+20 process should be to end with fewer treaties than we have now, in order to exploit the ever increasing synergies between both traditional environmental institutions, and those necessarily involved in broader sustainable development goals.

- **Broadening Scope for Participation:** GEG must become less state-centric and more open to participation from actors outside of the traditional nation-state. Civil society brings many skills to the GEG process, and in particular they bring a proximity to implementation. It is in this regard that the best venues for engagement must be created, expanded upon or utilized moving forward. The Rio+20 processes provide another significant opportunity to think critically about the ways in which a new course for governance can be forged in this respect.

6. If Rio+20, like the original Rio Earth Summit, is given an ambitious ‘raison d’être’ that focuses on any one of these priorities, it will undoubtedly shift the debate and could have deep and far-reaching impacts on the institutional framework for sustainable development and our understanding of how our current economic, social and environmental systems can be improved therein. If not, Rio+20 could become just another summit.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND CHALLENGES

7. Few international issues have garnered as much attention in the last thirty years as the environment. By some measures, the progress of the international environment regime which has been constructed through a lengthy series of international negotiations has been encouraging and constructive. Institutions with a mandate to address a broad spectrum of environmental issues have been put in place at the national and international levels. The environmental dimensions of social and economic policy are also being considered in unprecedented ways. A complex negotiating system has been operational for decades, resulting in hundreds of conventions and agreements. International initiatives by civil society have acted as a check and balance for the traditional state system, and the importance of civil society is increasing as the scale of issues under the umbrella of global environmental governance (GEG) grows.

8. The end goal of environmental governance is to improve the state of the environment and eventually lead to the broader goal of sustainable development. If we ask whether the environmental regime is solving problems at an adequate pace and pushing development in a more sustainable direction, the news is much less encouraging. In a number of ways - climate, biodiversity, fisheries, forests, water, environmental security - the situation worldwide has deteriorated alarmingly despite three decades of organized international action on the environment. In some of these areas we are on the brink of irrevocable damage and potential collapse. Furthermore, trends of accelerated economic growth (especially within developing countries) are far from universal. Sub-Saharan Africa has fallen further behind other developing regions in terms of per capita income, and momentum remains slow in other least developed countries and small island states. The ongoing global economic crisis has substantially slowed growth in many developing countries, though the robust growth of key emerging economies has prevented an even deeper global recession. If we understand the concept of sustainable development as a call for international cooperation and national leadership to achieve a convergence between the three pillars of economic development, social development, and environmental protection, it becomes clear that the gaps are wider than ever.

9. The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) held in Stockholm is credited with launching the global environmental governance (GEG) system, including the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The Rio Earth Summit, officially called the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in 1992, brought renewed commitment to establishing the concept of sustainable development as a driving principle in international governance and launched two of the seminal instruments of environmental governance, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The significance of these summits in relation to Rio+20 will be touched upon later in this paper.

10. We know that GEG is about much more than summits and negotiations, as environmental issues at the international level are dealt with by a myriad of actors, institutions, and organizations. Over 30 UN bodies including UNEP, the UN Development Program (UNDP), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have mandates that cover some aspect of environmental governance, as does the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The over forty members of the UN Environmental Management Group (UN EMG) each undertake specified environmental activities. Other international organizations like the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have become involved to varying degrees and through different means. Recently much of the emphasis on climate change has begun to shift to smaller multilateral processes like the G8 and G20, and the Major Economies Forum (MEF) in an attempt to complement the often tortuous negotiations in the larger fora. Countless Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) as well as technology and sector-focused agreements round off a diverse set of formal governing tools and practices at the international level. Add exponentially more actors at the local, regional and national levels, and it quickly becomes evident that a dizzying array of factors contributes to the dynamics within the current GEG system.

11. Even though the GEG system has achieved much in the way of new treaties and participation, environmental degradation continues. Indeed, we know so much more about environmental conditions and processes than we did thirty years ago, and thus we better understand the negative impacts we continue to have on the environment. At the same time, poverty alleviation and economic growth have been uneven between and within countries, and many countries are not on track to achieve key development objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Around the world, challenges with food, health and human security are often only exacerbated by environmental factors like biodiversity loss and rising sea levels. Many countries that are already dealing with the most serious human development issues are also those dealing with increasingly serious environmental threats.

12. While there is an acute recognition that something is wrong, various attempts from within and outside the system (and at the national, regional and international levels) have failed to ‘mend’ a system that clearly needs reform. At the international level, reform initiatives have ranged from incremental attempts to reform the nature and mandate of UNEP, to calls for the creation of a World or Global Environmental Organization. The current Belgrade process under UNEP has created a consultative group and roadmap for developing a “set of options for international environmental governance”, including discussions of a number of the challenges we identify below. The Belgrade process has also identified the Rio+20 process as an appropriate venue for further discussions to take place.

13. While it would be naive to assume that addressing these issues within the GEG system would automatically result in improved environmental conditions, it certainly would have a positive impact and significantly realign priorities towards truly sustainable development. We would characterize the persistent challenges within today’s GEG system in the following ways:

14. **Proliferation of MEAs and Fragmentation of GEG:** The rapid growth of environmental agreements, MEA-related instruments and geographically dispersed Secretariats

has left environmental governance in disarray. There are inconsistencies in rules and norms and the inefficient duplication of efforts. Institutional and policy fragmentation takes place as separate conventions address related environmental threats, while convention secretariats become geographically dispersed and operate in different political, normative and geographical contexts. The resource intensive pace of activities, meetings and negotiations can overwhelm and financially drain some, particularly the poorest, countries. All of this feeds into the concerns that the GEG system is operating at a suboptimal level: its agreements, institutions and resources are unable to achieve their full potential and possible synergies remain unexploited.

15. **Lack of Cooperation and Coordination among International Organizations:** Because of its cross-cutting nature, coordination has always been an important goal of environmental governance. The dynamics within the sheer number of institutions that affect GEG at the international, regional and national levels have been complicated by the ad-hoc nature of many aspects of the architecture itself. When effective coordination does happen, it is either through strong leadership and the use of incentives to bring about action (the carrots and sticks approach), or by consensus (the capacity to orchestrate a coherent response and mobilize the key factors around common objectives and priorities). Coordination by default or laissez-faire means (absence of a formal coordinating entity but informal exchange of information) is becoming increasingly difficult as the international governance systems grow more complex. The effectiveness of the consensus model is regularly questioned, as exemplified most recently at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP15) in Copenhagen.

16. Within the context of GEG more broadly, discussions of the problem have mainly focused on the nature of UNEP's mandate, of which coordination should be a natural part. However, UNEP has never been given the resources or the political capital to fulfill this mandate. UNEP's ability to "coordinate" other UN agencies is further hampered by the sheer number of agencies and programs in the UN that have some stake in environmental protection. Problems become even more apparent when considering the lack of coordination between other international organizations outside of the explicit 'environment' realm that are still charged with various parts of the Sustainable Development agenda, including the World Bank, UNDP and other parts of the UN system. Ironically, the GEG system still faces the very same needs that resulted in UNEP's establishment: there is no common outlook and general policy guidance in the field of environment. This situation is unsustainable because the lack of direction diminishes the overall performance of GEG and weakens GEG even further while it is faced with continuous pressure to coordinate with other fields.

17. **Lack of Implementation, Compliance Enforcement and Effectiveness:** GEG has evolved into a negotiation system rather than an implementation system. Save for a few exceptions, the system has a rather poor record of turning agreements into actual change on the ground in terms of either the quality of the environment or the lives of those impacted. The problem becomes apparent at three interconnected levels: when laws are made; when laws are not complied with and enforcement mechanisms do not exist; and when those implementing laws closest to environmental threats are marginalized. The crux of the challenge here is that the GEG system by its nature has been so focused on negotiating new agreements that it has paid little attention to whether these agreements perform or not. Merely reaching agreement seems to have

become the goal to such an extent that a performance focus is nearly entirely absent from the discourse. And penalties for non compliance with international obligations are almost nonexistent. There is a missing link between the people who understand the nuanced intricacies of negotiations and those responsible for implementation of policies from the bottom-up.

18. This disequilibrium is especially detrimental in developing countries, when many experts are needed to serve the international process and thus take away from the capacity of their home countries to carry out the work of domestic implementation. Treaties will not accomplish anything if they are not implemented by those on the ground with an understanding of the unique needs of their countries. There is a great deal of work going on at the local, regional and national levels, and as such the bridge between negotiation and implementation needs to be strengthened.

19. **Underfunding and Inefficient Use of Resources:** Although the GEG system mobilizes a substantial sum of money, many elements of the system are under-funded, and a piecemeal architecture results in inefficient use of resources and the unnecessary duplication of efforts. There are a number of sources for funding, from multilateral financial flows, debt relief and official development assistance, to financing via the non-governmental sector, private investment, and domestic capital flows. The options for funding are only increasing as the number of institutions involved in environmental governance in some way, shape or form increases. Still, many existing financing mechanisms have proven ineffective in bridging the gap between countries able to provide funding and those most in need, particularly in the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation. The lack of financial resources for environmental governance is considered to be a key obstacle to treaty compliance, particularly in developing countries. Inefficiency in the use of the monies that are available is another chronic complaint. Inefficiencies are everybody's loss: they act as a disincentive for donors to invest in the system, diminish the credibility of the system's institutions and fail to provide funds to those who need them most.

20. **Limited Scope:** Concerns surrounding the limited scope of an increasingly complex system of environmental governance essentially revolve around two main issues. First, many of the most important decisions affecting the environment occur outside the complex web of international treaties and organizations that comprise the formal GEG system. Decisions related to investment, development, and trade affect patterns of natural resource use, production and consumption to a much greater extent than the operation of MEAs. Security and environment are linked through both the potential for conflict arising from scarcity of natural resources and environmental degradation in conflict zones. Environmental issues are also spilling over into the health arena, as the health risks posed by environmental degradation become increasingly prevalent. The links between environment and other issues must be more formally acknowledged and environmental concerns must be given due importance in fora, regulations and policies dealing with these other issues.

21. Second, the lack of space for non-state actors remains a chronic issue. Increasing involvement of civil society actors and the private sector in international policy-making, capacity building and implementation is a growing trend that is unlikely to reverse. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are playing an increasingly large role, not just as stakeholders, but as “motors” of international environmental policy-making through setting agendas, drafting treaties, providing scientific information and monitoring implementation. Local and international NGOs also engage in implementation and capacity building. In addition to the achievements of civil society, great strides have been made in engaging the private sector as partners in development and environmental protection rather than as culprits for environmental degradation. Although the UN has begun incorporating non-state actors into the GEG system through mechanisms such as the Secretary-General’s Global Compact, greater access to policy-making forums and through partnerships, the current state-centric nature of global environmental governance does not allow civil society actors the institutional space to realize their full potential.

22. The challenges identified above essentially point to one overarching conclusion: the environmental governance system we have today reflects both successes and failures at the highest levels. There is great awareness of environmental threats and numerous efforts have emerged to address them globally. At the same time—and partly because of the rather spectacular growth in awareness and initiatives—the GEG system has failed to rise to these challenges. So, what can Rio+20 do to address this?

GEG AND THE RIO +20 PROCESS

23. Given the scale of the challenges faced by the global system today, having an international meeting is not enough, especially with today’s glut of global summitry. Of course, there is nothing inherently special about anniversaries except that they provide a convenient opportunity to revisit, re-energize and reflect upon issues in a way that brings new attention and focus to them. The opportunity provided by this particular anniversary may be especially important not only because the Rio Earth Summit was a particularly important event but also because Rio itself marked the 20th anniversary of an equally significant milestone: the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) held at Stockholm.

24. However, Rio+20 runs the risk of being ‘just another summit’. Ministers need to make sure that the meeting has a central theme which is meaningful to Commonwealth members and not just a rehashing of the old issues remaining from Rio and Johannesburg. And COP15 in Copenhagen once again reminded us of the danger in placing too much weight on one particular event. Other ‘anniversary’ conferences have been far less memorable or meaningful. This was the case with the ‘Stockholm+5’ as well as the ‘Stockholm+10’ conference, ‘Rio+5’ as well as the ‘Rio+10’ meetings. None of these ever took on the hallowed status of the Stockholm and Rio meetings, even though Rio+10, held in Johannesburg, did gain comparatively more public attention and was planned and was executed on the same scale of global summitry as the Rio Earth Summit.

25. There are very good reasons for the world to use the opportunity in 2012 to take stock of where we stand on global environment and development and to chart a course for future action, just as we did at Stockholm and Rio. 2012 will also mark the 25th anniversary of the World Commission for Environment and Development's influential report *Our Common Future*, which has essentially been credited with putting the term 'sustainable development' into the policy lexicon.

26. What made the landmark summits of Rio and Stockholm memorable when others were not? Both were special because the timing was right. They were also special because they came to embody a grand purpose that coincided with a glaring need of the time and they resonated with a shared global sense of what needed to be done. Importantly, both were able to articulate the promise, or at least the potential, of grand global change. When there is an overarching purpose, people might disagree on the answer, but not on the question. Stockholm marked the conversion of emerging sporadic national environmental movements into a global enterprise, as well as the first attempts to come to grips with the nexus between environment and development. There was a purpose, there was a need, and Stockholm delivered the institutions. Similarly, Rio saw the emergence of sustainable development, born from the alliance between the environmental and the development communities. There was a purpose, there was a need, and Rio began crafting the principles and rules. In Johannesburg a key outcome was the elevation of Sustainable Development as a legitimate goal for all humanity. Yet unlike Stockholm and Rio, there was no clear need or grand purpose for the summit, no necessary new thing to be debated or created.

27. All this leads us to realize that the Rio +20 Summit must have a significant 'raison d'être'. While sober reflection is a necessary undertaking, a mere review will not provide sufficient justification for a summit of global proportions, nor will it alone result in any groundbreaking progress in meaningfully addressing any of the persisting challenges with the GEG system.

THE GREEN ECONOMY AND RIO +20

28. In trying to imagine how Rio+20 might muster the political momentum to make a significant breakthrough on GEG, there is one element that was absent both in Stockholm in 1972 and in Rio in 1992: the vulnerable state of the world economy. At the time of the Stockholm conference, the challenge was to secure recognition that the environment warranted more than local or national concern. If Stockholm succeeded, an important reason was because ten years of evidence had been mounting that some environmental problems – and most prominently pollution – could not be addressed without international cooperation. Further, it recognized that environmental problems were not confined to the rich countries – an unwelcome spin-off from rapid development. Stockholm established environment in its place in the pantheon of worthy topics on the international development agenda.

29. While this was a welcome first step it was clearly far from enough. Twenty years later, in the lead-up to Rio, the challenge was not to deal with the environmental legacy from otherwise desirable development. It was instead to "mainstream" it into the overall development

process. If environment was to be considered not just as an approved topic but as an aspect of every other facet of economic and social development, we might then move towards sustainability and the gradual resolution of the panoply of environmental problems that, by then, were well-recognized and accepted.

30. Unfortunately, the promise of Rio was quickly diluted, coinciding as it did with the emergence of a dominant economic paradigm. Efforts to mainstream the environment led to environment being lost in the powerful current that was de-emphasising regulation, government oversight and long-term planning. The so-called “Washington Consensus” placed economic growth ahead of other concerns and rested on the assumption that this growth would yield the resources needed to address social and environmental problems. Furthermore, the explicit bargain struck in Rio- that the developed world would provide greater financial transfers, better access to markets and to technology in exchange for actions by developing countries to improve the global environment – was never fulfilled.

31. As the international community struggles to restore some measure of economic health and to put in place regulations that might prevent the worst mistakes from being repeated, there is still very little attempt to describe any vision that might serve as the new economic paradigm. We know the old system failed and we don’t want to repeat that failure; but we are not yet sure of the contours of the paradigm that might replace it.

32. An exception to this image of confusion and loss of direction is the attempt to describe a Green Economy and to craft a roadmap that would take us there. Called by various names – the Green Economy, a Global Green New Deal, the Low-Carbon or Clean Energy Society – they all have one notion in common: that we can no longer afford to reassemble forms of development that increase poverty and social marginalization, that deepen inequality between and within countries, that undermine social justice, and that hollow out the natural foundation on which all development must be built.

33. The green economy approach has much in common with the now-established notion of Sustainable Development, developed by the Brundtland Commission and secured in Johannesburg in 2002. But there are subtle differences: sustainable development accepted the notion of “development” and implied that its task was to build upon the foundation of whatever development path a country or region had chosen. Thus others would set the development trajectory, and the environmental community would advise on what adjustments were needed to make that trajectory more sustainable. Further, given that the term “development” was and remains predicated on economic growth of the quantitative sort, sustainable development could be described as the challenge of harnessing that growth as the engine that would lead us to the greener pastures of sustainability.

34. But in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, many now feel that it is time to go beyond the simple notion of kick-starting growth and to ask ourselves what destination we would like to reach before working out the best itinerary to get us there.

35. There is much talk of green stimulus and green economy, much of it driven by a concern to address climate change. With the failure of the UNFCCC COP in Copenhagen to reach a comprehensive agreement, many have taken a step back and are asking themselves candidly what approach might, after all, yield results. These include UNEP and its Green Economy Initiative. UNEP has set as its task to identify what policies, regulations and practices would need to be changed so that economic, social and environmental policy are put on a convergent course, destructive policies and the counter-incentives they provide gradually dismantled and replaced with policies that equate economic success with strengthening of the social net and the restoration to health of ecosystems and natural resources. And they are seeking to identify the institutions and networks that are required for that shift to take place.

36. Others, are also digesting the lessons from Copenhagen and there is growing acceptance of the premise that we will only truly see action to combat climate change on the scale needed when economic success stems from actions that take us as quickly as possible to a low-carbon economy, to a shift away from fossil fuels, and towards a technology revolution based on minimal use of energy and resources.

37. However, to ensure this, governments must phase out and avoid economic, social and environmental policies that do not reinforce and accelerate the transition to sustainability. A good example is provided by fossil fuel subsidies. While we pledge to move beyond a carbon-based society, some governments are, at the same time, offering billions of dollars in incentives that support carbon fuels over alternatives. While we argue that avoiding catastrophic climate change requires a rapid energy transition, countries continue to provide a substantial financial award for fossil fuel production. This is costing the world's economies somewhere between half and three quarters of a trillion dollars annually, a sum that would go a long way towards funding the transition to cleaner energy sources.

38. It is not only financial encouragement that is luring investment away from clean energy. Often uncoordinated domestic policy – which favours one source over another, which can skew energy pricing and allows inefficient energy monopolies – deters the investment that might otherwise flow towards clean energy. Further, the terms of both bilateral investment agreements and contracts between investors and the host state of the investment often prevent positive discrimination in favour of clean energy.

39. Finally, governments have it within their power to lead the markets in the transition to sustainable energy sources by insisting that public procurement be conducted on the basis of sustainable criteria. With on average 23% of world markets for goods and services, government purchasing has the power to bring markets to sustainable tipping points. All that is required is government decision. Yet, for a variety of mostly indefensible reasons, governments shy away from their responsibilities.

40. Rio+20 should commit not just to address but to working out in detail how the transition to a green economy might genuinely take place. This would provide a purpose – a lodestar – for the rethinking of our global environmental governance arrangements, offer a basis for a new age

of accountability, and provide a mobilizing point around which governments, the private sector and civil society could mobilize.

41. There appears to be little doubt that the notion of a green economy will be prominent in the agenda of Rio+20. It is important, however, that the Commonwealth countries insist that this not be simply a rhetorical focal point in the preparations, but that working out a detailed roadmap for the transition to a green economy should be the central purpose of the summit.

HOW CAN THE COMMONWEALTH MINISTERS CONTRIBUTE TO THE RIO+20 PROCESS?

42. In recent years, the Commonwealth has been at the vanguard of calls for a more equitable, fairer and more inclusive approach to global governance. The Marlborough House Principles, endorsed by Commonwealth leaders in 2008, for example, calls for the legitimacy of global institutions, fair representation, institutions which are both responsive to members' interests and which are also flexible, transparent and accountable. The statement also calls for institutions which are effective and capable of addressing today's global challenges. With this as a foundation, Commonwealth members can contribute significantly to the Rio + 20 process. With the goal of transforming the "Global Environmental Governance" system into a system of "Global Sustainable Development Governance", and recognizing the role the green economy will play therein, there are a number of opportunities for the Rio+20 conference to address the key challenges identified at the beginning of this paper. Given that, along with the green economy, an 'institutional framework for sustainable development' has been identified as a second key theme, there could be three interrelated priorities for a reform agenda to be pursued by Commonwealth members within the Rio+20 process.

43. **Increasing Accountability¹:** As an overarching concept fundamental to effective governance at any level, accountability within the existing system must be improved. We need to move beyond problem recognition to actual action. In this way, success should be measured not by the number of agreements in place, but by what has actually come of such agreements and by concrete improvements. Despite the commitments made by governments, meaningful action rarely follows. Indeed, the scale of the problem has far outweighed the scale of response to date. It is time to engage in candid discussion on the political and policy obstacles. Similarly, it is time to look carefully at what compliance and enforcement mechanisms work and might be replicated or scaled up.

¹ For further reading on this topic, please see *Accountability: A Central Governance Challenge* by Adil Najam and Mark Halle, available as a Draft for Discussion

44. The GEG system as it stands has a structural impediment to global accountability in that it is by nature declaratory rather than regulatory. There is no real disincentive for failing to implement commitments. Many of the actors who actually shape environmental governance remain un- or underrepresented in international decision making. The lack of tools and capacity to properly engage not only civil society members, but important actors in developing countries makes it difficult to engender better accountability if those who have the deepest interest in making the system more accountable remain unable to do so.

45. Improving accountability—essentially reformulating the very culture of the GEG system—will not be easy, but it is absolutely necessary. Commonwealth members can press to ensure that the Rio+20 Summit provides a key opportunity to address which immediate steps, from more transparency in information to performance monitoring, could be taken to begin recalibrating the GEG system towards a culture of accountability.

46. Commonwealth members can contribute to the Rio + 20 process in several further ways. Firstly, governments should undertake a review of their own existing commitments, understanding where gaps persist, and what can realistically be done moving forward. This review of commitments also necessarily involves financial support. Indeed, the outright lack of financing or non-adherence to funding commitments has been a hindrance to progress for many years. As a recent example, the Copenhagen Accord includes significant short-term and long-term financing commitments, including a \$100 billion annual fund for climate mitigation and adaptation financing in developing countries. Discussions on implementation of this commitment are taking place in a number of forums, including the UN Secretary General’s High Level Advisory Group on Mobilizing Climate Change Resources, the Major Economies Forum, and African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) meetings. Commonwealth members can actively urge that the Rio+20 process provide another key opportunity to discuss the way forward: and can propose mechanisms which are necessary to ensure action is taken and commitments are met. Secondly, Commonwealth members can press for a strengthening of accountability in the lead-up to Rio+20. Proposals could include the creation of greater transparency in information, the compilation of a registry of global goals and obligations (and more importantly what these goals have led to), and the recognition of best practices in compliance and implementation so as to provide positive incentives for action.

47. **Coherence and consolidation:** As the GEG system has come together in a rather ad-hoc and piecemeal fashion over the past thirty or so years, it should not be surprising that its present state is incoherent and fragmented in many respects. Meaningful reform must be holistic, realistic and politically feasible, though we may not necessarily require new institutions. Many of the current challenges in the GEG system stem more from an overabundance of inefficient institutions than from a lack of organizations altogether. More communication and coherence is needed among the plethora of existing treaties, agreements, governing bodies, international organizations and institutions.

48. There is a wealth of ideas for better coherence and coordination already being discussed.

- Treaty clustering is one option being explored and exercised within treaties relating to chemical management. The secretariats of the Basel Convention on Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants are working towards a coherent legal framework to support environmentally sound management of hazardous chemicals and wastes through their whole lifecycle. The chemicals cluster is also utilizing opportunities for back-to-back negotiation meetings, as was the case in Bali this year. While some promising efforts are being made as in the chemicals cluster, many other discussions are happening in varied institutions that do not communicate well with each other. Commonwealth Ministers could urge that the Rio + 20 Summit focuses, amongst other things, on targeted coherence for institutions. This could have deep and far-reaching impacts on global environmental governance.
- A renewed vision for and commitment to sustainable development is fundamental in the lead up to Rio+20, which includes coherence not only amongst environmental institutions, but also with development, economic, and trade institutions. Commonwealth Ministers have a key role to play in leading efforts to build coherence and effective cooperation between existing institutions. Action in this regard may include not only the consolidation of governing bodies at the international level as discussed, but deeper cooperation within national government agencies and departments with a role to play in environmental policy and economic development. Coherence and consolidation here also necessarily refers to the review of national environmental and economic goals to assess the mutually beneficial opportunities for low carbon development via the green economy and trade.
- The goal for the original Rio Earth Summit was to leave with more treaties than we came in with, but perhaps an ambitious goal for the Rio+20 process should be to end with fewer treaties than we have now. It is not about discounting the years of progress that has been made in creating a complex system of treaties, conventions and agreements, but about exploiting the ever increasing synergies between both traditional environmental institutions, and those necessarily involved in broader sustainable development goals.

49. **Broadening scope for participation:** GEG must become less state-centric and more open to participation from actors outside of the traditional nation-state. Meaningful participation from civil society, sub-national and local governments, and the private sector is an issue that has been present since the inception of GEG. Collaboration among members of these groups is proliferating at very significant rates, yet policy space for these interactions has not been meaningfully created within the architecture of formal GEG. Particularly if GEG is to be implementation-based, legitimate engagement and participation at all levels is fundamental in bringing about long-term change.

50. Commonwealth Ministers can call for policy space to be created, to broaden the scope for participation. Opening up the framework of GEG to include constructive avenues for participation from groups outside of the traditional nation-state leads to a number of challenges. However, civil society brings many skills to the GEG process, and in particular they bring a proximity to implementation. It is in this regard that the best venues for engagement must be created, expanded upon or utilized moving forward. The Rio+20 processes provide another significant opportunity to think critically about the ways in which a new course for governance can be forged in this respect.

51. Commonwealth Ministers again have a key leadership role to play in recognizing the importance of numerous stakeholders, and supporting the creation of the policy space for advocacy to take place. Importantly, broadening participation also refers to the need to meaningfully engage least developed countries, small island states, and other states where the disproportionate gap between economic and environmental challenges faced and the resources available to address them is most persistent.

CONCLUSION

52. Global Environmental Governance has emerged over the past 30 years as a critical aspect of the international development agenda. The end goal of environmental governance is to improve the state of the environment and eventually lead to the broader goal of sustainable development. If we ask whether the environmental regime is solving problems at an adequate pace and pushing development in a more sustainable direction, the news is much less encouraging.

53. There is great awareness of environmental threats and numerous efforts have emerged to address them globally. At the same time—and partly because of the rather spectacular growth in awareness and initiatives—the GEG system has failed to rise to these challenges.

54. On the 20th Anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit, the world is provided with a key opportunity to revisit, re-energize and reflect upon the issues in a way that brings new attention and focus to them. A number of potential priority areas and recommendations have been put forward, any one of which would undoubtedly bring about a dynamic and fruitful discussion within the Rio+ process.

55. Both on behalf of their respective nations and collectively, Commonwealth Ministers must make a commitment to the Rio+20 process in order to insure its success, and to allow constructive and candid discussion to take place about the role of sustainable development in the future of global environmental governance.

56. If Rio+20, like the original Rio Earth Summit, is given an ambitious ‘raison d’être’, it will undoubtedly shift the debate and could have deep and far-reaching impacts. If not, Rio+20 could become ‘just another summit’.