

CSD18

Statement by Switzerland on cross-cutting issues and interlinkages

Friday, May 7, 2010

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Mr. Chair

Long-term prosperity is threatened by the degradation and deterioration of the natural resource base. Sound economic development is only possible if we protect our natural capital, the environment, and make sustainable use of the natural resources available to us.

In many countries, the use of natural resources exceeds the ecological carrying capacity of our planet. Global population growth and the increase of goods produced and consumed are happening within the constraints of the limited natural boundaries of our planetary ecosystem. Currently, the pressure exerted on our planet, the ecological footprint, is too big, we are overusing resources.

Switzerland acknowledges the strong interdependence between sustainable development issues. A good coordination of sectoral policies is therefore necessary.

For instance, the issues of food security and poverty eradication need to be considered. To meet growing food demand, including changing dietary habits to more protein-rich food, agriculture needs to increase its productivity. However, this needs to happen on a sustainable basis. Increasingly scarce resources such as soil, water and biodiversity need to be managed sustainably and used efficiently. An integrated approach to increase sustainability along the entire agro-food chain is required, from production to processing, storage, distribution/transport, consumption and eventually recycling and waste management.

Also, a new understanding of environmental policy is required which considers the interrelated nature of many issues, such as climate change and its impacts on resource availability for agricultural production as well as for industrial and other uses.

Switzerland holds the view that environmental policy increasingly means resource policy as well as economic policy. Environmental policy needs to shift from its classical understanding of environmental protection to a more comprehensive resource policy. Since natural resources, and the market goods we derive from them, are what constitutes welfare, environmental policy also means economic policy. Only with such a comprehensive understanding of environmental policy can we ensure sustainable economic and social development without compromising our natural resource base, the very life-supporting system we depend on.

Switzerland would also like to reiterate the importance of the Rio principles. Adopted by the international community at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, these principles are still valid and of the same importance in guiding our policy towards a more sustainable development, which also needs to include gender equality as necessary prerogative for human development.

The two Rio principles we would specifically like to highlight here are the precautionary principle and the polluter-pays-principle:

Both principles are of particular importance for safeguarding and managing our natural resource base, or natural capital, as foundation for economic and social development:

The precautionary principle acknowledges that scientific impact assessment often lags behind technological progress. In the absence of a scientific consensus on potential harms, the precautionary principle protects citizens and the environment by laying the burden of proof on those parties who advocate for introducing a product or a substance on the market.

Finally, the polluter-pays principle is based on our sense of justice, as it calls for holding those parties responsible who cause harm. What is needed are economic instruments that allow the better internalisation of environmental costs to be shouldered by polluting parties.

Thank you.