MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
MOLEWA –

ESG SPECIAL FOCUS SOUTH AFRICA

environment; contributing to ensuring a sustainable and healthy enhancement of environmental assets, key strategic priorities in these areas equitable society living in harmony with creating jobs and fighting poverty is ideals. Building better communities, leadership role in the promotion of these development, and the conservation of encompassing economic growth, social on a path of sustainable development, rapidly with the advent of democracy had very low profiles in terms of be protected as the people’s common environmental resources must serve the trust for the people. The beneficial use of sustainability and equitable access to integration.

The fundamental objectives of the policies and legislation are to secure sustainability and equitable access to resources. The National Environment management Act (Act 107 of 1998) notes: “The environment is held in public trust for the people. The beneficial use of environmental resources must serve the public interest and the environment must be protected as the people’s common heritage.” Before 1994, environmental matters had low profiles in terms of government priorities. That changed rapidly with the advent of democracy and has also contributed to the progress towards putting South Africa on a path of sustainable development, ever-improving economic growth, social development, and the conservation of natural resources and services.

After successfully hosting the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Department assumed a global leadership role in the promotion of these ideals. Building better communities, creating jobs and fighting poverty is a central part of its global quest for sustainable development. In line with its vision of creating a prosperous and equitable society living in harmony with the natural environment, government’s key strategic priorities in these areas include:

- the protection, conservation and enhancement of environmental assets, natural and heritage resources; ensuring a sustainable and healthy environment; contributing to sustainable economic growth; livelihoods and social cohesion; providing leadership on climate change; promoting skills development and employment creation through facilitating green and inclusive economic opportunities; and And creating a better Africa and a better world by advancing national environmental strategies and global sustainable development agenda.

The Department of Environmental Affairs is fully supportive of the smart cities initiative which will help major cities including South Africa’s Johannesburg, Tshwane/Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town better understand and tackle the environment and city infrastructure challenges they are facing and would encourage that the work be cascaded to smaller municipalities as well. The Department believes that actions to address climate change and sustainable economic development pathways are linked. South Africa takes a green economic growth strategic approach which allows for sustainable development and climate mitigation and adaptation co-benefits.

Climate change is considered to be one of the most serious threats to sustainable development, with adverse impacts on the environment, human health, food security, economic activity and investment, natural resources and infrastructure. This will disproportionately affect the poor who have not contributed to the causes of climate change but are the least equipped to adapt to the potential effects of climate change.

The African continent considers the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) to be a critical meeting that should agree on how to facilitate expeditious implementation of sustainable development agenda. Therefore, the Department will build on the concrete and practical experience of approximately 20 years in the implementation of sustainable development agenda as outlined in Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI).

Rio+20 should reaffirm the Rio principles and establish focus principles for operating the green economy concept. Principle seven of common but differentiated responsibility should form the cornerstone of the implementation of the green economy concept. This will ensure that countries will design their transition within their policy spaces and take into account their developmental imperatives.

The following principles are proposed for consideration:

- All States should be allowed a policy space to define their own strategies towards a transition to a green economy as per their national priorities and respective stages of development
- In order to maintain the balance of addressing poverty while securing natural resource base, green economy should be people-centred and inclusive, taking into account the needs of the most vulnerable (women, disabled and youth)
- Recognising, the specific capacity needs of developing countries for transition to a green economy, promotion of finance, research development and innovation, science and technology, and capacity building measure to developing countries should be upscaled
- Promote access to green technologies at affordable cost and work ensures that green economy creates new market opportunities, notably for developing countries
- All States should build on existing programmes, indigenous knowledge, initiatives in key sectors and promote information sharing of best practices on policies and programmes that contribute towards the attainment of inclusive green economy
- All States should recognise green economy as a means to achieve sustainable development agenda and integrate its dimensions

Therefore, the conference should build on the concrete and practical experience of approximately 20 years in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda as outlined in Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI).

To integrate ESG management effectively and efficiently, the Department poses the following questions: What might a more just and sustainable global economy look like in the year 2025? How can the real economic value of sustainability information be unlocked to create a more caring, trusted and sustainable capitalism? What lessons can be learnt from the past in constructing a new growth model in which the integration of sustainable development factors becomes a normal part of doing business? What role will technology play? What are the roles of government, business and civil society in this context? What existing or new partnerships must be forged?

Increased urbanisation of human society has been an uninterrupted trend since at least the industrial revolution. Each year millions of people are lured from the countryside to the cultural, economic, social dynamism of cities. This trend has been accompanied by significant economic growth and expansion.

The State of the Environment Reporting (SoER) has a central role to play in evaluating environmental management and its impact on society. Ideally, the central purpose of SoER is to inform policy and planning by providing decision-makers with up-to-date scientific data in relevant and user-friendly formats. SoER is a relatively new aspect of governance in South Africa. A study undertaken by Chantal Wil for the CSIR suggests that considerable scope for improvement exists in the extent to which SoER indicators in South Africa are engaged with during the development of policy and planning processes.

To make South Africa a sustainable business destination, guidance on policy related matters is a necessity. Areas of guidance include: government policy and experience; national and regional regulation and guidance; regional sustainability and transparency issues; relations to other international CSR and sustainability tools; advancement of sustainability reporting practices for public agencies; and the role of governments as supporters of public goods and public development.

The Department of Environmental Affairs strives for continued sustainability. In short, over the years it has made real progress in fulfilling its constitutional commitment to ensuring that the environment that is not harmful to health or well-being. This and the steps it has taken to integrate its efforts with those of other countries hold great promise for our nation, the region, and the African continent.