

GBEP Task Force on Sustainability

Progress Report to 6th GBEP Steering Committee

This note summarises the progress achieved to date by the GBEP Task Force on Sustainability. The Steering Committee is invited to **acknowledge progress** and to **discuss and decide on the next steps** suggested below. This report should be read in conjunction with the Chair Conclusions from the 3rd meeting of the Task Force, held in Sao Paulo on 19 November 2008.

Background

The Task Force on Sustainability was established following the agreement of the Steering Committee at its 5th meeting in Rio de Janeiro on 18 June 2008. The Task Force has met three times since then, on 19 June in Rio de Janeiro, on 25/26 September in Rome and most recently, on 19 November in Sao Paulo. At its first meeting, the Task Force decided to prioritise its efforts on **the key task of developing a set of global science-based criteria and indicators regarding the sustainability of bio-energy**. This progress report focuses on that area of work.

Progress

The Task Force made a good start at its first meeting by identifying an initial set of key sustainability criteria on which to base further discussion. To help structure the debate the Task Force agreed to organise the criteria into four headings, or baskets, namely “Environmental”, “Economic”, “Social” and “Energy Security”. These categorisations are not final and the structure of the framework may change as a result of further discussion within the Task Force.

Following initial discussions of the criteria, the Task Force decided that it needed to discuss and agree two issues which it considered necessary to facilitate future progress. The first of these concerned **the scope, purpose and use of the criteria and indicators**, which the Task Force regarded as essential both to the future direction of the task itself and the usefulness of the resulting framework. At its last meeting, on 19 November, the Task Force took the significant step of agreeing the following text to describe the scope, purpose and use of the criteria and indicators which it is developing:

“This work is intended to provide relevant, practical, science-based, voluntary sustainability criteria and indicators to guide any analysis undertaken of bioenergy at the domestic level. The criteria and indicators themselves, when made part of such analysis, should be used with a view to informing decision making and facilitating the sustainable development of bio-energy and, accordingly, shall not be applied so as to limit trade in bioenergy in a manner inconsistent with multilateral trade obligations.”

The second key issue to be resolved, at least conditionally, was the nature of the language that would be used to describe the criteria. During debate, various Partners had expressed a preference for either descriptive, directional or neutral language. In order to allow work to proceed, and to reflect this range of views, the Task Force decided to use neutral language to describe the criteria on condition that directionality would be explored during the iterative process of developing the criteria and indicators.

With these two issues resolved, the Task Force has returned to the detailed discussion of the criteria, which remains ongoing.

Comment and suggested next steps

This is proving to be a very challenging and complex task not least because of the wide range of views held by the participating Partners and the highly sensitive nature of this important issue. Nevertheless, the Task Force has made significant progress over a short period on two key issues necessary to put the work of developing the criteria and indicators on a sound footing. However, the need to resolve these issues has meant that it has been possible to achieve only limited progress towards agreeing the criteria, while work on indicators has yet to begin. It is therefore highly likely that the criteria and indicators will not be finalised by April 2009 as originally hoped, however it will be possible to develop a progress report for inclusion in GBEP’s report to the G8 Summit 2009.

Now that the scope and criteria language have been agreed, the Task Force should be able to make more rapid progress on the criteria and to start work on indicators soon. To facilitate this, it is suggested that the Task Force should continue its work by email to make as much progress as possible on criteria prior to the next meeting. Accordingly, the following outline timetable is suggested for the first 6 months of 2009:

- Week commencing 5 January 2009 – the Chair of the Sustainability Task Force will circulate a revised version of the criteria based on the outcome of discussions at the 3rd meeting of the Task Force on 19 November, and invite Partners to comment on them by 30 January.

- In parallel, and to the same timescale as above, the Chair will circulate proposals on how to organise and take forward work on indicators, and invite Partners to comment on these. One possible option might be to establish sub-groups, each led by a Partner, to develop indicators for selected criteria (i.e. similar to the approach taken by the GHG Methodologies Task Force to developing the questions to be considered in each of the 10 boxes of the methodological framework).
- The Task Force will aim to meet again at the end of February or in early March to discuss the criteria. At this meeting, the Task Force should aim to agree a preliminary set of criteria which, although subject to further development as part of an iterative process, would be sufficient to allow work on indicators to begin. The Task Force should also agree at this meeting the arrangements for undertaking this work, including working practices (e.g. email working) and timetables.
- By the end of April, the Chair of the Task Force will work with the Secretariat to prepare a progress report for approval at the next meeting of the Steering Committee. The intention will be for this report to form the basis of a progress report on the sustainability criteria and indicators work for inclusion in GBEP's report to the G8 Summit during the Italian Presidency next summer.

The Steering Committee is invited to discuss and comment on the above suggestions on next steps.