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Differences remain despite some common understanding on 'Green economy' approach

Rio de Janeiro, 16 June (Alex Rafalowicz) - At the conclusion of the scheduled sessions of preparatory meetings for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), Member States had agreed to limit the prescriptive nature of the idea of 'green economy', but divisions still remain over core concepts and issues related to its definition.

Working in a 'splinter group' chaired by **Patrick Wittman of Canada** states consistently agreed to move controversial elements either into 'placeholder' form, awaiting agreed language in other negotiating groups; or in brackets but primarily under paragraph 52, which lists what member states expect 'green economy policies' to do.

The most significant development in the negotiations has been the removal of the term 'a green economy' with the subject of the section becoming 'green economy policies', indicating the acceptance by developed countries, particular the **EU**, that the concept as a whole, internationally, did not have sufficient support, and that states needed to be able to define it to fit their own specific circumstances. 'Green economy policies' or 'policies for green economy' is now the formulation used in paragraphs 51, 52, 53, and 55.

The agreement on this formulation came to a head over the use of the words 'transition to a green economy', proposed by **RoK** and the **EU** originally in paragraph 50, the introductory paragraph to the section, but was moved to allow agreement on that paragraph early in the week. It was taken up again in paragraph 53 which addresses commonality of challenges and issues confronted by 'green economy policies.' Ultimately **Switzerland** presented compromise language from informal consultations that highlighted that 'green economy' was not an objective distinct of sustainable development, but a tool for its achievement.

The paragraph reads: "We view the implementation of green economy policies by countries that seek to apply them for the transition towards sustainable development as a common undertaking, and we recognize that each country can choose an appropriate approach in accordance with national sustainable development plans, strategies and priorities. **[Agreed ad ref]"**

Paragraph 55, which deals with green economy polices' relationship with the economy generally was also agreed by removing the prescriptive nature so it now reads:

"We encourage each country to consider the implementation of green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, in a manner that endeavours to drive sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and job creation, particularly for women, youth and the poor. In this respect, we note the importance of ensuring that workers are equipped with the necessary skills, including through education and capacity building, and are provided with the necessary social and health protections. In this regard, we encourage all stakeholders, including business and industry to contribute, as appropriate. We invite governments to improve knowledge and statistical capacity on job trends, developments and constraints and integrate relevant data into national statistics, with the support of relevant UN agencies within their mandates. **[Agreed ad ref]"**

That 'green economy' is not prescriptive was reaffirmed by agreement over the wording of paragraph 56, which had detailed what 'green economy policies' might look like. It now reads:

"We recognise the importance of the evaluation of the range of social, environmental and economic factors and encourage, where national circumstances and conditions allow, their integration into decision making. We acknowledge that it will be important to take into account the opportunities and challenges, as well as the costs and benefits of green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, using the best available scientific data and analysis. We acknowledge that a mix of measures, including regulatory, voluntary and others applied at the national level and consistent with obligations under international agreements**,** could promote green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. We reaffirm that social policies are vital to promoting sustainable development. **[Agreed ad ref]"**

Similarly, paragraph 57 now focuses on 'voluntary exchanges' and so was agreed as follows: "We acknowledge that involvement of all stakeholders and their partnerships, networking and experience sharing at all levels could help countries to learn from one another in identifying appropriate sustainable development policies, including green economy policies. We note the positive experiences in some countries, including in developing countries, in adopting green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication through an inclusive approach and welcome the voluntary exchange of experiences as well as capacity building in the different areas of sustainable development. **[Agreed ad ref]**".

(Paragraph 50 that was agreed ad ref on 13 June reads: "We affirm that there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions which is our overarching goal. In this regard, we consider green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development and that it could provide options for policy making but should not be a rigid set of rules. We emphasize that it should contribute to eradicating poverty as well as sustained economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare and creating opportunities for employment and decent work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the Earth's ecosystems.")

Outside of this general agreement, little progress was made on the substantive issues with divisions still remaining on how to incorporate the 1992 Rio Principles, address unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, approach "ecosystem services" and link commitments to the means of implementation.

In discussing the importance of the Rio Principles to green economy policies, addressed in paragraph 51, divisions remained between the **US** that preferred the weak formulation of "taking into account" and the **G77** that wanted a stronger formulation, "in accordance with." The **EU** proposed "reaffirm and guided by." No proposal was supported.

Negotiations on paragraph 52, the pivotal paragraph of the section as it lists what green economy policies should do, remain blocked with no movement on issues relating to means of implementation (the mobilization of financial resources and technology transfer) nor the reflection of relevant Rio Principles. There was some discussion on finding an agreement to reflect concerns about the development space of developing countries but this was not ultimately agreed.

In reporting to the plenary on the evening of 15 June, **Wittman** suggested that 'basically half of the section was agreed' and the other areas were not as contentious, but that seems an unduly optimistic account.