

World Resources Forum 2019: Chairman's Summary

Preamble:

1. Well over 300 participants coming from some 50 countries and international organizations gathered together for plenary talks, workshops, scientific sessions, and side events at the World Resources Forum (WRF) 2019 from 23-24 October 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland.
2. The participants, representing the private sector, the public sector, academia, and civil society organizations, communicated their viewpoints and shared best practices in their informal capacity on how to make natural resource governance fit for the 21st Century.
3. WRF 2019 opened with a tribute to Prof. Schmidt-Bleek by WRF Founder and Vice President Xaver Edelmann, who remembered his charisma and important influence on natural resources research and policies.
4. WRF President, Bruno Oberle, recalled that there are many more major disasters around the world than what we hear about. He highlighted that the extraction and processing of natural resources contributes to around 50% of climate change impacts and up to 90% of biodiversity loss, as has become clear from the Global Resources Outlook, prepared by the International Resource Panel (IRP).

Plenary I: Getting the License to Operate

5. Businesses are aware of the supply and sustainability challenges regarding natural resources. Businesses want to engage with voluntary initiatives and standards, getting them the Social Development License to Operate, and they actively call on the public sector to provide long-term objectives and to level the playing field.
6. Discussions demonstrated the need to increase the level of ambition of all actors. To address the scale and urgency of the challenge, participants called for the international community to develop ambitious international rules regarding the management of mineral resources in order to close the governance gaps, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement.

7. There was general acknowledgement that environmentally sound and socially responsible business models are the only way forward. Putting incentives in place can encourage businesses to adopt better practices, and governments need to step in to help drive positive change and promote and facilitate a sustainable circular economy.
8. The present generation should significantly invest into the future environment. Examples are a CO2 tax, rate reductions on investment loans in sustainable investments, and reforming the pension system with the sustainability goals in mind.
9. More than 50 years after the publication of the Limits to Growth report to the Club of Rome, the call to take action is more relevant than ever – governments should stop talking: “Come on!”

Plenary II: High-Level Political Dialogue on the Governance of Mineral Resources

10. A low-carbon and resource efficient economy requires an uptake in technologies such as electric vehicles, renewable energy, or digitalization. New technologies can require increases of the demand for specific minerals and metals.
11. Evidence shows that today’s governance framework is not fit for purpose. The many existing standards governing the management of mineral resources do not bring the expected results at the scale and the speed needed. Without improved governance, it will be impossible to ensure proper provision of the resources needed.
12. The United Nations Framework Classification for Resources (UNFC) embraces the principles of comprehensive resource recovery, circularity, zero harm, and zero waste, thereby supporting the improved governance of natural resources.
13. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) vision supports positive change in the extractive sector’s governance and business practices. The UNEP vision aims to make minerals, oil and gas work for all, with minimal harm and many benefits.
14. The current political momentum and the resolutions adopted at the Fourth UN Environment Assembly in March 2019 provide the foundations for this process and need to be brought further at the Fifth UN Environment Assembly in 2021. Also, the new European Commission and other regional bodies speak out for strong, multilateral political leadership.

Plenary III: Raw Materials Around the World

15. Regional experts presented progress and highlighted the special needs of each region. The emerging circular economy networks in Africa need to be supported by the international community. Participants from developing countries acknowledged that natural resources are essential for development and that resource efficiency and improving natural resource governance is essential for reaching development goals.
16. Urbanization is one of the easier leverage points: smarter cities, natural based solutions, passive houses, and sharing. Sharing experiences and establishing best practices can help support action in urban contexts.
17. Sustainable Consumption and Production hot-spots and other tools of the sustainable lifestyles agenda are essential components for science-based decision making. The IRP, the One Planet Network and other global actors, as well as individual influencers, have fundamental roles to play in guiding this transition.
18. All countries and regions are different, and that is why it is essential to continue global discussions. Governance requires a global perspective and trans-national operations should consider environmental and social liabilities produced as a consequence of mineral extractions. Yet, there is a need to respect country values and long-term historical perspectives. The exploitation of the past cannot continue.
19. The Fifth UN Environment Assembly in 2021 is a crucial element of the dialogue process.

Conclusions

20. Participants expressed thanks to the WRF Secretariat, its partners and the hosts for organizing WRF 2019.
21. The next World Resources Forum will be hosted by the Ghana Ministry for Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) in Accra, June 2020, so announced its Minister H.E. Kwabena Frimpong-Boateng.