

# The Green Bridge initiative

## Balancing economic development with environmental sustainability

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Next June the Rio+20 UN Conference on sustainable development will take place in Brazil. The objective is to renew political commitment to sustainable development, assess progress 20 years on from the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, as well as the implementation of the outcomes of the intervening sustainable development summits, and to address new and emerging challenges.

In the run up to the event, Kazakhstan has launched its *Green Bridge initiative*. Kazakhstan sits firmly in the heart of Eurasia. As such it has the privilege of belonging to two regional UN groupings – the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The government of Kazakhstan recognises that its Eurasian location allows it to position itself in the international arena as a green growth leader, as shown by its hosting of ESCAP's sixth ministerial conference on environment and development in Asia and the Pacific in September 2010, and UNECE's seventh 'Environment for Europe' ministerial conference in September 2011.

In 2009 Kazakhstan began to elaborate the concept of green growth, which was later developed into the *Astana Green Bridge initiative*. This initiative, which is based on consultation among international organizations, NGOs, and representatives of governments and the private sector, seeks to provide a platform for dialog and cooperation in the run-up to Rio+20. It also seeks to strengthen integration between Europe, Asia, and the Pacific regions. After being introduced at the UNESCAP and UNECE conferences in 2010 and 2011, the initiative is to be presented by President Nazarbayev in Rio in June 2012.

*The Astana Green Bridge initiative* promotes green growth, low-carbon development, climate change, biodiversity, sustainable urban development, eco-efficient use of natural resources and investment in ecosystem services, environmental safety, and other topics. It emphasizes the importance of mitigation and adaptation to environmental changes, together with the need to eliminate environmental damage where it has already occurred.

Through technical support and technology transfer, capacity building and financial support

from the European region, the initiative will help developing countries in Asia to move faster toward a green economy. European countries are expected to benefit not only from reduced pressures on the global environment, but also from better access to Asian markets for green goods, services, and technologies. In this way the Green Bridge can provide concrete solutions to real world problems of sustainable development, solutions that span the 'north-south' divide. The initiative is expected to complement existing institutions by working primarily as a practical tool for cross-border private and public sector investments into the green economy.

The key approach is to provide practical, long-term and systemic assistance to countries and any organizations interested in attracting green investments, as well as to transfer available best practices. *The Green Bridge Partnership Programme* does not aim to replace or to duplicate other existing processes or programmes. The Bridge's purpose is to make connections among many processes and to create a new level of partnership not just between countries and regions, but also between the real economic sector and businesses.

The initiative outlines a number of practical activities that will put in place the conditions and infrastructure needed to expand access to green technologies and innovations for all interested countries and organizations. *The Green Bridge Programme* is a two-way traffic arrangement: green technologies on the one side and green products based on such technologies and ecosystem services required for global sustainability on the other side.

*The Green Bridge initiative* shows that the Government of Kazakhstan is committed to balancing rapid economic development with environmental sustainability, and that it is eager to mediate the competing interests of developing and developed nations. It also shows that even countries with large carbon footprints can rally to the cause of sustainable development. Kazakhstan therefore expects the Green Bridge to become a practical tool for cooperation leading up to Rio+20, and beyond.

Today's rising challenges require adequate responses and concerted actions. To this end, Kazakhstan believes the *Green Bridge Partnership Programme* offers a complementary, practical mechanism for cooperation for the transition to a global green economy. **F**