Observations of the UNCSD 2nd Informal Negotiations of the Outcome Document
(24 April-4 May 2012, New York)

18 May 2012
Programme Management Office
Masaya Fujiwara, Ikuho Miyazawa

The Second Informal Negotiations on the outcome document of UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD: Rio+20), was held on 24 April ~ 4 May 2012, in New York. With only one month until Rio+20, negotiations still have a rough road ahead.

Current Statues of Negotiations:

Negotiations on the co-chair’s suggested text (as of 17 April) were conducted between 23 April and 4 May by two working groups, but there was very little progress made, with only 21 paragraphs agreed ad referendum out of more than 400 paragraphs. Key persons from member states and representatives from Major Groups mainly spent their time behind the scenes, engaged in networking based on their own agenda at the “Vienna Café,” located outside of the meeting rooms. There was no atmosphere that pointed to resolving the front negotiations more effectively. The meeting decided to have extra negotiations from 29 May ~ 2 June in New York and also that the co-chairs would provide the new compromised texts by 22 May. Negotiating groups need to drastically change their attitude before the next meeting.

As for the transition to green economy, the situation remains almost the same as many developing countries still stressed the inclusion of “Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR),” given the vague definition of green economy. Discussion on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) continued to stall without the co-chair’s new text, but G77+China proposed their new comprehensive position on IFSD reforms, including ECOSOC reform, on 3 May. However, the African Union left G77+China as their consideration did not include the issue of upgrading UNEP into a specialised agency. On Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many efforts have been made to achieve an agreement at Rio+20, but existing and differing views on its link with MDGs remain large. It is expected that SDGs will become one of the main outcome of Rio+20, but we cannot judge whether ambitious proposals by SDGs proponents such as including priority areas would be agreed by the end.

Prospect for Rio+20:

Compared to the last negotiations in March, there are growing voices about lack of leadership and little sense of urgency among the host country Brazil, member states, and the Secretariat.
Expectations on Rio+20 outcome have not been at all like the Rio Summit in 1992, and many wonder whether Rio+20 could attain renewed political commitments on “sustainable development” based on the changes in the last 20 years since Rio. At the closing plenary, co-chairs shared the message from the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, that Rio+20 is a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” and that there are strong expectations on the progress on the negotiation process. It is worth watching whether new developments towards the next negotiations in the end of May would be made with a sense of urgency and flexibility by member states. Perhaps, it is also important to make member states’ pavilions, side-events, and online civil society dialogues more active and attractive in order to make another “Rio+20 Outcome” more visible and effective.