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Salvaging Rio+20

The need for a comprehensive follow-up

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Editor's Note

WITH the world engulfed in multiple crises – financial instability, global warming, continuing rapid depletion of natural resources, volatile food prices – and poverty still rampant in large parts of the South, there were expectations that a June gathering of world leaders in Rio de Janeiro would escalate their political will for urgently needed global cooperation to achieve sustainable development.

The Rio+20 summit was intended to be the occasion for a review of implementation and a renewal of political commitments made 20 years earlier at the 1992 summit on environment and development, also held in the Brazilian city of Rio. At the 1992 summit there had been promises and commitments, especially by developed countries, to move towards a more sustainable path of development. Sustainable development as the agreed framework was contained in two milestone agreements, the Rio Declaration with its 27 principles and Agenda 21 with its wide-ranging plan of action for the 21st century.

Twenty years on, it was clear that developed countries had reneged on their commitments to provide the means of implementation – finance and technology. They had also agreed, but failed, to take the lead to change their unsustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles. In addition, they have used trade rules in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and a plethora of bilateral trade and investment agreements to maintain and increase their economic dominance, all of which contradicts sustainable development in developing countries.

Instead of an honest appraisal, urgency to act and decisive next steps, however, the lead-up to the Rio+20 conference saw developed countries actively trying to weaken, even remove, many of the last 20 years of agreed principles and commitments. The United States in particular was determined to have no reference in the Rio+20 outcome to equity and 'common but differentiated responsibilities', a fundamental Rio principle. The European Union (EU), Australia, Canada and Japan were essentially of the same mind.

The unity of developing countries was crucial in waging the biggest battle in the final negotiations in Rio – to get developed countries, especially the US, to renew the original commitments of the 1992 summit, without which Rio+20 would have been a failure. In the final hours as the heads of state arrived, the US conceded and the Rio+20 summit adopted a document, 'The Future We Want', that reaffirms the 1992 Rio principles, including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

At the same time, the EU, South Korea and Japan were in the forefront to aggressively get the Rio+20 summit to endorse a 'green economy' framework. Despite their denial that this would replace the sustainable development paradigm, it was clear that a political blessing would legitimise very disturbing trends to turn the last of the planet's natural resources into a final frontier of 'capital assets' that would fuel yet another speculative bubble. Resistance by developing countries and civil society groups worldwide against giving a blank cheque on an undefined concept prevented this.

So the outcome document basically reaffirmed or recalled what had been agreed to 20 years ago at the first Rio summit or 10 years ago at the Johannesburg summit that adopted a Plan of Implementation. It also mandated work within the United Nations to strengthen institutions, consider options on a financing strategy and a technology facilitation mechanism, and set up new sustainable development goals.

As one of the contributors to this issue remarked, 'Multilateralism in sustainable development was put to the test and survived to live another day.' However, it is clear that unless there is comprehensive follow-up, there is no prospect of salvaging the historic blueprint for sustainable development which the 1992 Rio summit produced to chart the course the world must pursue to avoid an ecological catastrophe.

In our cover story for this issue, we look back, from the vantage point of the June summit, at the historic 1992 Rio summit and consider its main achievements. We analyse the Rio+20 summit and review in broad terms the progress that has been made in implementing the original Rio summit commitments. We highlight the fact that there has been considerable regression in this regard and that unless this process is arrested and progress renewed, the future for the planet and its inhabitants will be a bleak one. Finally, we round off our analyses with a number of articles which afford insights on different aspects of the Rio+20 summit.

– The Editors

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The Rio+20 sustainable development conference in June *(pic)*, which was intended to consider progress made since the first UN Earth Summit two decades ago, turned out to be something of a disappointment. However, its outcome can still be salvaged with a strong follow-up. 9

THIRD WORLD RESURGENCE is published by the Third World Network, an international network of groups and individuals involved in efforts to bring about a greater articulation of the needs and rights of peoples in the Third World; a fair distribution of world resources; and forms of development which are ecologically sustainable and fulfil human needs.

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CBD body takes on controversial issues

Attempts by a subsidiary body of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to arrive at a common position on some highly controversial issues, most notably geoengineering, have proved unsuccessful. These unresolved issues will therefore have to be settled by the parent body when it meets in October in India.

Doreen Stabinsky

Photo courtesy of IISD/Earth Negotiations Bulletin

The Convention on Biological Diversity's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) held its 16th meeting in Montreal, Canada in early May.

THE 16th Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 16) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) took place in early May in Montreal, Canada. Three issues were strong contenders in the SBSTTA contest for most controversial issue: geoengineering, taking on synthetic biology as a new and emerging issue to be addressed by the SBSTTA, and REDD+ indicators and safeguards. [REDD+ refers to Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, and (plus) the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.]

All three draft recommendations approved by the SBSTTA contain unresolved outstanding issues, reflecting the contentious nature and high stakes of these discussions, which have major implications for our planet's biodiversity. The still-bracketed recommendations will be forwarded to the CBD's 11th Conference of the Parties (COP) – which meets in October in Hyderabad, India – transferring the political fights to the parent body to address.

Geoengineering

At their last meeting in 2010, Parties to the CBD decided, 'in the absence of science based, global, transparent and effective control and regulatory mechanisms for geoengineering, and in accordance with the precautionary approach and Article 14 of the Convention, that no climate-related geoengineering activities that may affect biodiversity take place, until there is an adequate scientific basis on which to justify such activities and appropriate consideration of the associated risks for the environment and biodiversity and associated social, economic and cultural impacts, with the exception of small scale scientific research studies that would be conducted in a controlled setting in accordance with Article 3 of the Convention, and only if they are justified by the need to gather specific data and are subject to a thorough prior assessment of the potential impacts on the environment'.

This 'de facto' moratorium was welcomed by civil society, given the concerns raised that such untested modifications on a planetary scale, in the name of combating climate change, would not only detract from the real need for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but also lead to unanticipated adverse impacts on biodiversity and associated social, economic and cultural considerations.

In the intervening period since then, the CBD Secretariat has carried out several studies and synthesised relevant information. The Secretariat found that 'most geoengineering techniques are associated with unintended impacts on biodiversity, particularly when deployed at a climatically significant scale, together with significant risks and uncertainties'. Its preparatory note also concluded that 'the current regulatory mechanisms that could apply to climate-related geoengineering relevant to the Convention do not constitute a framework for geoengineering as a whole that meets the criteria of being science-based, global, transparent and effective'.

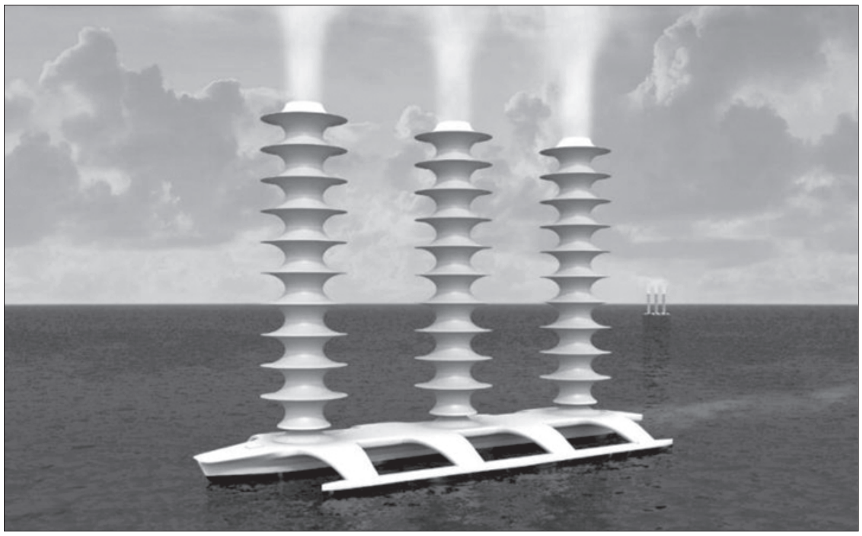
One issue Parties to SBSTTA 16 deliberated, and left unresolved, was the definition of geoengineering. The group of experts convened intersessionally by the CBD Secretariat provided an overly broad definition, according to comments made by many Parties. The experts defined climate-related geoengineering as 'a deliberate intervention in the planetary environment of a nature and scale intended to counteract anthropogenic climate change and/or its impacts through, *inter alia*, sunlight reflection methods or removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere'.

Many Parties were unsatisfied with this definition, as it could be interpreted very broadly, and include such practices as organic agriculture methods that would increase soil carbon concentrations through the incorporation of animal manures into cropland soils. The UK, a proponent of continued research on geoengineering, was the sole, strong voice for inclusion of this definition.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), on the other hand, defines climate-related geoengineering as 'deliberate large-scale manipulation of the planetary environment'. Previously, the SBSTTA had defined the term as 'any technologies that deliberately reduce solar insolation or increase carbon sequestration from the atmosphere on a large scale that may affect biodiversity'.

Another topic of debate was whether the draft conclusions should state that mitigation of climate change must be accomplished through immediate and substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and that geoengineering cannot be seen as a substitute for such efforts. Although supported by many Parties, the wording in the draft recommendation that reflected this sentiment remained controversial and in brackets, with the UK arguing for a formulation that called for rapid and significant reductions in emissions as a priority for tackling climate change, rather than wording that said climate change should be addressed primarily through emission reductions.

The final recommendation notes that many geoengineering techniques do not meet basic criteria for effectiveness, safety and affordability. It also notes that many significant gaps remain in understanding the impacts of geoengineering, including impacts on biological diversity and the associated socioeconomic, cultural and ethical issues, including global justice, the unequal spatial distribution of impacts, benefits and risks, and intergenerational equity.



The SBSTTA notes that many significant gaps remain in understanding the impacts of geoengineering. Picture shows the design for one proposed geoengineering scheme: an unmanned ship that will spray seawater into the air to generate clouds and reflect sunlight away from the earth.

The recommendation reaffirms the moratorium put in place in 2010, and further requests Parties to report on measures undertaken in accordance with the moratorium decision and on any climate-related geoengineering activities with potential impacts on biodiversity. The information conveyed by Parties would be made available by the Secretariat on the clearing-house mechanism.

One additional paragraph in the final text remains bracketed, which provides a reference to state obligations under customary law. This was not supported by the UK and a non-Party, the United States.

New and emerging issues: how to address synthetic biology?

One standing item on the SBSTTA's agenda is 'new and emerging issues'. Parties sought generally to clarify the criteria and process for identifying a new issue to be taken up by the SBSTTA. They also considered several new issues, including synthetic biology and ground-level ozone. Most of the attention and controversy on this agenda item focused on whether synthetic biology should be taken up as a new and emerging issue.

A number of countries were hesitant to take up any new issues. Due to this reticence, the language being forwarded to the COP is still unresolved, despite other Parties being keen to begin to address synthetic biology as a new issue. The draft recommendation contains three options: 1) no new issues; 2) synthetic biology as a new issue; and 3) no new issues but opening the door for further discussion of synthetic biology as a new issue. In the third option, Parties, other Governments, relevant international organisations, indigenous and local communities and other stakeholders were invited 'to submit additional relevant information, including peer-reviewed scientific information and information from different knowledge systems, on the possible impacts of synthetic biology techniques, organisms and products on biodiversity and associated social, economic and cultural considerations'.

Under the second and third options, the CBD Executive Secretary is requested to compile and synthesise the submitted information on the possible impacts of synthetic biology techniques, organisms and products on biodiversity and associated social, economic and cultural considerations, and the applicable provisions of the Convention and its Protocols. All three protocols – the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, its Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing – were considered relevant to the issue of synthetic biology.

The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing was seen as an important inclusion, as Parties and NGOs at the meeting had specifically raised concerns about the possibility of digital transfer of genetic information that could be then synthesised. Digital transboundary transfer and subsequent use of genetic information would precipitate a range of associated access and benefit-sharing issues.

One further paragraph is bracketed in the draft recommendation – a paragraph submitted by the Philippines urging the application of the precautionary approach and prevention of release into the environment or commercial application of synthetic genetic parts and organisms until risks have been assessed and there is adequate basis on which to justify such activities.

REDD+: safeguards or no safeguards?

In a decision from their meeting in 2010, Parties requested the CBD Secretariat, with regard to REDD+, to collaborate with relevant international organisations 'to provide advice, for approval by the Conference of the Parties at its eleventh meeting, including on the application of relevant safeguards for biodiversity… so that actions are consistent with the objectives of the Convention'. REDD+ refers to 'reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries', which is linked to greenhouse gas emission reduction efforts of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

One of the most contentious issues at the SBSTTA meeting was REDD+, or 'reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries'.

In their 2010 decision, Parties also requested the CBD Secretariat to identify possible indicators to assess the contribution of REDD+ to achieving the objectives of the Convention and to assess potential mechanisms to monitor impacts on biodiversity from these and other ecosystem-based approaches for climate-change mitigation measures.

In the interim, work has progressed under the UNFCCC on REDD+ safeguards. However, the UNFCCC discussion of safeguards is focused on implementation and reporting on the application of safeguards. UNFCCC negotiations are not addressing the question of indicators, which would be used at national or sub-national levels. National or subnational indicators are politically sensitive, as some countries view them as possibly infringing on sovereign decision-making if externally imposed.

At SBSTTA 16, many countries were supportive of language in the draft recommendation that approved advice on relevant country-specific safeguards contained in the Secretariat's preparatory note. They were also supportive of language on 'Possible indicators to monitor the impacts of REDD+ on biodiversity and indigenous and local communities'. Several countries with a strong interest in the REDD+ outcomes in the UNFCCC, in particular Brazil and Mexico, rejected this language. They argued that any decision in the CBD with regard to safeguards and/or indicators could preempt or prejudice ongoing work under the UNFCCC.

Language in the draft recommendation was carefully sculpted to circumscribe the work of the CBD on REDD+ safeguards. Paragraphs mentioning indicators were either removed or remain in brackets to be forwarded to the COP, as is the paragraph which [approves][takes note of][welcomes] the advice on relevant safeguards.

Conclusion

The CBD SBSTTA is technically a scientific body, established to provide advice to the Parties on scientific and technical issues. But scientific and technical issues are never devoid of politics, and the body routinely engages in substantive political debate. That said, there are some questions clearly not resolvable in the subsidiary body, particularly those of uncertain nature and substance arising from new issues such as geoengineering and synthetic biology. Those issues will need to ripen a bit more before they can be tackled. The REDD+ debates will likely not move very far within the CBD until further progress on the issue is made within the UNFCCC, a negotiating forum with even thornier issues to resolve.◆

Doreen Stabinsky is Professor of Global Environmental Politics at College of the Atlantic in Maine, USA.

Childbirth: The biggest threat to a woman's life

South Sudan has the worst reported maternal mortality rate in the world.

'MORE women die in child birth, per capita, in South Sudan, than in any country in the world,' says Caroline Delany, a health specialist with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in South Sudan which is funding a raft of maternal health programmes.

A 2012 report entitled 'Women's Security in South Sudan: Threats in the Home' by Geneva-based think-tank Small Arms Survey (SAS) says a national survey carried out in 2006 indicating 2,054 deaths per 100,000 live births may have been an under-estimation.

'Many deaths are not reported, in part because 90% of women give birth away from formal medical facilities and without the help of professionally trained assistants,' it said.

Childbirth and pregnancy, rather than conflict, are the nation's biggest killers of girls and women.

'One in seven South Sudanese women will die in pregnancy or childbirth, often because of infections (from puerperal fever and retained placenta), haemorrhaging, or obstructed births, with a lack of access to healthcare facilities playing a large role in their deaths,' SAS found.

'When we talk about security in South Sudan there is a tendency to focus on issues such as guns and militia groups. But real human security means protection from anything that threatens health and well-being. In South Sudan there is nothing that poses greater threat to a woman's life than getting pregnant,' says SAS researcher Lydia Stone.

Elizabeth Deacon/IRIN

A new birth at Juba Teaching Hospital in the South Sudanese capital. More women die in childbirth, per capita, in South Sudan than in any other country in the world.

Lack of midwives

'Midwives can prevent up to 90% of maternal deaths where they are authorised to practise their competencies and play a full role during pregnancy, childbirth and after birth,' the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in South Sudan said in a May report on maternal mortality.

At the maternity ward in Juba Teaching Hospital, staff members say there are not enough (or the right) drugs, and never enough trained staff.

Midwife Julia Amatoko is one of three registered midwives at the country's ramshackle and constantly overcrowded hospital in the capital.

'We are just a few and a lot of mothers are coming. And beds are not enough for the mothers. We have just eight beds for the first stage of labour and for the post-natal mother,' she said.

According to UNFPA, South Sudan has just eight registered midwives and 150 community midwives.

Amatoko said the lack of professional midwives working alongside traditional birth attendants (TBAs) and community midwives caused needless death. 'Those who are TBAs are not able to cope with the serious cases, like when the mothers have post-partum haemorrhage.'

Giving birth even at the country's leading hospital is a lottery, especially at night. 'I've been here for three months, and two mothers died, in the night,' she said, due to a lack of human resources.

'Midwives are the backbone for reduction of maternal mortality… but here, with all the midwives and birth attendants put together, there are only around 20,' said consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist Mergani Abdalla.

'If you have professional midwives that can provide basic obstetric care – once South Sudan can deploy those, they can expect progress, but it will happen slowly,' said midwifery specialist for UNFPA Gillian Garnett.

UNFPA is looking forward to the graduation of around 200 midwives next year.

Treatment delays

Many women come to the hospital late, when they are already in the throes of a difficult labour, said Abdalla.

'There are delays at the community level, with a lot of cultural and other kinds of issues; there are delays in getting to the hospital because of the transport infrastructure, the lack of ambulances, the roads; and then there are delays in the hospital as well,' said Garnett.

Mariam Kone, a medical coordinator for a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital in Aweil, Northern Bahr-el-Ghazal, echoed the problem. 'We are receiving ladies at a really late stage… They're usually in a septic condition or they're anaemic, and many have malaria,' she said.

MSF admits around 6,000 people a year to the maternity ward and had 18 deaths last year, mainly due to post-partum haemorrhage, septicaemia and eclampsia.

Blood, scissors and gauze

At Juba hospital, UNFPA is supplying kits for mothers, surgical instruments and life-saving drugs such as oxytocin to stop bleeding, but Amatoko bemoans the lack of basics: 'We need scissors for delivery, and browns for packing. We don't have even cottons in the ward; gauze – we don't have.'

The nation's first blood bank has been built but not filled at the hospital, which only has a family-size fridge full of blood (mostly allocated by relatives for patients due for surgery).

'The biggest need is blood transfusion, because most of the [maternal mortality] cases are due to post-partum haemorrhage,' said Abdalla.

Garnett says that if these were normally healthy women, blood loss would not be so tragic, but a combination of poor health and the delays at community and hospital level in seeking health care puts most women at risk even before they go into labour.

In a country where girls are often married off in their early teens, the number of children they have is often not up to them.

'A married woman of childbearing age is expected to become pregnant at least once every three years, and to continue until menopause,' the SAS report found. – *IRIN humanitarian news and analysis service* ◆

Developing countries face a *new* debt crisis

Twelve years after a global campaign successfully advocated the cancellation of some of the world's poorest countries' public debt, developing economies are again facing unsustainable debt burdens. Only this time, it is the private sector's debt that is inflating dangerously.

Hilaire Avril

A RECENT report by the Jubilee Debt Campaign, a coalition of organisations supporting debt relief and increased transparency in global financial markets, highlights that foreign debt payments of the private sector in impoverished countries have increased from 4% of export earnings in 2000 to 10% on average in 2010.

'Some countries like Ethiopia, Niger or Mozambique continue to spend as much on debt service as before the rounds of debt cancellation in 2000,' Tim Jones, who authored the report, told Inter Press Service (IPS). The governments of El Salvador, the Philippines and Sri Lanka also continue to spend a quarter of government revenue on foreign debt payments.

Debt payments of the private sector are now double those of the public sector in many of the world's most fragile economies, the 'State of Debt' report argues.

Dangerously indebted

'Generally, public debt has decreased because of debt cancellation or better economic prospects, but the private sector has become dangerously indebted in many developing countries, threatening development achievements,' Jones explained. 'Nothing has been done to prevent the build-up of large debts in developing countries through a very liberalised global financial system,' he added.

Despite the international community agreeing to cancel up to $125 billion for 33 countries since 2000 under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank predictions foresee foreign debt payments in the least developed countries (LDCs) increasing by one-third over the next few years, the report argues.

'Many developing countries have been, and continue to be, locked in a debtor's prison.'

The swelling of unsustainable debt, which has afflicted the South since the 1970s, is now causing panic in Europe as well. What is happening in Greece today mirrors what has been happening in the developing world, the Jubilee Debt Campaign argues, observing that history is repeating itself in a world where 'lenders can go on lending with impunity and borrowers will always have to pay the price'.

The issue of unsustainable debt came to the world's attention when Mexico first defaulted in August 1982. Mexico faced another debt crisis in the 1990s, followed by East Asia, Russia, Brazil, Turkey, and Argentina, due to excessive borrowing by the private sector.

The Campaign's research estimates that 'in the 1950s and 1960s, the number of governments defaulting on their debts averaged four every twenty years. Since the 1970s this has risen to four every year.'

'We now have a global financial crisis where people in the Western world are experiencing what many people across the global South have experienced for the last 30 years. It's amazing how this ideology of liberalisation still holds so much sway,' Jones marvelled.

'Some countries have tried to re-regulate international lending in recent years, like Brazil, which imposed a tax on short-term foreign money coming into the country; Iceland as well (whose entire banking system collapsed in 2008, the country's three largest banks having accrued debt exceeding six times the national GDP) has had a very different response to the global financial crisis: its government refused to take on the banking sector's foreign debt, largely because the people stood up and refused to do that. Iceland is now recovering far better than other countries from its debt crisis.'

'More countries have been backing regulations on how money flows in and out of their territory, but there are barriers in the system, such as World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements,' Jones added.

Since 2000, 32 developing countries have qualified for debt relief, their debt payments reduced from an average of 20% of government revenue in 1998 to less than 5% in 2010, according to the report. In countries qualifying for debt cancellation, primary school enrolment has increased from 63% of children to 83% in 10 years.

The Jubilee Debt Campaign has

been advocating the creation of an international debt court able to cancel unsustainable debts, arguing, ‘Many developing countries have been, and continue to be, locked in a debtor’s prison.’

Increasing burden

The increasing burden of debt is also strongly felt in developing countries that did not qualify for the HIPC scheme, such as Kenya.

‘There isn’t enough thinking around debt management policies and development outcomes,’ Kiama Kaara, who heads the Kenya Debt Relief Network programmes in Nairobi, told IPS. ‘Loans and development financing must be tied to the national development agenda, otherwise we will end up with more useless, “white elephant” projects that drain national resources,’ he added.

Kenya’s public debt increased from 46.8% of GDP to 48.9% today, according to the Network.

‘Borrowing makes economic sense, but the level of prudence should increase,’ Kaara explained. ‘This is particularly worrying in countries where the political elite is the same as the economic elite; the appetite for increasing domestic debt benefits banks controlled by influential players, who profit from the private sector’s debt despite the obvious conflict of interest.’

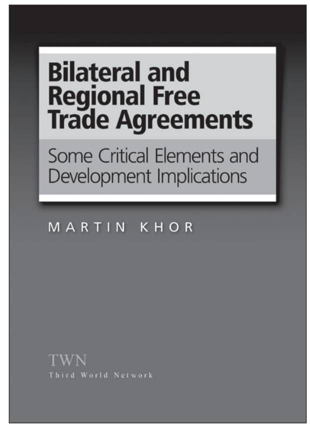
At a national level, civil society is increasingly mobilising to have a stronger say on the level of debt incurred by governments. The Kenya Debt Relief Network has been drafting a ‘Responsible Borrowing Charter’ to gauge loans against the country’s macroeconomic indicators.

‘The IMF has been seeking to create a new mandate on how to regulate the movements of money between countries, but it is still very weak,’ Jones told IPS. ‘We are making the same mistake with the European debt crisis as with the Latin American debt crisis in the past, by thinking austerity is the answer, and it just creates further decline in the economy and suffering for the people on the ground.’ – *IPS* ◆

Bilateral and Regional Free Trade Agreements

Some Critical Elements and Development Implications

By *Martin Khor*



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BILATERAL and regional free trade agreements (FTAs) between developed and developing countries are proliferating. They usually contain tariff-reduction commitments and disciplines deeper than at the World Trade Organisation and also contain rules that are not in the WTO.

This book argues that the comprehensive and strict obligations these FTAs impose will seriously constrain the developing-country party’s policy-making capacity to pursue national socioeconomic and development goals. As a result of this erosion of policy space and the drastic market-opening demanded by FTAs, no less than the country’s development prospects would be undermined.

This book examines the development implications of FTAs for signatory developing countries in each of the major areas typically covered by these agreements, including trade in goods, trade in services, investment, government procurement, competition policy and intellectual property rights. In light of the very real risks posed, developing countries should assess the costs and benefits of an FTA before deciding whether to enter into or conclude negotiations.

The book uses the typical FTA that the United States adopts with developing countries as the main basis of its analysis. FTAs adopted by other developed countries share many of the same features.

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The Rio+20 summit and the need for a strong follow-up

The Rio+20 summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 13 to 22 June was disappointing to many, but it could still succeed through the mandated follow-up actions. *Martin Khor* gives an in-depth assessment.

Photo courtesy of IISD/Earth Negotiations Bulletin

World leaders posing for a group photograph at the Rio+20 sustainable development summit. The success of the summit will be determined by the strength of the follow-up.

THE United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, more popularly known as Rio+20, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 1992 Earth Summit which was also held in Rio de Janeiro, ended with expressions of deep disappointment from broad sections of members of the media and the environmental NGOs, who saw few new commitments to action in the final text that was adopted by the heads of state and government and their senior officials.

This was understandable, as much had been expected from the Rio+20 summit, the biggest international gathering of world leaders this year. This is also because the world is facing serious crises in the global environment and economy, and thus there were hopes that some decisive actions would be taken, worthy of the 20th anniversary of the original Rio Earth Summit, which was officially known as the UN Conference on Environment and Development.

Thus, there was unhappiness and frustration that the hundred heads of state and government who came to Rio de Janeiro were unable or not asked to take decisive actions. There was a sense that the speeches, roundtables and panel discussions at the huge Rio Centro conference centre were part of a ceremonial function for the political leaders, while the tough decisions required by the crises were avoided or postponed.

But there are grounds for a more positive assessment of Rio+20. It achieved an agreed outcome, something that is increasingly rare in high-level multilateral meetings. It managed (just) to reaffirm previous understandings on sustainable development, thus maintaining the foundations for international cooperation. And it directed the diplomats and officials of all countries to continue negotiating and come up with solutions to important unresolved issues within one to two years – including on sustainable development goals, finance and technology, and a new political forum on sustainable development.

The summit adopted a 53-page document, 'The Future We Want'. It reaffirmed or recalled what had been agreed to 20 or 10 years ago (at the first Rio summit that produced the Rio Principles and Agenda 21, and the Johannesburg summit that marked the 10th anniversary and produced a Plan of Implementation). And it directed that talks continue in the United Nations (in New York) to strengthen sustainable development and environment institutions, examine how and whether to provide finance and technology to developing countries, and establish new sustainable development goals.

Measured against the urgent tasks needed, there were no breakthroughs. But neither was the summit the failure that many portrayed it to be.

Pre-summit negotiations lowered expectations

Those who were following the negotiations to prepare for the summit had already scaled down expectations, for various reasons. The talks were bogged down by contentious debates on the 'green economy', a new concept in the context of multilateral negotiations. There had been little focus on assessing the serious gaps in implementation of the Rio 1992 or Johannesburg 2002 outcomes, including on the commitments to provide finance and technology to developing countries. Only at a late stage was there a discussion on texts on specific environment or development issues, such as food security, water, oceans, poverty, and trade, and on the means of implementation (finance and technology), while a new theme (sustainable development goals) was also proposed at this late stage.

The developed countries seemed to be in little mood for a new boost to international or North-South cooperation, due perhaps to the effects on them of the global financial crisis and insecurity felt by some of them about the rise of potential rivals in the developing world. Even a reaffirmation of past commitments, which is a normal part of UN conferences, became a contentious issue. It was a repeat of the UNCTAD XIII conference in April, when the developing countries had to fight very hard simply to get developed countries to reaffirm the mandate given to UN development body UNCTAD in the previous conference (UNCTAD XII) in Accra in 2008 (see *TWR* No. 260). And finally, there were just too few negotiating days allocated in the past two years to cover such a wide range of topics embedded in sustainable development.

The impasse in the negotiations continued in the last negotiating session in Rio itself on 13-15 June. As of the night of 15 June, there were 315 paragraphs in the draft of the outcome, but only 116 of them had been agreed to, with no compromise in sight on many major issues. The Brazilian government, as host country and incoming President of the conference, took over leadership of the negotiations. On 16-18 June, negotiations intensified on the basis of a new draft issued by Brazil. Finally, on 19 June, a final draft produced by Brazil was adopted by the senior officials.

Faced with the prospect of a real breakdown, the officials representing almost 200 countries pulled back from the brink and worked out last-minute compromises in an agreed text just as their political leaders were arriving in Rio. No country or group of countries were satisfied with the text, as some key points wanted by each group were not included. This gave rise to a comment from a senior UN official that everyone was equally unhappy, and thus the outcome was possible. There was above all relief that Rio+20 did not collapse in disarray without an outcome, as happened in some World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial meetings (1999, 2003) and in the Copenhagen climate conference (2009). Multilateralism in sustainable development was put to the test and survived to live another day.

The outcome document agreed to just about meets the minimum requirements of success, given the deteriorating state of international cooperation and the tough battles that developing countries had to fight in the past year to get their points across. It was often a frustrating and seemingly hopeless task. But in the end, the developing countries prevailed on several issues.

If there is to be reason for some optimism amidst the downbeat atmosphere, it is to be found in the mandate for follow-up actions. At the closing plenary on 22 June night, the Brazilian President, Dilma Rousseff, hailed the outcome document as a historic step for sustainable development. She said it was a ‘starting point’ and not a ‘threshold or ceiling’ for implementing the path to sustainable development that had to be ambitious and should serve as a legacy for future generations. Those were well-chosen words, for the document, while not itself containing high action points, is a start in opening the way to potentially important actions.

Common but differentiated responsibilities

The biggest battle in the last week of negotiations in Rio was to get developed countries, especially the United States, to renew the original Rio principles on environment and development adopted at the historic 1992 Earth Summit. These include the environmental precautionary principle and ‘polluter pays’ as well as development and equity principles of the right to development and the common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). The CBDR principle is especially important for developing countries, as it implies that while all countries should take sustainable development actions, the developed countries have to take the leading role in environmental protection, as they contributed the most to environmental problems, and they should also support developing countries with finance and technology in their sustainable development efforts.

Some developed countries, especially the United States, resisted affirming the Rio principles and especially CBDR. For developing countries, the reaffirmation of Rio plus a mention of CBDR was a necessity; without this reaffirmation, the summit would have been a disaster. On almost the last day, the US gave in. The outcome document, in paragraph 15, now reaffirms the 1992 Rio principles, including CBDR.

In a section on climate change, the text (paragraph 191) also recalls that the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) provides that Parties should protect the climate system ‘on the basis of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’. Though this is only a factual reflection of the Convention, it is nevertheless a victory for developing countries since the equity and CBDR principles were notably absent in the decision at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties in December 2011 that mandated negotiations on a new Durban Platform under the Convention. Some developed countries, especially the US, have argued that the absence of the mention of equity and CBDR means that all Parties have to take on similar levels of commitments in a future climate regime, unlike in the Kyoto Protocol. Developing countries on the contrary argued that these principles apply since the new regime will be under the Convention. Their position is thus strengthened since Rio+20 ‘recalled’ these two principles in climate protection actions.

Technology and finance

The Rio+20 outcome was a big letdown on the issues of financial resources for and technology transfer to developing countries. These are the ‘means of implementation’ needed by developing countries to help them implement sustainable development plans, and were very prominent in Agenda 21, the plan of action adopted by the 1992 Earth Summit. The developing-country Group of 77 (G77) and China insisted on reaffirmation of the understanding that developing countries require these means of implementation to meet their obligations, and that developed countries renew their commitments, especially since there are new obligations on developing countries on account of the green economy and sustainable development goals components of the text.

On technology, the G77 and China proposed a new technology transfer mechanism to promote sustainable development, since there has been little if any real transfer in the past two decades. However, the US and others refused to even reaffirm their commitment to transfer technology to developing countries. They insisted that the word 'transfer' be deleted from the title of the technology transfer section, and that the term 'technology transfer' wherever it appears should be accompanied by the words 'voluntary' and 'on mutually agreed terms and conditions', meaning that technology transfer would be on a commercial basis. The US chief delegate explained that this was to prevent compulsory licensing and imposition of technology transfer requirements by developing countries.

This demand was opposite to the language in Agenda 21 and the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation that agreed on proactive technology transfer principles. After many rounds of intense discussion, the US on the last day agreed to language (in paragraph 269) that 'recalled' the technology text in the 2002 Rio+10 summit in Johannesburg, including technology transfer 'particularly to developing countries, on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed'.

Long negotiations on how to treat the issues of intellectual property and access by developing countries to environmentally sound technology did not yield any direct results, with the US rejecting even very mild language on a 'balanced approach to intellectual property'. The only place intellectual property is mentioned in the final text is in paragraph 269 that recalled 'the provisions on technology transfer, finance, access to information and intellectual property rights as agreed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation'.

On finance for developing countries, the developed countries have watered down their previous commitments, this time refusing to reaffirm the usual terms of providing 'new and additional financial resources' for developing countries in the Rio+20 text. This may reflect the budget problems in both the US and Europe, and the decline in development aid in the past year. Instead, there are references in the text to getting funds from a 'variety of sources' and 'new partnerships', a code for the reduced importance (and quantum) of developed countries' government financing for developing countries. A long paragraph (258) reaffirms the importance of fulfilling the official development assistance (ODA) target of 0.7% of gross national product (GNP).

The developed countries also wanted to emphasise South-South cooperation as an alternative source of financing, but did not succeed; instead there is a balanced paragraph on South-South cooperation as solidarity and complement (paragraph 260).

The G77 and China had before the Rio meeting proposed that a new sustainable development fund be created, and that at least $30 billion a year be provided in 2013-17, rising to $100 billion a year from 2018. (In Rio 1992, the Secretariat estimated that developing countries required $100 billion a year in external funds to implement Agenda 21.) But this was unacceptable to developed countries.

The developing countries were thus very dissatisfied with the retreat in commitments on the means of implementation, and argued that the new green economy and sustainable development goals aspects of the outcome would be meaningless without a commitment to finance and technology.

To save the show, it was agreed that there would be a follow-up process in both finance and technology after Rio+20. On finance (paragraph 255), an intergovernmental process will start under the UN General Assembly to assess financing needs, existing frameworks and additional initiatives, to prepare a report towards a Sustainable Development Financing Strategy to mobilise resources for sustainable development. A committee of 30 experts nominated by regional groups will implement this process and conclude its work by 2014.

On technology, developing countries wanted a technology transfer mechanism, or at least a discussion towards that goal. Developed countries would not agree to a direct intergovernmental process. The final text (paragraph 273) requests UN agencies to identify options for a facilitation mechanism to promote development, transfer and dissemination of environmentally sound technologies by assessing technology needs of developing countries, options to address them and capacity building. The UN Secretary-General is asked to make recommendations on this mechanism to the General Assembly's 67th session.

These are actions to be carried forward, rather than firm commitments, and will hardly convince developing countries that they will get the means (finance and technology) to implement new obligations on environment and sustainable development. Thus, the developed countries have not maintained their level of commitments of 20 or even 10 years ago, whether on sustainable development principles or on finance and technology. Developing countries in effect made significant concessions in accepting the very watered-down language, and this must be seen as their major contribution to an outcome for Rio+20.

Nevertheless, two processes have been put in motion that keep the issues of finance and technology for sustainable development alive, and the follow-up processes for both issues hold the promise of leading to some new strategies and mechanisms.

Sustainable development goals

A new item in the Rio+20 outcome with considerable follow-up implication is the decision to formulate sustainable development goals (SDGs). This will be done in the next year through a 30-member working group under the UN General Assembly, nominated by governments through the UN regional groups. The

UN Secretary-General is asked to provide initial inputs and the UN agencies' support to the working group, which will submit a report on the goals to the General Assembly next year for its action.

Establishing SDGs was not on the original mandate of Rio+20 topics but entered the process in late 2011 through a proposal of Colombia and a few other countries. It developed increasing support as a concrete 'deliverable' for the summit and as a kind of replacement for the controversial green economy issue. Although establishing SDGs turned out to be a complex exercise, at least the concept of sustainable development was an accepted and comfortable one, unlike the green economy.

The developing countries during the negotiations fought for several things: to have a good definition of SDGs, to ensure that there is a balanced approach among the three pillars (economic, social, environmental) of sustainable development in the selected goals, that the SDGs be formulated by an intergovernmental process and not be 'dropped'on the governments by the UN Secretary-General or UN-chosen experts (as in the case of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)), and that the SDG process should interact with and not replace the separate process of the UN's post-2015 development agenda after the expiry of the MDGs. They also preferred that no specific SDGs be named in Rio, in order not to preempt the approach of having goals balanced from all three pillars.

The developing countries' positions prevailed on all these aspects. In the final text, the SDGs are to be based on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, respect the Rio principles, build on commitments already made, and incorporate the three dimensions of sustainable development. They should be coherent with and integrated in the UN development agenda beyond 2015 and should not divert effort from the MDGs. The goals should address priority areas, guided by the outcome document.

Developed countries, especially the European Union (EU), were disappointed that the summit itself did not adopt five specific goals that were mainly environmental in nature, which they had put forward as initial and priority SDGs. The developing countries argued there was no time to agree on what the initial goals would be, since economic and social goals also have to be included.

The formulation of the SDGs, and their interface with the post-2015 development agenda, will be one of the most important follow-up actions initiated by the Rio+20 summit.

Green economy

The outcome document has a large section on the 'green economy'. This topic had in fact absorbed most of the time and energy of the summit's preparatory meetings over the last two years. 'The green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication' had been included as one of the two specific themes of the conference (the other being 'the institutional framework for sustainable development'). However, it soon became the centre of contention and controversy, partly because it was a new subject for multilateral negotiations that could potentially result in new obligations on states, and partly because the subject was being negotiated in the home of 'sustainable development' and there was confusion about its interface conceptually and practically with sustainable development.

From the early stages of negotiations, some developed countries, especially the EU, were advocating having an action-oriented and norm-related approach to the green economy. The EU proposed that Rio+20 formulate a UN green economy roadmap with several specific goals, targets and deadlines for issues such as water, forests, agriculture and oceans. This was seen by many developing countries as going too far with the concept. They had many concerns, including that the 'green economy' concept would replace 'sustainable development'; that it may be used to justify trade protectionism against developing-country products and new conditionality for aid and finance; and that it would be used to create new markets based on economic valuation of nature's functions, offsets and payments for environment services and thus lead to commodification of nature. There was also concern that there would be a one-size-fits-all approach as well as 'green economy' obligations that all countries have to adhere to, without developing countries getting the corresponding means of implementation (finance and technology) from developed countries.

After a long fight lasting over a year, it was finally agreed in the Rio+20 text that the green economy is one of the important tools for achieving sustainable development, providing options but not a rigid set of rules. The green economy policies should be guided by the Rio principles. The text also contains 16 points of what the green economy should or should not be. It should respect national sovereignty, promote inclusive growth, strengthen finance and technology transfer to developing countries, avoid aid and finance conditionalities, not be used for trade protectionism, help close North-South technology gaps, address poverty and inequalities, and promote sustainable consumption and production patterns.

The main action points on the green economy are quite mild (paragraph 66). The UN system and relevant donors are asked to coordinate and provide information on matching interested countries with partners to provide requested support; to provide toolboxes and best practices and good examples in applying green economy policies, methodologies for evaluating policies, and platforms that can contribute.

Institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD)

The IFSD was one of the two major themes of Rio+20 and the chapter on it could prove to have the most significant results. It is widely recognised that while Rio 1992 was a success, its follow-up mechanisms for implementation were weak. The main body for follow-up was the new UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD); it worked well as a convening body for ministers and senior officials in its initial years, but had lacklustre results in recent years. The problem was mainly in design: it meets only two to three weeks in a year and has a small secretariat within the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, yet it has a large agenda of tasks and issues to fulfil.

Potentially, the most important decision in Rio was to set up a high-level political forum on sustainable development to replace the CSD. The idea of a forum had been originally proposed by the G77 and China, while others, mainly the European countries, proposed transforming the CSD into a new Sustainable Development Council. The final text agreed to establishing the forum; the text also incorporated some of the ideas proposed for the Council.

According to the text, the high-level forum could have 12 functions, including to provide political leadership and recommendations for sustainable development, provide a platform for regular dialogue and agenda setting, consider new sustainable development challenges, review progress in implementation and improve coordination in the UN system, have an action-oriented agenda for new and emerging challenges, follow up on implementing all the sustainable development commitments, coordinate within the UN system, promote system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies.

As the details have not been sorted out, Rio+20 decided to launch an intergovernmental process under the General Assembly to define the forum's format and organisational aspects, aimed at convening the first forum at the General Assembly's 68th session in 2013.

A key issue is the extent to which this forum will only be a series of annual meetings and roundtables (during the time of the annual General Assembly session) or whether it will have a strong structure that addresses the social, economic and environmental dimensions, that meets regularly throughout the year and that is serviced by a strong enough secretariat.

If the new forum can have a wide agenda, a big enough mandate to act, a dynamic process of discussion and decision making, a strong secretariat and high political backing, then the modest document coming out of the Rio+20 summit can be transformed into a world-changing process and organisation.

Rio+20 also agreed that the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) would be strengthened and upgraded, including through establishing universal membership of its governing council and increased, stable and adequate financing, and strengthening its regional presence. It is the only place in the text in which increased and adequate funding is committed. The General Assembly is invited to adopt a resolution on UNEP to this effect.

This decision was a great disappointment to European countries which were strongly advocating that UNEP be transformed into a UN specialised agency. This was also supported by the African Group of countries. However, this proposal was not acceptable to other major developed countries including the US, Japan and Russia, or to many developing countries, each for its own reasons.

Action on thematic issues

The document also has a large section (Section V) on action on many thematic issues, including water, oceans, biodiversity, food security and agriculture, energy, transport, health, employment and social protection, cities, disaster risk reduction, poverty eradication and trade. Some of these topics contain proposals and promised actions, most of which are useful as guidelines for countries and institutions to implement. For example, the section on food security and sustainable agriculture reaffirms the right to food, emphasises rural development and the importance of small farmers and indigenous peoples and their need for secure land tenure and credit, and promotes sustainable agriculture, while stressing the need to address the root causes of food price volatility. It does not, however, address the key problem of developed countries' agricultural subsidies.

Conclusion

While the Rio+20 summit fell short of justified expectations that it would be a landmark in addressing the world's current serious crises, it was fortunate that there was even an agreed outcome at all. The present atmosphere of international cooperation has deteriorated recently, as can be seen in the impasse in the WTO's Doha Round trade negotiations, the failure of the Copenhagen climate conference, and the uncertainties surrounding the UNCTAD XIII conference. Rio+20 also became a victim of the reduced commitments by developed countries to support the developing countries in their development quest.

Despite some setbacks, the developing countries managed to secure many of their key positions and demands made in the negotiations. It says a lot about the current international situation that a reaffirmation of principles made 10 and 20 years ago is a sign of success.

With the outcome in Rio, the multilateral system in sustainable development lives to fight another day. The mandated actions in the Rio+20 text, on the high-level forum on sustainable development, the finance strategy and technology facilitating mechanism, and the sustainable development goals, point to more and potentially important work in the year ahead at the UN. The success of any conference is ultimately determined by the strength of the follow-up. Rio+20 could remain a disappointment, or could become the start of something significant. In that sense, Rio+20 has not ended, but only started, as the Brazilian President stated at the summit's closure. ◆

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COVER

A renewed political commitment to sustainable development

It was an uphill task at times but the gathering of world leaders and high-level representatives of almost 200 countries succeeded in adopting the outcome document of the Rio+20 conference that renewed their political commitment to achieving sustainable development.

Chee Yoke Ling

THE first summit in 1992, also held in Rio de Janeiro, was historic in forging the set of 27 principles in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development as well as Agenda 21, a detailed plan of action. It was also the occasion for the opening for signature of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Twenty years later, implementation of sustainable development continues to be elusive and most developed countries display weak political will to fulfil their agreed commitments to provide crucial means of implementation (finance and technology) to developing countries. Thus, it was imperative that the Rio+20 conference produce, as mandated by the UN General Assembly, a renewed political commitment.

The Rio+20 conference reaffirmed the Rio principles adopted by the historic first Earth Summit *(pic)* **held in 1992.**

While many are critical that the outcome document titled 'The Future We Want' did not go far enough, it was crucial for the Rio principles to be reaffirmed – especially Principle 7 on 'common but differentiated responsibilities' – and this was achieved.

In Section I of the document on 'Our common vision', the heads of state and government and high-level representatives declare that they 'renew our commitment to sustainable development and to ensuring the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations' (paragraph 1).

Paragraph 2 states that 'Eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. In this regard we are committed to freeing humanity from poverty and hunger as a matter of urgency.'

Until the end of the work of the conference preparatory committee (prepcom) late in the night of 15 June, this was not agreed because the United States wanted to restrict the commitment to 'extreme' poverty. Developing countries stressed throughout that poverty eradication was their overarching objective and that Rio+20 must address all poverty. In the course of the informal consultations under the guidance of Brazil as the host country (16-19 June), the word 'extreme' was removed.

There was considerable debate on consumption and production patterns in Section I and Section V (on 'Framework for action').

In the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) adopted by the Rio+10 summit, Chapter III is titled 'Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production', whereby it was agreed that 'All countries should promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, with the developed countries taking the lead and with all countries benefiting from the process, taking into account the Rio principles, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities as set out in principle 7 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.'

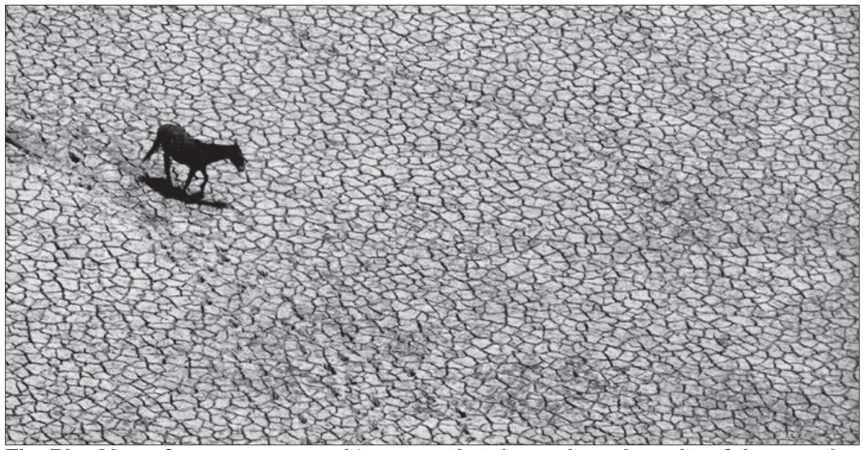
The US did not agree to the original prepcom chairs' text (paragraph SCP 1) based on the JPOI, and asked for deletion of the phrase 'sustainable consumption and production is one of the overarching objectives of sustainable development' and also of the words 'with developed countries taking the lead'. It also did not want 'changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production' proposed by the European Union and supported by the G77 and China in the original paragraph 3, instead preferring 'promoting sustainable patterns ...'

The final result is a combination as seen in paragraph 4 of the outcome document: 'We recognise that poverty eradication, changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development ...'

It is also significant that the summit adopted the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns that was finalised at the 19th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in 2011. The programmes are voluntary and the summit invited the UN General Assembly, at its sixty-seventh session, to designate a member state body to take any necessary steps to fully operationalise the framework (paragraph 226).

Human rights and the right to development featured significantly in the intergovernmental discussions, with civil society groups making this a central issue in their advocacy throughout the process. The right to development, which is incorporated as 1992 Rio principle 3, was contested by some developed countries at the beginning but accepted subsequently as it has also been long recognised in the UN. However, until the final days, the US could not accept the right to food, preferring 'the right to an adequate standard of living, including food'. The offered compromise of 'right to adequate food' was also unacceptable.

In the final outcome document, Brazil managed to obtain consensus as part of the overall package, and the right to food is now in paragraph 8: 'We also reaffirm the importance of freedom, peace and security, respect for all human rights, including the right to development and the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, the rule of law, gender equality, the empowerment of women and the overall commitment to just and democratic societies for development.'



The Rio+20 conference expressed 'concern that the scale and gravity of the negative impacts of climate change affect all countries and undermine the ability of all countries, in particular, developing countries, to achieve sustainable development...'

The summit also reaffirmed 'the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as other international instruments relating to human rights and international law. We emphasise the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status' (paragraph 9).

Good governance and rule of law are acknowledged in paragraph 10: 'We acknowledge that democracy, good governance and the rule of law, at the national and international levels, as well as an enabling environment, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger. We reaffirm that to achieve our sustainable development goals we need institutions at all levels that are effective, transparent, accountable and democratic.'

Both paragraphs 9 and 10 were negotiated outcomes at the prepcom level.

In Section II titled 'Renewing political commitment', the prepcom ended on 15 June with most of the substantive paragraphs unresolved.

Subsection IIA on 'Reaffirming the Rio Principles and past action plans' had five paragraphs and only one had been agreed: 'recalling' the Stockholm Declaration of the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment.

Reaffirming the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) was the most contentious issue, with the US stating that there should be no singling out of any one Rio principle and that this was a 'red line' for the US.

On the other hand, the G77 repeatedly stated that CBDR and equity were essential for global cooperation in sustainable development and for the Group, explicit reference to CBDR was its 'red line'. Others, including Canada, the EU, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Switzerland, also objected to specific reference to CBDR.

The final text reads in paragraph 15: 'We reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, as set out in principle 7 of the Rio Declaration.'

According to sources, an intense exchange took place into the early hours of 18 June between India and the US.

Paragraph 15 is seen by many as a major achievement of Rio+20 as it has implications not only for the UN sustainable development agenda but also for the negotiations under the legally binding UN Framework Convention on Climate Change which operationalises CBDR.

Reference to CBDR in the paragraph on the Rio conventions (climate change, biodiversity and combating desertification) was rejected by developed countries and the final paragraph 17 reads: 'We recognise the importance of the three Rio conventions for advancing sustainable development and in this regard we urge all parties to fully implement their commitments under the [conventions] in accordance with their respective principles and provisions, as well as to take effective and concrete actions and measures at all levels and to enhance international cooperation.'

There is also a reaffirmation of commitment to fully implement the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, JPOI and a long list of past action plans relating to the three sustainable development dimensions in paragraph 16. Conspicuously missing from the list, however, is the outcome of the 2009 UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development, which faced objections from the US.

With the decision reached to work on sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the next few years, there were concerns among developing countries that this could undermine the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, whose target deadline is 2015. Switzerland also proposed that reaffirmation be extended to other relevant internationally agreed goals under the three dimensions since 1992.

Thus, the accepted paragraph 18 reads: 'We are determined to reinvigorate political will and to raise the level of commitment by the international community to move the sustainable development agenda forward, through the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. We further reaffirm our respective commitments to other relevant internationally agreed goals in the economic, social and environmental fields since 1992. We therefore resolve to take concrete measures that accelerate implementation of sustainable development commitments.'

'Uneven progress'

Section IIB on 'Advancing integration, implementation and coherence: assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development and addressing new and emerging challenges' saw deep divisions among member states and the Brazil-facilitated process had to resolve these.

Paragraph 19 recognises 'uneven progress' since 1992, emphasises 'the need to make progress in implementing previous commitments', and recognises 'the need to accelerate progress in closing development gaps between developed and developing countries'. The US insistence on 'voluntary technology transfer on mutually agreed terms and conditions' was finally resolved by the words 'finance, debt, trade and technology transfer, as mutually agreed, ...'.

The second contested issue in paragraph 19 was the G77 proposal for affirmation of 'the continued need for increased voice and full and effective participation of all countries, in particular developing countries, in global decision-making', with the US wanting deletion of 'increased voice'. The Brazil-facilitated text retained these words but in the face of continued objection, the final adopted text does not have these two words.

During the prepcom informals in Rio and the subsequent informal consultations led by Brazil, strong differences surfaced on the 'principle of non-regression' introduced by the G77 reflecting their concern that developed countries are backtracking from their commitments, especially on means of implementation and taking the lead in changing from unsustainable consumption and production patterns.

Brazil proposed language to the effect that 'it is critical that we honour all previous commitments, without regression', which several delegates and observers said was an elegant way to deal with the issue.

However, the word 'regression' was not acceptable to developed countries and the final text in paragraph 20 reads: '...it is critical that we do not backtrack from our commitment to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development...' It should also be noted that the scope has been reduced drastically from 'all previous commitments' to sustainable development, to only the commitment to the 1992 Rio conference outcome.

How to treat the ongoing discussions on human security in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) was also a point of difference.

Japan, supported by the US, the EU, Canada and Switzerland, wanted the document to 'acknowledge' those discussions by adding this issue in the paragraph expressing concern over people living in extreme poverty while public health challenges remain. The G77 objected, arguing that these were new ideas that had not received agreement in the UNGA and that it was premature to include the issue in the outcome document. The final compromise is to 'note' the ongoing discussions.

Emphasis on the multiple financial, economic, food and energy crises was diluted in the final text and an important action point proposed by the G77 did not get any support. This was paragraph 19 *bis* in the 2 June 2012 (5 pm) text: '[19 *bis*. We recognize that the current major challenge for developing countries is the impact from the multiple crises affecting the world today, particularly the ongoing economic and financial crisis, as a result of the deficiency of the international financial system. In this regard we reaffirm the urgent need to deepen the reform of the global financial system and architecture based on the principles of equity, sovereign equality, independence, common interest, cooperation and solidarity among all States. – G77; US delete]'

The paragraph on climate change proposed by the G77 was another topic of extended debate.

The G77 wanted an acknowledging paragraph to be in this section on renewing political commitment because climate change undermines the ability of developing countries to achieve sustainable development and for some countries their territorial integrity and existence and viability as countries are threatened. The US, Canada and Japan did not want any paragraph on climate change on the grounds that this issue was covered in Section V on framework for action.

The EU said that there should not be any special reference to developing countries as climate change affects all countries, and on the issue of undermining ability, the EU wanted to focus on 'the most vulnerable' developing countries. In response, the G77 said that the paragraph was designed to stress the negative impact on all developing countries' ability to pursue sustainable development.

The EU went further to add a sentence, 'Therefore we underscore that combating climate change requires urgent and ambitious action and the widest possible cooperation among all countries.' The G77 did not agree with this.

Observers note that the EU insertion was directly linked to the ongoing climate negotiations of the Durban Platform where developed countries are attempting to remove differentiation between developed and developing countries with regard to responsibilities for climate change actions.

The final text in paragraph 25 reads: 'We acknowledge that climate change is a cross-cutting and persistent crisis and express our concern that the scale and gravity of the negative impacts of climate change affect all countries and undermine the ability of all countries, in particular, developing countries, to achieve sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals and threaten the viability and survival of nations. Therefore we underscore that combating climate change requires urgent and ambitious action, in accordance with the principles and provisions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.'

Coercive economic measures

The subject of coercive economic measures was another contentious issue. The G77 had proposed the following to be in the section on renewing political commitment: '[24 *ter*. We express deep concern on the imposition of laws and other forms of coercive economic measures, including unilateral sanctions, against developing countries, which undermine international law and the rules of the WTO and also severely threaten freedom of trade and investment, and in this regard urge States to refrain from enacting and implementing such measures that hamper the full achievement of sustainable development, as well as trade in developing countries.]'

Belarus supported the proposal; the US and Canada wanted its deletion; the EU and Australia reserved their position as of 2 June in the informal negotiations in New York.

Intense exchanges took place in Rio with no resolution at the prepcom level. Brazil then proposed the following: 'We urge the international community to adopt urgent and effective measures to eliminate the use of unilateral coercive economic measures against developing countries that are not authorised by relevant organs of the United Nations or are inconsistent with the principles of international law as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and that contravene the basic principles of the multilateral trading system.'

This was not acceptable to several major developed countries and the final diluted text in paragraph 26 reads: 'States are strongly urged to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries.'

Although it was not discussed openly, sources said that the delay till 2.45 am of 19 June for the release of the Brazil-facilitated text had to do with the G77 proposal for strongly worded paragraphs on peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, and on the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent states. Canada, the US and Japan had wanted these paragraphs, 24 *quat* and 24 *quint* respectively in the 2 June text, deleted, while the EU reserved on it. Azerbaijan also wanted paragraph 24 *quint* deleted.

The final accepted formulations for the two paragraphs are as follows:

'27. We reiterate our commitment, expressed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the 2005 World Summit Outcome and the outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals of 2010, to take further effective measures and actions, in conformity with international law, to remove the obstacles to the full realisation of the right of self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, which continue to adversely affect their economic and social development as well as their environment, are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and must be combatted and eliminated.

'28. We reaffirm that, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, this shall not be construed as authorising or encouraging any action against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State.'

A new issue was added in paragraph 29: 'We resolve to take further effective measures and actions, in conformity with international law, to remove obstacles and constraints, strengthen support and meet the special needs of people living in areas affected by complex humanitarian emergencies and in areas affected by terrorism.'

An observer said that these three paragraphs were a 'sub-package' seeking to balance the concerns at hand.

The issue of women's reproductive health rights suffered a setback. In paragraph 26 of the 2 June text, the US inserted the words 'including access to reproductive health services' after the sentence that recognises 'gender equality and women's empowerment' as important for sustainable development.

The G77 and the Holy See asked for deletion of the phrase. The Holy See further bracketed the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Key Actions for Further Implementation of the Programme of Action (ICPD+5), the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action in a sentence that reaffirms commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making.

Brazil, as host country, proposed the following paragraph 30 (formerly paragraph 26 of the 2 June text): 'We emphasise that sustainable development must be inclusive and people-centred, benefiting and involving all people, including youth and children. We recognise that gender equality and women's empowerment are important for sustainable development and our common future. We reaffirm our commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making, in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Key Actions for Further Implementation of the Programme of Action (ICPD+5), the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action.'

In responding to Brazil's proposal, the G77 spokesperson explained that some of its members had difficulty with specific references to the ICPD and Beijing documents in paragraph 16 (on reaffirming/recalling commitments in numerous UN outcomes) but that the Group could accept references in paragraph 30. It reiterated its position that there should be appropriate context for reference to the documents and paragraph 16 that refers to sustainable development was not appropriate.

The Holy See said it did not see why there should be reiteration of these two documents all over the outcome document and asked for deletion of the references from paragraph 30.

After further consultations, the final text in paragraph 31 reads: 'We emphasise that sustainable development must be inclusive and people-centred, benefiting and involving all people, including youth and children. We recognise that gender equality and the empowerment of women are important for sustainable development and our common future. We reaffirm our commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making.'

Specific groups of states

The Rio outcome document also renews political commitments with regard to specific groups: small island developing states, least developed countries, Africa and landlocked developing countries.

There is a separate paragraph 37 on middle-income countries that recognises progress made in improving the well-being of their people as well as the specific development challenges these countries face in their efforts to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities and achieve their development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and to achieve sustainable development in a comprehensive manner integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

The document reiterates that these efforts should be adequately supported by the international community, in various forms, taking into account the needs and the capacity to mobilise domestic resources of these countries.

The EU had inserted a sentence at the end of this paragraph at the prepcom stage: 'We also recognise the solidarity of middle-income countries with other developing countries with a view to supporting their development efforts, including in the context of South-South and triangular cooperation.' The Russian Federation, the G77 and Belarus asked for deletion of this. It was not included in the final adopted document.

Reflecting current discussions on going beyond GDP as a measure of progress, paragraph 38 states: 'We recognise the need for broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product in order to better inform policy decisions, and in this regard we request the United Nations Statistical Commission, in consultation with relevant United Nations system entities and other relevant organisations, to launch a programme of work in this area building on existing initiatives.'

Efforts by countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela to have the document reflect their national constitutional philosophy were resisted by several developed countries but finally stayed in place in paragraph 39: 'We recognise that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that "Mother Earth" is a common expression in a number of countries and regions, and we note that some countries recognise the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development. We are convinced that in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature.'

The following two paragraphs were earlier negotiated and agreed *ad ref* before the Rio summit:

'40. We call for holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development that will guide humanity to live in harmony with nature and lead to efforts to restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem.

'41. We acknowledge the natural and cultural diversity of the world and recognise that all cultures and civilisations can contribute to sustainable development.' ◆

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Overview of key issues in the Rio+20 outcome document

This is a *Third World Network* analysis written by *Alex Rafalowicz*, *Meena Raman*, *Lim Li Ching* and *Chee Yoke Ling*.

One of the greatest failings of Rio+20 is that it does not provide any new and additional resources to achieve sustainable development. However, it did agree to set up an intergovernmental process under the UN General Assembly *(pic)* to propose options on an effective sustainble development financing strategy.

AT a time when international cooperation is weak and developed countries are effectively backing off from their commitments made in 1992 at the summit on environment and development, the Rio+20 outcome document, 'The Future We Want', was still significant in preserving key principles of sustainable development.

Third World Network identified nine key issues for the Rio+20 conference:

1. Political commitment to sustainable development
2. Reaffirming the 1992 Rio Principles
3. Reaffirming rights
4. Implementing existing commitments
5. 'Green economy'
6. Sustainable development goals
7. Reform of the institutional framework for sustainable development
8. Effects on trade
9. Regulation of corporations

In this article we assess how these were addressed. In addition we also look at some of the critical issues under several thematic areas in the framework for action and follow-up.

On the whole, the outcome of the Rio+20 conference may not have set the paradigm for a real vision of 'the future we want', but given the obstacles and difficulties faced during the negotiations in the multilateral process, it was not the step backwards from the Rio summit of 1992 that was initially feared.

In fact, it provides some opportunities for further work ahead to shape and chart the future course of the vision we want.

1. 'The focus and mandate of the conference is to review and recommit to sustainable development.'

This was ultimately achieved at the conference, with paragraph 15 reaffirming 'all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development' (the 'Rio Principles'). Similarly, paragraph 16 provides for a 'commitment to fully implement' a range of agreements on sustainable development, including Agenda 21 and the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

Paragraph 20 is also particularly important in both recognising the 'multiple crises' that humanity faces and acknowledging 'insufficient progress' on sustainable development. Although the 'principle of non-regression' as proposed by the Group of 77 and China (and supported by the European Parliament) was not accepted in the text, it was agreed that states 'do not backtrack' from their previous commitments.

The finally agreed paragraph 20 reads:

'We acknowledge that since 1992 there have been areas of insufficient progress and setbacks in the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, aggravated by multiple financial, economic, food and energy crises, which have threatened the ability of all countries, in particular developing countries, to achieve sustainable development. In this regard, it is critical that we do not backtrack from our commitment to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. We also recognize that one of the current major challenges for all countries, particularly for developing countries, is the impact from the multiple crises affecting the world today.'

Poverty eradication is underscored in paragraph 2 as an 'indispensable requirement for sustainable development'. It is recognised that 'poverty eradication, changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development'.

2. 'Reaffirming commitments to the Rio Principles and to common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) is essential to preserve the global partnership on sustainable development.'

As described above, the Rio Principles were reaffirmed in paragraph 15. They were also invoked with respect to: 'policies for green economy' which 'should be guided by and in accordance with all the Rio Principles' (paragraph 57); the institutional framework for sustainable development, where it was agreed that 'an improved and more effective institutional framework for sustainable development…should be consistent with the Rio Principles' (paragraph 76); and sustainable development goals which should 'fully respect all the Rio Principles' (paragraph 246).

Specifically, CBDR was recalled particularly in paragraph 15, which reads:

'We reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, as set out in principle 7 of the Rio Declaration.'

It was also recalled in the section on climate change in paragraph 191, which reflects the language in Article 3(1) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and reads, '...parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.'

The reaffirmation of equity and CBDR in relation to the climate regime is particularly important for developing countries since these two principles were notably absent in the decision at the climate talks in December 2011 on starting negotiations on the Durban Platform under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Other Rio Principles were not recalled directly but their substance is reflected in many parts, including particularly: principle 2 (the sovereign right of states to exploit their own resources) in defining 'green economy policies' in paragraph 58(b), and in paragraph 227 on 'mining'; principle 3 (the right to development) included in paragraph 8 on 'common vision'; principle 10 (public participation) in Section C of Part II, particularly paragraph 43 on 'engaging major groups and other stakeholders'; principle 12 (against restrictive and unilateral trade measures) is partially reflected in paragraph 26 on 'advancing integration, implementation and coherence' and is elaborated under what 'green economy policies' should do in paragraph 58(h).

In the further work on sustainable development goals (SDGs) it would be crucial to ensure that the Rio Principles are fully incorporated. Paragraph 246 on SDGs calls for 'taking into account different national circumstances, capacities and priorities'.

3. 'Governments must also reaffirm the right to food, safe drinking water and sanitation, health and education and respect human rights-based approaches.'

'The Future We Want' provides some affirmation of human rights-based approaches including generally in paragraphs 8 and 9, and gives some recognition to rights that are particularly important to sustainable development.

The right to food is affirmed with complete integrity ('the right to food') in paragraph 8. The US strongly resisted 'the right to food' language and after protracted negotiations it was agreed to draw from the language in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Paragraph 108 in the section on framework for action and follow-up now reaffirms 'commitments regarding the right of everyone to have access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger'.

After a long struggle (with Canada showing the strongest resistance), the right to safe drinking water and sanitation was also 'reaffirmed' in paragraph 121 but some analysts are concerned about the appendage of the words 'commitments regarding', given very few are elaborated at an international level. The paragraph reads:

'We reaffirm our commitments regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, to be progressively realized for our populations with full respect for national sovereignty.'

The right to education is recognised in a similar manner in paragraph 229 which begins:

'We reaffirm our commitments to the right to education and in this regard, we commit to strengthen international cooperation to achieve universal access to primary education, particularly for developing countries.'

The right to health, in paragraph 138, is recognised in the following form:

'We call for the full realization of the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.'

The importance of indigenous peoples' interests and knowledge is recognised throughout the document and paragraph 49, in the context of 'engaging major groups', reads:

'We stress the importance of the participation of indigenous peoples in the achievement of sustainable development. We also recognize the importance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the context of global, regional, national and subnational implementation of sustainable development strategies.'

However, there is a significant setback for sexual and reproductive health rights, and this was heavily criticised by women's organisations (see boxed statement 'Governments gamble with our future'on p. 24).

4. 'Existing commitments need to be implemented – the words at this conference must be followed up with by action.'

One of the greatest failings of 'The Future We Want' is that it does not provide any concrete 'means of implementation' or new and additional resources in order to achieve sustainable development. Thus the developed countries failed to maintain their level of commitments of 20 or even 10 years ago on finance and technology for sustainable development.

However, it was agreed in paragraph 255 that 'an intergovernmental process under the auspices of the General Assembly' would be established to 'assess financing needs, consider the effectiveness, consistency and synergies of existing instruments and frameworks, and evaluate additional initiatives, with a view to preparing a report proposing options on an effective sustainable development financing strategy'.

Similarly, states requested 'relevant United Nations agencies to identify options for a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies' in paragraph 273, suggesting a longer-term outcome of Rio+20 may be a 'facilitation mechanism' for technology transfer.

(a) 'New, additional, predictable and public finance from developed countries is needed.'

On finance for developing countries specifically, the developed countries watered down their previous commitments, refusing to use the agreed terms 'new and additional financial resources' that are one of the foundations of international development cooperation.

Instead, there are references to getting funds from a 'variety of sources' (paragraph 191) and 'new partnerships' (paragraphs 71 and 253), which are code for the reduced importance (and quantum) of public finance and the elevation of private sector finance. The private sector cannot generate predictable or sufficient finance for the essential sustainable development actions that are needed and so it is deeply concerning that it became the focus of 'The Future We Want' section on finance.

Developing countries had proposed specific finance levels ($30 billion per year from 2013-17, and to enhance the mobilisation to $100 billion per year from 2018 onwards) for sustainable development, particularly given the context of UN studies that show that at least $1.9 trillion per year is needed by developing countries for sustainable development actions; yet this was not recognised in the text due to stiff resistance from the developed countries.

As a compromise, developing countries proposed the setting up of a financial mechanism and the proposal evolved to what is in the text now: the establishment of an intergovernmental process under the UN General Assembly to propose options on an effective sustainable development financing strategy. At the least, this process, which has a proposed time frame and stipulates that there will be a report requiring action from the General Assembly, could help put in motion implementation and follow-up to realise the necessary resources for financing sustainable development.

A weak recognition of the ODA (official development assistance) target of 0.7% of gross national product (GNP), which has been previously and repeatedly agreed to by all UN member states, was given in paragraph 258, which labelled it a 'commitment by many developed countries'.

There is a worrying increase in references to 'South-South' solidarity financing in paragraph 260 ('We reiterate our support for South-South cooperation, as well as triangular cooperation, which provide much needed additional resources to the implementation of development programmes'), which poses the risk of shifting existing commitments from rich countries to the developing world, but this is at least limited by agreed language:

'We recognize the importance and different history and particularities of South-South cooperation and stress that South-South cooperation should be seen as an expression of solidarity and cooperation between countries, based on their shared experiences and objectives…South-South cooperation complements rather than substitutes for North-South cooperation…'

This is preferable to a reference to the OECD's Busan Declaration, as proposed by the United States, which had not been agreed at the global level. (The Busan Declaration sets out guidelines for 'aid effectiveness', with the OECD countries seeking to include developing countries in adopting similar standards, a move that was resisted by the latter as this would significantly change the notion of ODA as primarily a North-South commitment.)

There is insufficient commitment to scaled-up resourcing for the United Nations in general and no elaboration of truly innovative forms of public financing such as international financial transaction taxes and Special Drawing Rights of the International Monetary Fund; nor are there any concrete actions to address debt and financial crises.

(b) 'The transfer of technology to developing countries to enable sustainable development is an essential element of any outcome and is an existing commitment of developed countries.'

On the last day of negotiations, the US agreed to language that 'recalled' the technology text in the Rio+10 summit in Johannesburg in 2002, including technology transfer on favourable terms to developing countries (paragraph 105 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation). The US had insisted throughout on replacing agreed technology transfer commitments with 'voluntary transfer of technology, on mutually agreed terms and conditions'.

However, the final compromise has appended language noting 'further evolution'. The agreed language appears in the sections on 'green economy' and 'technology' of 'The Future We Want' (paragraphs 73 and 269) and reads:

'We emphasize the importance of technology transfer to developing countries and recall the provisions on technology transfer, finance, access to information, and intellectual property rights as agreed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, in particular its call to promote, facilitate and finance, as appropriate, access to and the development, transfer and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies and corresponding know-how, in particular to developing countries, on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed. We also take note of the further evolution of discussions and agreements on these issues since the adoption of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.'

As noted above, calls for a technology mechanism were not accepted although a process that may lead to such a mechanism has been set in train by paragraph 273, which reads as follows:

'We request relevant United Nations agencies to identify options for a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies by, inter alia, assessing the technology needs of developing countries, options to address those needs and capacity-building. We request the Secretary-General, on the basis of the options identified and taking into account existing models, to make recommendations regarding the facilitation mechanism to the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly.'

That the text fails to address 'intellectual property' and the negative effects that monopoly can have on sustainable development, is a major gap in the outcome. However, language referring to the need to explore modalities in the relevant fora for enhanced access to such technologies by developing countries was retained in paragraph 270, opening the door to future action on the issue. That paragraph reads:

'We stress the importance of access by all countries to environmentally sound technologies, new knowledge, know-how and expertise. We further stress the importance of cooperative action on technology innovation, research and development. We agree to explore modalities in the relevant forums for enhanced access to environmentally sound technologies by developing countries.'

This retains the flexibilities that are contained in the intellectual property agreement of the World Trade Organisation that countries can ensure in their national laws.

On 'technology assessment', or the independent assessment of the real impacts of technologies, there is recognition of the importance of strengthening international, regional and national capacities in research and technology assessment in paragraph 275 that reads:

'We recognize the importance of strengthening international, regional and national capacities in research and technology assessment, especially in view of the rapid development and possible deployment of new technologies that may also have unintended negative impacts, in particular on biodiversity and health, or other unforeseen consequences.'

This provides a window of opportunity for further work on technology assessment.

5. 'The "Green Economy" cannot be agreed without being defined; and it must be defined in accordance with the Rio Principles and with the backing of new and additional resources.'

'The Future We Want' does not adopt 'green economy' as a distinct concept but as one of many 'approaches, visions, models and tools' (paragraph 56) to achieve sustainable development, with the focus of the section being 'green economy policies' (or just 'green economy' but not 'a green economy'). This is to be welcomed as it does not constrain choices of governments, with agreement that green economy 'could provide options for policymaking but should not be a rigid set of rules' (paragraph 56).

In the elaboration of what green economy policies should be and do, it is also welcomed that they 'should be guided by and in accordance with all the Rio Principles, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation' (paragraph 57) and that they '[r]espect each country's national sovereignty over their natural resources' [paragraph 58(b)] and 'not constitute' restriction on international trade and 'avoid' unilateral trade measures [paragraph 58(h)].

Of concern is that the section provides no 'new and additional' resources, merely noting that developing countries 'should be supported', not that developed countries should provide this support. Further, the reference to support does not include 'finance' but only 'through technical and technological assistance' (paragraph 74). Similarly, there is language throughout the section which indicates an intention by developed countries to shift resourcing obligations to the private sector, for example, in paragraph 71 that begins:

'We encourage existing and new partnerships, including public-private partnerships, to mobilize public financing complemented by the private sector …'

This paragraph also includes an exhortation to governments to support initiatives including 'promoting the contribution of the private sector'.

Many in civil society will be relieved that the final adopted text does not contain the words 'ecosystem services', which were seen as conferring legitimacy on policies that 'financialised nature' at great risk to local communities and environmental integrity (see the article by Sian

Sullivan in this issue).

Vigilance is still needed, however, as many are concerned that paragraph 66 may create a hook for the establishment of some international body that will continue to promote this agenda as it invites 'the United Nations system, in cooperation with relevant donors and international organizations, to coordinate and provide information' on 'matching interested countries' with support and 'toolboxes in applying green economy policies'.

6. 'Sustainable development goals (SDGs) represent a risk if they are not developed in an open, democratic and transparent manner.'

The adopted SDG process outlined in paragraph 248 of 'The Future We Want' is to be welcomed. It avoids the pitfalls of prematurely 'listing' themes to be focused on and provides for an intergovernmental process that will not be susceptible to 'high-jacking' by the Secretary-General or appointed 'experts'. It is agreed that '[t]he development of these goals should not divert focus or effort from the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals' (paragraph 246) and 'should be coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015' (the target for meeting the MDGs is 2015).

Although states agreed that the resulting SDGs should 'fully respect all the Rio Principles', the principle of CBDR is not reproduced in its entirety, although it can be assumed to apply given its inclusion in paragraph 15. In earlier versions of the negotiation document the G77 had wanted to include specific reference to CBDR in the SDG section.

7. 'Reform of the "institutional framework for sustainable development" must not lose sight of strengthening the effective institutions we already have.'

The progress made on agreeing to institutional reform in 'The Future We Want' is to be welcomed as it does not discard existing institutions before proposing replacements – the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will continue its work until it is 'subsequently' replaced (paragraph 84) by a new 'high-level political forum'. The process (in paragraph 86) to develop this high-level forum bears risks that states will not agree to a sufficiently ambitious and comprehensive new body, but it also provides the opportunity to shape and improve the new institution. If the new forum can have a comprehensive agenda, a wide enough mandate to act, a dynamic process of discussion and decision-making, a strong secretariat and high political backing, then the institutional framework for sustainable development would be greatly strengthened.

The invitation to the UN General Assembly to broaden the mandate of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and increase its resources (in paragraph 88) is a positive step, as is the affirmation of the mandated role of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in sustainable development (paragraph 83).

It is disappointing that no serious measures to reform international financial institutions, which are integral to sustainable development, were countenanced and that paragraph 92 states only the following:

'… reiterate the importance of the reform of the governance of those institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions.'

8. New 'green' trade barriers cannot become the 'blocks' to sustainable development; sustainable consumption and production revived

'The Future We Want' is clear in its prohibition against countries using their own terms to justify trade measures, as outlined in paragraph 26:

'States are strongly urged to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries.'

This is similarly applied and elaborated with respect to 'green economy policies' in paragraph 58(h) as discussed above.

The corollary to changing and limiting unsustainable production patterns is addressing unsustainable patterns of consumption, so it is welcome that the text acknowledges that 'changing unsustainable…patterns of consumption and production' is an 'overarching objective of, and essential to, sustainable development' (paragraph 4). Similarly the adoption of the '10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns' in paragraph 226 is a step forward. However, it is concerning that recognition of the North's previously agreed responsibility to lead, given their historical responsibility, is not adequately and explicitly reaffirmed anywhere in the text.

The phasing out of 'harmful and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies' was a subject of intense debate, with the many developed countries advocating strong language and developing countries expressing concerns that there are widespread impacts on the poor when subsidies are removed without safeguards and alternatives such as affordable and sufficient renewable energy are not available. The agreed paragraph 225 calls for policies that phase out such subsidies to take 'fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries, with the aim of minimising the possible adverse impacts on their development and in a manner that protects the poor and affected communities.'

9. 'If governments want to enable sustainable development, then they must regulate transnational corporations which are major drivers of unsustainable development.'

'The Future We Want' is a missed opportunity on this issue as it does not significantly address the role of transnational corporations in driving unsustainable development (the word 'corporation' does not even appear in the text as the term 'private sector' is used, subsuming transnational corporations, small and medium-sized enterprises). This remains a serious gap in the international framework for sustainable development and should be a priority for governments and campaigners and should be included as an issue in the ongoing processes on the SDGs and the work of the 'high-level political forum'.

The weak language in paragraphs 46 and 47 is not sufficient and retains a 'corporate social responsibility' approach, which is voluntary and allows for corporations to 'monitor' themselves with no binding enforcement.

Governments gamble with our future: South feminists demand responsible action now

The following is the statement on Rio+20 released by the gender justice network *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)* on 22 June.

WHILE governments were locked in their semantic battles in the Rio+20 process, women's and other social movements continue to fight on multiple fronts for human rights, justice and sustainability. These struggles take place on diverse territories and geographies including the body, land, oceans and waterways, communities, states, and epistemological grounds. Each of these terrains is fraught with the resurgent forces of patriarchy, finance capitalism, neo-conservatism, consumerism, militarism and extractivism.

An understanding of the deeper structural roots of the crises we face today and analytical clarity on the interlinkages between different dimensions are both critical. There is no core recognition that the multiple crises we face are caused by the current anthropocentric development model rooted in unsustainable production and consumption patterns, and financialisation of the economy that are all based on and exacerbate gender, race and class inequities.

In sharp contrast to 20 years ago at the historic Earth Summit (also in Rio de Janeiro) when linkages between gender and all three pillars of sustainable development were substantively acknowledged, the Rio+20 outcome document has relegated women's rights and gender equality to the periphery without recognition of a wider structural analysis.

Over the past few months we have witnessed and confronted attempts by a small group of ultra-conservative states (with the strong support of an observer state – the Holy See) to roll back hard-won agreements on women's rights. We are outraged that a vocal minority have hijacked the text on gender and health and blocked mention of sexual and reproductive rights, claiming that these have nothing to do with sustainable development. Meanwhile most states concentrate on what they considered their 'big ticket' items of finance, trade and aid with little interest to incorporate a gender analysis into these macroeconomic issues.

There is a reference to women's 'unpaid work' but without recognising the unequal and unfair burden that women carry in sustaining care and well-being (paragraph 153 of the outcome document titled 'The Future We Want'). This is further exacerbated in times of economic and ecological crisis when women's unpaid labour acts as a stabiliser and their burden increases. For example, reference to the root causes of excessive food price volatility, including its structural causes, is not linked to the risks and burdens that are disproportionately borne by women (paragraph 116). Development is not sustainable if care and social reproduction are not recognised as intrinsically linked with the productive economy and reflected in macroeconomic policy-making.

Reference is made to the critical role that rural women play in food security through traditional sustainable agricultural practices including traditional seed supply systems (paragraph 109). However these are under severe threat unless governments stop prioritising export-oriented agribusiness. The reason why such wrong-headed policies are not adequately addressed is because of corporate interests that are protected in the Rio+20 outcome.

Northern governments advocating for such corporate interests have warped the sustainable development paradigm in the so-called 'green economy' that is skewed toward the economic pillar, emphasising sustained economic growth over equitable development and without any ecological limits. Within this section women are regarded as either welfare recipients or as a supplier of labour for the green economy, but not acknowledged as rights holders, especially of economic, social and cultural rights [paragraph 58(k) & (l)].

The 'green economy' concept is somewhat challenged in the text by an affirmation of diverse visions, models and approaches to development as well as the policy space to integrate all three dimensions of sustainable development (paragraph 56). While the recognition of policy space and sovereignty over natural resources is important, there is a need to deeply question a development model that is based on extractivism and that fails to take into account social and ecological costs.

While the Rio principles including common but differentiated responsibilities are reaffirmed at Rio+20, the outcome is imbalanced across the three pillars of sustainable development without sufficient attention to gender and social justice, including women's rights. It fails to tackle the systemic inequities of the international monetary, financial and trading systems; and prioritises economic growth over the ecology and equity.

Feminists across the global South will continue to demand that governments stop regressing on their commitments and begin to seriously address the structural transformations that are required for genuine sustainable development. ◆

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) is a network of feminist scholars, researchers and activists from the economic South working for economic and gender justice and sustainable and democratic development.

A UN global framework, or international binding code, for regulating and disciplining transnational corporations is unfinished business – the first Rio summit in 1992 saw a strong business presence and opened the way for transnational corporations to be 'partners in sustainable development', and in the months afterwards the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations was effectively dismantled.

The 2012 Rio outcome is weak on this issue even as public and community demands for corporate regulation increase with the financial and environmental crises. There is a need for this vital issue to be on the UN agenda. Similarly, there must be agreed global rules on corporate advertising and public relations activities that corporations use to promote consumption and drive forward the wasteful consumerist development model that generates corporate profits but that also threatens the well-being and even survival of present and future generations.

The right to food is affirmed in the outcome document of Rio+20.

10. Food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture

The section on 'food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture' is generally positive in that it includes language on the right to food, access of small farmers, women and indigenous peoples to credit, markets and land tenure, promotion of sustainable agriculture, recognition of the importance of traditional sustainable agricultural practices and the need to address the root causes of food price volatility. The section does not however address the critical problem of developed countries' agricultural subsidies. Nonetheless, the reaffirmation of these key issues in the Rio+20 outcome document underlines and augments the gains that have been already made on these same issues in other relevant processes and fora.

The right to food is reaffirmed in paragraph 108: 'We reaffirm our commitments regarding the right of everyone to have access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.' Together with the reaffirmation of the 'right to food' in paragraph 8, this sets the stage for addressing hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition within a human rights framework that encompasses the full range of the meaning of the right to food.

The role and needs of rural communities are recognised and rural development emphasised in paragraph 109. In particular, there is recognition of the need for enhanced access by 'small producers, women, indigenous peoples and people living in vulnerable situations to credit and other financial services, markets, secure land tenure, health care, social services, education, training, knowledge and appropriate and affordable technologies'.

In addition, the 'importance of traditional sustainable agricultural practices, including traditional seed supply systems, including for many indigenous peoples and local communities', is recognised. This is important in light of the threats that undermine and marginalise such systems and the increasing takeover of seed supply by a few large multinational corporations. This also implicitly recognises farmers' rights to plant genetic resources, where farmers save, reuse and exchange seeds, and farmers' role in conserving and sustainably using agricultural biodiversity.

Crucially, paragraphs 110-113 emphasise the importance of sustainable agriculture, including crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, and the need for increased investment in sustainable agricultural practices. The links between sustainable agriculture and food security, biodiversity and climate resilience are rightly highlighted. In paragraph 111, the need to 'maintain natural ecological processes that support food production systems' is recognised, which is a nod towards agro-ecological principles and processes such as nutrient cycling, biological nitrogen fixation, biological control via promotion of diversified farming systems and harnessing functional biodiversity.

The need to enhance agricultural research, extension services, training and education is addressed in paragraph 114, to improve productivity and sustainability. While falling short of calling for a transition from the current unsustainable models of industrial/conventional agriculture, the language is sufficiently supportive of sustainable agriculture approaches.

In paragraph 115, the important work and inclusive nature of the reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is reaffirmed, although it does not explicitly refer to the path-breaking participation schemes adopted by the Committee such as its Civil Society Mechanism. Still, this is in line with calls from civil society to recognise the CFS as the governing body for food, agriculture and rural development policy and related financial issues at the global level. Some of the progressive work of the CFS is highlighted: the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security and the ongoing discussions on responsible agricultural investment.

The issue of food price volatility is addressed in paragraphs 116 and 117. The text stresses 'the need to address the root causes of excessive food price volatility, including its structural causes, at all levels, and the need to manage the risks linked to high and excessively volatile prices in agricultural commodities and their consequences for global food security and nutrition, as well as for smallholder farmers and poor urban dwellers'. Mention is made of the Agricultural Market Information System hosted by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), which is limited to the market information aspects, but no other concrete solutions are offered. This is surprising given that there have been several UN proc-

Other thematic areas in the framework for action and follow-up

Chee Yoke Ling

IN addition to the highlighted thematic areas in the main article, the following were also included in 'The Future We Want'.

'Access to sustainable modern energy services': There is a commitment 'to facilitate support for access to these services by 1.4 billion people worldwide who are currently without them' (paragraph 125). However there is no concrete commitment, but only an emphasis on 'the need to take further action to improve this situation' (access for the poor who are unable to afford services even when they are available), 'including by mobilizing adequate financial resources' (paragraph 126). The energy mix listed in paragraph 127 is a mixed bag: 'increased use of renewable energy sources and other low-emission technologies, the more efficient use of energy, greater reliance on advanced energy technologies, including cleaner fossil fuel technologies, and the sustainable use of traditional energy resources'.

The UN Secretary-General's initiative on 'Sustainable Energy for All' was quite controversial in the Rio+20 process. This initiative involves almost all major transnational corporations in the energy sector and is heavily criticised by civil society groups and several developing-country government delegations for its reliance on the biggest fossil fuel extractors and contributors to global warming to deliver sustainable solutions. The privatisation of energy in many countries and the profit orientation of these corporations, according to critics, are a major driver of the lack of access to energy by the poor. The final agreed text in paragraph 129 therefore 'note[s] the launching of the initiative' whereas earlier drafts sought a stronger endorsement, while several states asked for deletion of this reference to the initiative.

'Sustainable tourism': The two paragraphs 130 and 131 had been agreed to before delegates arrived in Rio. This topic did not receive much attention from civil society participants in the Rio process, and there is an assumption that 'well designed and managed tourism' can contribute to all three pillars of sustainable development. 'The Future We Want' accordingly 'encourage[s] the promotion of investment in sustainable tourism, including eco-tourism and cultural tourism'. Third World Network was the only organisation that disseminated analyses that strongly critiqued tourism at the World Tourism Organisation side event held in Rio. (For details see the article by Alison Johnston in this issue and a new TWN publication *The Politics of Tourism, Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development* by Anita Pleumarom.)

'Oceans and seas': This thematic area received considerable attention from organisations that work with fisherfolk and conservation, as well as countries with extensive marine resources. Urgency was also escalated with new data on the unabated depletion of marine resources and the impact of global warming and glacial melting on ocean and sea levels, and massive marine pollution (the Rio+20 document highlights marine debris, especially plastic, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals and nitrogen-based compounds).

There is a commitment 'to intensify our efforts to meet the 2015 target as agreed to in the [2002] Johannesburg Plan of Implementation to maintain or restore [fish] stocks to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield on an urgent basis' (paragraph 168).

'The Future We Want' document also notes the decision of the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that 'by 2020 10% of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are to be conserved'.

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and seas, and its importance, is recognised, as is the 'near universal adoption by States' of the Convention (paragraphs158 and 159) – the United States is still not a Party. There is commitment 'to protect, and restore, the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems, and to maintain their biodiversity' and 'to effectively apply an ecosystem approach and the precautionary approach' in the management of activities that impact on the marine environment.

Paragraph 162 recognises the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. It notes the ongoing work under the General Assembly of an ad hoc open-ended informal working group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of such marine biodiversity. There is a commitment 'to address, on an urgent basis', this issue, 'including by [the General Assembly] taking a decision on the development of an international instrument' under the UNCLOS before the end of the 69th session of the General Assembly (2015).

An issue that has emerged in the negotiations of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilisation (concluded in 2010 as a protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity) is the need for a regime to govern marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction as bioprospecting, patenting of marine resources (especially microorganisms) and commercialisation are already taking place with the benefits accruing to a minority of entities from developed countries. Developing countries had sought to include this in some form in the esses that have extensively debated the issue, including the CFS and the General Assembly, with the latter adopting the resolution 'Addressing excessive price volatility in food and related financial and commodity markets'.

The final paragraph of the section, paragraph 118 on trade, is regrettably weak. This is because developed countries did not want to discuss their agriculture subsidies, which are adversely affecting food security, livelihood security and rural development in developing countries. Similarly, attempts to address agriculture subsidies in the means of implementation/trade part of the outcome document came to naught, despite pleas from the G77 and China that this was a critical issue for developing countries. ◆

Nagoya Protocol but developed countries countered that this is a matter addressed at the General Assembly ad hoc working group. In the meantime the dominance of a few Northern corporations and research entities over these resources will continue.

It is significant that concern is expressed at this high level about 'the potential environmental impacts of ocean fertilisation' and that governments 'recall the decisions related to ocean fertilisation adopted by the relevant intergovernmental bodies' (the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity has a decision that is a de facto moratorium on ocean fertilisation), and 'resolve to continue addressing with utmost caution ocean fertilisation, consistent with the precautionary approach' (paragraph 167).

There is also a commitment 'to eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as advanced in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (paragraph 170), and a call upon states to ratify the FAO agreement that addresses this challenge.

There is in paragraph 173 a reaffirmation of the commitment in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation 'to eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and overcapacity, taking into account the importance of this sector to developing countries …'. Subsidies in the fisheries sector is a complex and contentious issue that is addressed in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and so the Rio+20 conference reiterates its commitment 'to conclude multilateral disciplines on fisheries subsidies that will give effect to the WTO Doha Development Agenda and the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration mandates' on this issue, 'recognising that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part' of the WTO negotiations, 'taking into account the importance of the sector to development priorities, poverty reduction and livelihood and food-security concerns'.

There is encouragement to states 'to eliminate subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, and to refrain from introducing new subsidies or from extending or enhancing existing ones'. This is a reflection of the different realities and situations in developing and developed countries.

Importantly, there is a commitment 'to observe the need to ensure access to fisheries and the importance of access to markets, by subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fisherfolk and women fish workers, as well as indigenous peoples and their communities, particularly in developing countries, especially small island developing States' (paragraph 175).

'Biodiversity': The intrinsic value of biodiversity and 'its critical role in maintaining ecosystems that provide essential services' are reaffirmed (paragraph 197). Several developing countries concerned about the adverse impacts of market mechanisms such as payment for ecosystem services did not want the term 'ecosystem services' to be used in certain contexts in the outcome document (see the article by Sian Sullivan in this issue).

Recognising the severity of global loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems that undermine development, biodiversity conservation is 'highlighted' (paragraph 197) and governments 'reiterate our commitment to the achievement of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and call for urgent actions that effectively reduce the rate of, halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity' and 'affirm the importance of implementing the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets' adopted in 2010 by the CBD's Conference of the Parties (paragraph 198).

The contribution of the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities is recognised. The term 'indigenous peoples' is used in the document, as opposed to the term 'indigenous and local communities' in the CBD – this is a significant step.

The resource mobilisation strategy in support of the achievement of the CBD objectives is welcomed in paragraph 200 and this itself was a hard-fought outcome of the 2010 meeting of the CBD Parties.

The document 'note[s] the adoption of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilisation' and 'invite[s]' CBD Parties to ratify or accede to the Protocol. The language is not stronger as many developing countries have concerns over gaps and weakness in this new treaty. Promoted by developing countries that sought to prevent biopiracy and ensure fair and equitable benefit sharing (the third objective of the CBD), the final stage of the negotiations in 2010 in Nagoya, Japan was controversial as the ultimate compromise was reached by a very small group of countries and political pressure was strong on all Parties to then agree to it.

Other thematic areas in 'The Future We Want' include sustainable transport; sustainable cities and human settlements; health and population; promoting full and productive employment, decent work for all and social protection; disaster risk reduction; forests; desertification, land degradation and drought; mountains; chemicals and waste; small island developing states; least developed countries; landlocked developing countries; Africa etc. In most cases there was reiteration of existing international agreements and work programmes at the global and regional levels.

However, as discussed in the main article, the means of implementation, especially financial resources, remain elusive as there were no concrete commitments to honour the agreement to provide new and additional financial resources for sustainable development (implementing Agenda 21 and the three 'Rio Conventions' of 1992). ◆

A mixed reaction to summit outcome

How did the world leaders and representatives of the nations that attended the Rio+20 summit view its outcome? The summit's closing speeches, while reflecting the sense of relief that consensus had been achieved, also evinced the general feeling of disappointment that more had not been achieved.

Meena Raman

THE Rio+20 summit ended late evening on 22 June with the adoption, to loud applause, of the outcome document entitled 'The Future We Want'. This was followed by closing speeches by several delegations, some of which lodged reservations and interpretations.

There were also closing speeches by Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the President of the UN General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, and the Rio+20 Conference Secretary-General, Sha Zukang. They described the conference as 'historic' for implementing sustainable development.

In her closing speech at the Rio+20 summit, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff said that the outcome document was a landmark for sustainable development.

Rousseff said that the outcome document was a landmark for sustainable development and a historic step. She said it was a 'starting point', not a 'threshold or ceiling' for implementing the path to sustainable development.

Ban said that Rio+20 has affirmed fundamental principles, renewed essential commitments and given new direction.

Sha said the outcome document should now be used to guide actions for the next 20 years. He listed the important outcomes as including sustainable development goals (SDGs), green economy, strengthening the environment pillar (of the institutional framework for sustainable development), setting up a high-level political forum (on sustainable development), progress on sustainable consumption and production, marine biodiversity, and strengthening social protection floors.

In a session chaired by Brazilian Foreign Ministry senior official Luiz Machado, the outcome document was put before the delegates and adopted to loud applause. In the closing speeches, some countries, including Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela and the United States, then expressed their reservations on various paragraphs.

In the final two days (21-22 June), there had been corridor talk of a possible attempt to reopen the outcome document during the summit. The document had earlier been finalised and adopted by negotiators on 19 June at the end of 'informal consultations' conducted by host country Brazil ahead of the summit.

The corridor talk was sparked off by remarks by heads of state from Kenya, Niger and France who had in their statements to the summit on the first day (20 June) indicated that they wanted the transformation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) into a full United Nations Environment Organisation (UNEO) with equal status with other UN agencies.

This proposal had been strongly advocated by the European Union (EU) and some African countries, but had been opposed by other countries. The final document agreed on strengthening and upgrading UNEP through various measures but did not accept that it become a specialised agency.

However, there was no attempt to reopen the text in the final summit plenary and the adoption of the outcome document proceeded smoothly.

New path

Algeria, speaking for the developing-country Group of 77 (G77) and China, welcomed the adoption of the outcome document. It said that although some proposals by the Group were not kept in the outcome document, the balance characterised by the document paved a new path for reaching agreement on different areas that would start with the implementation phase. The G77 paid tribute to Brazil for playing a leading role (in making consensus possible on the document).

The results achieved at the summit provided the greatest chance for reaching ambition that all wish for in the future in multilateral diplomacy, said the G77 and China chairman.

Denmark, speaking for the EU, while supporting the adoption of the document, said that there were a number of areas where it would have hoped for more ambition, such as timelines and goals in priority areas covered by the outcome document. It welcomed the document's acknowledgment of the important role of the green economy in achieving sustainable development and poverty reduction; the recognition of broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product (GDP); and the importance of corporate sustainability reporting.

The EU said it would remain fully engaged in operationalising the SDGs and welcomed the decision on the institutional framework on sustainable development, in particular, the strengthening of UNEP with universal membership and for a common global environmental agenda. The EU said it would continue to work for a full-fledged UNEO to be on equal footing with other UN organisations.

UN Photo/Luiz Roberto Lima

President Evo Morales of Bolivia speaking at Rio+20. The Bolivian delegation at the summit said that countries have the sovereign right to choose their own approaches to sustainable development.

Reservations

Bolivia said it joined the consensus but expressed its reservations on and interpretation of the outcome document.

On the 'green economy', Bolivia rejected it as a new model and tool for the privatisation of nature and society pretending to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication. It said that countries have the sovereign right to choose their own approaches, visions, models and tools for sustainable development. It had chosen the vision of 'Living Well' through a comprehensive model of integral development in harmony and balance with Mother Earth while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and its citizens.

On energy subsidies, which are addressed in paragraph 225 of the document, Bolivia reserved its position on the rationalisation of inefficient subsidies of fossil sources of energy, as this implied a restructuring of its tax system and royalties, and was contrary to its constitution. It could not accept any kind of assessment, monitoring, reporting and reviewing of its national energy policies and measures that affected its sovereignty.

On 'innovative financing mechanisms', Bolivia had reservations that they could imply or be interpreted as sources from carbon markets, water markets and rights, payments for environmental services, and schemes for the commodification of the functions and cycles of nature.

Ecuador also expressed reservations in relation to paragraph 225 on energy subsidies and said it could not act in any way that was against its constitution. It underlined the need for a new social contract as regards the rights of nature, requiring a change in the system and values of people.

Venezuela said that in the interest of consensus, it agreed to the outcome document but it had reservations on certain paragraphs which were contrary to its sovereignty and constitution, which it would submit in writing.

Peru said that one of the most important achievements of the conference was the reaffirmation of the Rio principles, and called for urgent and swift implementation of the outcomes. It wanted to see more ambition but the outcome document provided a road to follow.

Canada said that the outcome document was a balanced, forward-looking document. It said Brazil had shown leadership in shaping a balanced overall result.

On the reaffirmation of the human right to water in paragraph 121 of the outcome document, Canada's understanding was that this was essential to the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The human right to safe drinking water to be progressively realised did not encompass transboundary water issues including bulk water trade and mandatory allocation of international assistance, it added.

The United States joined the consensus on the outcome document to mark real advance on sustainable development. It was pleased that the document endorsed sexual and reproductive health and said there was a need to ensure women's reproductive rights. The US conveyed its intention to provide a statement for the record on several elements of the outcome document.

Kenya said that the process of the negotiations had been open, transparent, balanced, intense and difficult and compromises were made. It called for practical actions.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo considered Rio+20 as a crucial step forward to lead to sustainable development. The strengthening of UNEP should lead to an institution that reflects its true functions.

Nicaragua said that the main issues of the 1992 Rio summit on sustainable development and poverty eradication must continue and efforts should not be diluted.

Switzerland said that progress was made but the conference missed a historic opportunity. The outcome was a compromise and did not have the vision and strong commitment needed. It avoided a major setback and there was some progress in specific areas. The green economy was not a threat to sustainable development but was an opportunity, it added.

Iceland regretted the lack of reference to reproductive rights in the outcome document.

Brazil's Luiz Machado, who chaired the official closing session, said that the statements of reservation and interpretations would be included in the report of the summit.

'Starting point'

For the summit's closing ceremony, Brazilian President Rousseff took over as chair. In her closing speech, Rousseff said that the outcome document was a landmark for sustainable development and was a historic step. She said it was a 'starting point' and not a 'threshold or ceiling' for implementing the path to sustainable development, which had to be ambitious and serve as a legacy for future generations.

The document was a consensus for collective ambition and that same spirit was needed for the solutions, said Rousseff. Saying that the document did not set back the gains of the 1992 Rio, Johannesburg or other summits, she said it was a great step forward.

She highlighted some of the key decisions, including: recognition of the need to eradicate poverty and hunger and respect for human rights; the SDGs provided focus and guidance for the future we want; the high-level political forum will now coordinate sustainable development and ensure implementation of the SDGs; UNEP is to be further strengthened, even from a budget perspective; recognition of the need to have an indicator that will be more than GDP; adoption of a 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable production and consumption; recognition of the status of marine biodiversity and a decision on the development of a treaty on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity (beyond national jurisdiction).

The Brazilian President was convinced that the conference would bring sweeping changes for current and future generations with economic growth which was inclusive, enabled the distribution of income and respected environmental sustainability. She said that multilateralism is a global expression of democracy and is the legitimate pathway to find solutions.

Rousseff pledged $6 million to UNEP and $10 million for the most vulnerable countries and small island developing states (SIDS).

(On the first day of the summit, China's Premier Wen Jiabao announced that China will contribute $6 million to UNEP and $31.7 million for a three-year international project to help SIDS, underdeveloped countries and African countries tackle climate change.)

UN Secretary-General Ban said the conference was successful and the leaders of the world had renewed their commitment to sustainable development. The outcome document which was adopted by consensus provided a firm foundation for social, economic and environmental well-being. 'It will guide us – all of us – towards a sustainable path. It is now our responsibility to build on it,' said Ban.

He added that Rio+20 had affirmed fundamental principles, renewed essential commitments and given new direction. Agreement was reached to establish universal SDGs to create a stronger international architecture to support sustainable development. A 10-year framework on sustainable consumption and production had been adopted and there was acknowledgment of the potential for greening economies.

The road ahead was long and hard, he said, with too many people remaining poor, hungry and vulnerable to easily preventable disease, and the environmental base that will improve their opportunities for prosperity was under unprecedented threat. 'No longer can we afford to recklessly consume scarce resources. No longer can we carelessly pollute fragile ecosystems. No longer can we mortgage our future for our short-term needs ... Rio+20 has given us a solid platform to build on. And it has given us the tools to build with. The work starts now,' concluded Ban.

Sha, the Secretary-General of the Conference, said the conference was historic and the next stage of the work was to take the outcome document and use it to guide actions for the next 20 years.

He said the process to launch the SDGs provided an expression of commitment for the future we want. Other important ground-breaking outcomes were: the application of green economy policies as a useful tool for sustainable development; agreement to strengthen the environment pillar; decision to have a high-level political forum for sustainable development to integrate the three pillars; progress on sustainable consumption and production; sustainable use of marine biodiversity; addressing marine pollution and ocean acidification; more liveable cities and communities; strengthening social protection floors and tackling youth unemployment; and decision on a strategy for mobilisation of financing and technology transfer. Sustainable development was the only option for the common future, he added further.

President of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Al-Nasser said that member states had come a long way and the conference was historic. He said the UNGA had played a central role and the outcome document provided critical guidance for implementation and the right decisions needed to be made in the UNGA. ◆

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UN General Assembly endorses Rio+20 outcome document

The United Nations General Assembly has endorsed the outcome document of the Rio+20 summit, but not without reservations by some member states.

Meena Raman

THE United Nations General Assembly, at its 66th session in New York, adopted on 27 July a draft resolution by the President of the General Assembly endorsing the outcome document of the Rio+20 conference entitled 'The Future We Want'.

The resolution comprised only two main paragraphs. The first paragraph expressed 'profound gratitude to the government and people of Brazil for hosting the Conference from 20-22nd June in Rio de Janeiro and for providing necessary support'. The second paragraph endorsed the outcome document which was annexed to the resolution.

Following the adoption of the General Assembly resolution, Venezuela, Canada, Bolivia and the United States reiterated their reservations which they had expressed in Rio de Janeiro after the outcome document was adopted at the summit on 22 June. Several other countries also expressed their views on the outcome document.

In presenting the draft resolution for adoption, the President of the General Assembly (PGA), Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, said that member states had their work cut out for them and that by adopting the resolution, a new chapter was opened.

He said that the outcome of Rio+20 was not an end but presented a new beginning and had defined a new vision of development for the future which would be equitable and inclusive and take into account the limits of the planet. He said further that what was important now was implementation (of the commitments made at the June summit).

The PGA said that a number of processes had been launched in Rio and that the General Assembly (GA) will continue to play a central role in sustainable development.

Referring to the decision in the outcome document to establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals (SDGs) to be agreed to by the GA and for an open working group to be constituted no later than at the opening of the 67th session of the GA, the PGA said that the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the UN in New York (Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro) will lead this process.

(According to the outcome document, the working group will comprise 30 representatives nominated by member states from the five UN regional groups and will submit a report to the 68th session of the GA containing a proposal for SDGs for consideration and appropriate action.)

Apart from the SDGs, the PGA also outlined other important outcomes from the Rio+20 conference, including decisions to establish a universal intergovernmental high-level political forum to follow up on the implementation of sustainable development; to establish an intergovernmental process under the GA for an effective sustainable development financing strategy; for a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies; and the adoption of modalities at the 67th GA for the convening in 2014 of a third international conference on small island developing states (SIDS).

Ion Botnaru, Director of General Assembly Affairs, told member states before the adoption of the resolution that the Rio+20 conference outcome could give rise to additional resource requirements. He said that consultations would begin with all stakeholders to determine how the decisions would be implemented, following which the Secretary-General would submit a detailed report on programme budget implications to the GA at its upcoming session.

Following the adoption of the resolution, several countries took the floor to make explanatory statements, express their reservations or make general statements.

Nauru, representing the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), welcomed efforts to assist the SIDS and said that the next SIDS conference would provide an opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved and what more needs to be done. It also suggested that SIDS be adequately represented in the working group to develop the SDGs.

Papua New Guinea, speaking for the Pacific Small Island States, said that the outcome document was comprehensive and welcomed the recognition of oceans as an important ecosystem and for its conservation and sustainable use.

Venezuela said that there were still a lot of issues missing from the outcome document. It said that the speculative economy signifies predatory capitalism which preys on nature. Efforts must be made to prevent nature from being seen as a commodity to benefit a few. In adopting the document, it expressed reservations in relation to paragraphs 125, 126, 127, 129, 162 and 225.

(Paragraphs 125,126,127 and 129 relate to matters under the section on 'energy'; paragraph 162 to the issue of conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas in national jurisdiction; and paragraph 225 to fossil fuel subsidies.)

Venezuela also expressed concern that some UN bodies wanted to implement the Rio+20 outcomes in a fragmented way and referred to the issue of the 'green economy'. It said that it had been agreed in Rio that each country could have different approaches, visions and models to achieve sustainable development and that the 'green economy' was not the only model available. The policies must be guided by all the Rio principles, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

UN General Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser *(pic)* **said that what was important now was implementation of the commitments made at the Rio+20 summit.**

New Zealand welcomed the Rio+20 conference and stressed that it was a success which demonstrated that the multilateral process can and does work. It welcomed the decision on oceans and fisheries and wanted to see an SDG on oceans. It was also pleased with the outcome on fossil fuel subsidy reform but was 'less happy' with a lack of reference to agriculture subsidy reform and reproductive rights. It said that the road from Rio was going to be as challenging as the road to Rio.

Canada said that it had submitted an explanatory note to the secretariat where it had specified its position regarding the right to drinking water and basic sanitation.

Switzerland said that the success of Rio+20 would be measured not only by the outcome document but by actions which would be taken. It welcomed the SDGs and said that it was important to also take into account the work under the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) in the post-2015 development agenda.

Australia welcomed the SDGs and wanted the process forward to ensure the integration of the post-2015 development agenda, stressing the importance of the MDGs. It also welcomed the decision on oceans and seas and for enhancing marine biodiversity protection beyond national jurisdiction.

Bolivia reiterated its reservations. On the 'green economy', it rejected it as a new model and tool for the privatisation of nature and society pretending to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication. It said that countries have the sovereign right to choose their own approaches, visions, models and tools for sustainable development.

On the question of energy subsidies in paragraph 225 of the document, Bolivia reserved its position on the rationalisation of inefficient subsidies of fossil sources of energy, as this implied a restructuring of its tax system and royalties, and was contrary to its constitution. It could not accept any kind of assessment, monitoring, reporting and reviewing of its national energy policies and measures that affected its sovereignty.

On 'innovative financing mechanisms', Bolivia had reservations that they could imply or be interpreted as sources from carbon markets, water markets and rights, payments for environmental services, and schemes for the commodification of the functions and cycles of nature. On the issue of 'food security', it preferred the notion of 'food sovereignty'.

Morocco stressed the importance of the SDGs and the strategy for financing sustainable development.

South Korea, represented by Ambassador Kim Sook, who was one of the co-chairs of the conference preparatory process, said that Rio was a success and reaffirmed the strong commitment to sustainable development and laid a firm foundation for a sustainable future for all.

He said that success will not be complete until all the follow-up actions are undertaken successfully and stressed the importance of the GA in relation to the development of the SDGs and in the strengthening of the institutional framework for sustainable development.

Brazil, represented by its Ambassador Ribeiro, recalled the many important outcomes of the conference.

She referred to the launch of the SDGs; the high-level political forum that will coordinate the follow-up process; the strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); the adoption of the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns; the decision to launch broader measures of progress to complement the GDP; and further steps on sustainable use and conservation of marine biodiversity areas beyond national jurisdiction.

She also referred to the mandates for various processes including the open working group on the SDGs, effective financing strategy and recommendations from the Secretary-General for a facilitation mechanism on technology development and transfer.

The European Union welcomed the creation of the high-level political forum in relation to the institutional framework for sustainable development, the upgrading of UNEP and the recognition that the 'green economy' is a useful tool and promising pathway. It also stressed the importance of the implementation and operationalisation of the decisions.

Japan also stressed the need to ensure coherence and integration between the SDG and the MDG processes.

The United States said that the outcome of Rio made real advances in sustainable development and reiterated that it had additional observations and clarification regarding the outcome document which it had submitted for the official records of the conference. It did not elaborate further on its observations and clarification. ◆

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COVER

The dangers of the financialisation of biodiversity conservation

There were concerns among a number of developing countries that if there is no holistic approach to biodiversity and the functions of ecosystems, and economic valuation of nature is given undue prominence, then the Rio+20 outcome may cause more damage to nature and threaten the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. Instead of delivering financing for biodiversity, a range of proposed and experimental market-based 'innovative mechanisms' could lead to another financial bubble and more inequities.

Sian Sullivan

WHEN nature is viewed in monetary terms, is it the nature that is valued, or the money? And what implications does this have for ecosystems and equity, given a financialised economy that rewards money products and their brokers, and that tends towards speculative and volatile dynamics?

The current biodiversity crisis is giving rise to calls for a massive mobilisation of financial resources to conserve biodiversity, and to reduce the drivers of biodiversity loss. The possibility for 'innovative mechanisms' to assist with resource mobilisation needs is included in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity (2011-2020) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This has generated a fizz of interest around what might constitute 'innovative financing mechanisms' for biodiversity.

At the same time, much attention is directed to questions of how much nature is worth, and of how this worth might be signalled through prices that move decision-making in directions that are more ecologically sustainable. The recent UN programme on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) gives added impetus to the incorporation of monetised ecological values into national and corporate decision-making and accounting practices, and is welcomed as such in the CBD's current Strategic Plan. Financial support for TEEB comes from the European Commission, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Japan.

The financialisation of nature can displace local eco-cultural knowledge, practices and values which may be more benign for biodiversity.

Accounting for nature in terms of 'natural capital' and 'ecosystem services' also creates wealth-generating opportunities through the possibility that proxies for conserved or restored non-human nature can be mobilised as capital-bearing assets. This reflects a 'Green Economy' ideology proposing that social equity and environmental sustainability are compatible with further economic growth and entrepreneurial activity. A pillar of this ideology is the conversion of nature health and harm into capital assets that can be traded and financialised, and requires the following:

Numerical representation. First, nature needs to be conceptually 'cut up' into units that can be represented as numbers. These numbers, often referred to as 'metrics', act as surrogate or proxy measures for valued aspects of ecosystems. Numerical representation reduces ecosystem complexity to create apparent equivalence and commensurability between different locations and times. Through this, trade-offs between sites of development and sites of conservation become possible.

Monetisation. This is the process whereby something is conceived of in monetary terms, and thus behaves as a commodity that can be exchanged for a monetary payment. The use of metrics for turning aspects of non-human nature into numerical scores helps generate monetary figures for use in cost-benefit analyses and cognate economic models. As noted by economists, these can produce monetised values that, whilst useful, may be ad hoc, unreliable, and even deceptive.

The state as market facilitator. Legal markets require state participation in numerous ways. In environmental markets for conservation, the state provides regulatory frameworks to generate demand, creates terms attractive to investors and entrepreneurs through tax breaks and subsidies, and can underwrite loans bound with nature assets to make these investable by the private sector. These processes enable measures of nature health and harm to become marketised, capitalised and financialised in various ways:

Trading nature. Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) are considered to compensate for economic opportunity costs in contexts where environmental uses are altered so as to conserve the integrity of particular ecosystem functions. PES might take the form of relatively simple direct payments for transformed behaviour so that ecosystem service managers maintain a defined environmental good. Examples include water users paying upstream farmers not to engage in practices that might damage water quality downstream, or payments to tropical forest dwellers for the maintenance of carbon stored in trees constructed as an 'offset' for industrial carbon dioxide emissions. Many existing national ecosystem services markets are maintained through substantial government subsidies. New legislative structures also make it possible for developers to offset new environmental harms, through purchasing conservation activity on formally owned land areas elsewhere, and thereby trading environmental harm for environmental health. Examples include species and wetland mitigation banking in the USA, habitat banking in the UK, and various biodiversity offset schemes globally, all of which trade fungible units of species, habitats and biodiversity.

Nature markets. The conversion of nature aspects into numerical scores associated with monetary payments enables markets in conservation indicators. To create and service these markets, as well as to facilitate 'price discovery' through linking buyers and sellers, voluntary market exchanges for conservation measures currently are being established by nature brokers and environmental-financial entrepreneurs. Examples include the US 'Earth Exchange' of Mission Markets, and the UK's Environment Bank Ltd, through which conservation credits can be traded as commodities. The prospect of financial gain from these markets is attracting large entrepreneurial investors.

Bonding nature. Once elements of nature have been conceived as monetised units, they can also be leveraged as a new class of capital asset. As such, they may become the collateral for capital-releasing loans bonded with the designated monetary value of the underlying nature aspect. New environmental bond structures are suggested for the 'frontloading' of predicted future incomes from conserved ecosystems, which would act as collateral for loans by private investors and multilateral donors. This would connect investor finance now with infrastructural developments considered in time to enhance environmental sustainability and to generate financial returns. 'REDD+ bonds', for example, would permit the mobilisation of predicted future payments for expected emission reductions provided by standing forests under the United Nations' REDD+ mechanism (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) to act as collateral for loans to finance upfront investments in REDD+ and other environmental infrastructure. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Global Canopy Programme, the Climate Bonds Initiative, Goldman Sachs and the private bankers Lombard Odier similarly propose that through 'forest bonds' guaranteed by the national governments of forest-rich countries, the 'natural capital' of tropical forests could be 'materialised' to leverage finance for development from global capital markets. It is unclear who would own collateralised (i.e., pledged) 'natural capital' in the case of possible payment defaults.

Nature derivatives. As observed for the recently created market in tradable carbon units, the big money tends not to be in the credits themselves, but in poorly regulated voluntary and bespoke over-the-counter (OTC) trades in financialised products derived from these credits. As units of conserved or restored nature are leveraged as 'natural capital' in environmental markets, bonds and mortgages, these might be similarly 'securitised' into derived money-bearing products. This could transform the risk of species extinction and biodiversity decline, for example, into speculative opportunities. It is unclear what implications this would have for the 'underlying', which in this case could be credits for species populations, biodiversity and habitats.

These are significant inroads into the financialisation of biodiversity conservation, which may contribute to a scaling-up of financial resourcing for the sustenance of biodiversity. But these innovations also generate concern:

Conservation markets such as habitat banking require development-related ecological harm for their existence, so as to maintain the sorts of prices that might fund the conservation considered to offset development-related environmental harm. This generates a perverse situation in which ecological harm ensures market values for conservation, such that degradation is needed in order to sustain market demand for this conservation mechanism.

The raising of economic rents for land areas through the enhanced monetary values commanded by credit-bearing indicators of nature health may act to displace people from land areas as governments and investors seek to 'grab' these new values. Such enhancement of inequity is both unethical and may amplify the drivers of biodiversity degradation by diluting the possibility of collective action in support of conservation policies. The legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples and local communities will also be impacted.

Finally, conversion of complex landscapes into numerical and monetised metrics instrumentalises peoples and non-human natures so that these conform to a homogenising system in which money is the mediator of all value. This can displace local eco-cultural knowledge, practices and values which may be more benign for biodiversity, thereby reducing options for transferring maximum socio-ecological diversity to our descendants. ◆

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Tourism: For next generations?

Rethinking the future we want

Headlining tourism as a 'sustainable sector' reflects poorly on the 'green economy' concept embedded in the Rio+20 outcome document, says *Alison M Johnston*.

Our crisis of conscience

THE United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – also known as Rio+20 or the Earth Summit – has crystallised the priority issues needing our care. Neither the concept of sustainability incubated and endorsed in Rio 20 years ago, or this year's recycled idea of a 'green economy', has safe consensus. On 30 March, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a plea for integrity within the process.[1]

'Most tourism is a pronounced form of consumerism.'

The Earth Summit evokes a degree of awe, but also comes at a time of fatigue in global crisis management. We must be mindful that this does not suppress our judgment. The once-a-decade summit is meant to harness the wisdom of past dialogues on environmental stewardship – in particular, how to resolve or mitigate the core questions of social justice (for example, poverty, equity and human rights). This being the third summit, there is some presumption that the visions offered are well distilled. Tourism, singled out as a 'green economy', must be okay.

Tourism: Tangled truths

Who could object to eager tourists with pockets full of cash? That is a question that sums up the pivotal UN Earth Summit of 2012. A seemingly harmless question, but potentially lethal to fragile places and vulnerable peoples worldwide which are regarded as exotic attractions or resources for industry growth. Still, it is embedded in Rio+20 action plans as if consenting is a given.

This casual assumption that tourism belongs in our crisis-response toolbox reveals just how unhinged the Rio decision-making process has become. We are expected to endorse an industry whose infrastructure and practices are a primary cause of global warming, environmental degradation and culture loss globally. Let us not be so quick to minimise the issues.

The two paragraphs on tourism in the Rio+20 outcome document, 'The Future We Want', should be a red flag to us all. Titled 'Sustainable Tourism', this section emphasises tourism as a pathway for meeting and balancing multilateral sustainable development goals, as if the industry was already vetted and pre-approved – and exemplary in its evolution. The text highlights several tourism potentials (alleged benefits, far from corroborated as an industry norm at the grassroots level), suggesting an aggregate of success stories worldwide. It implies not only that tourism will be allowed to grow unabatedly, but also that tourism investments should be fast-tracked. Global standards are sidestepped, as if tourism impacts on the biosphere are benign.

Within the 200 words on tourism, a major macroeconomic policy issue with many troubling dimensions (notably, lax provisions for cultural rights) and unresolved risks (foremost, climate change) is packaged as a solution. This text stands out as the most dangerously abbreviated proclamation on tourism to hit the policy tarmac in a decade. If we endorse its glib assertions, we will turn this economy of vast scale into negligence of truly international proportions.

Headlining tourism as a 'sustainable' sector reflects poorly on the 'green economy' concept debated in Rio. Most tourism is a pronounced form of consumerism, even in its greenest attire. The tourism sector has long been chastised for misleading 'green' marketing, insincere 'green' gestures, and shallow 'green' reporting – as well as unsubstantiated claims of meaningful local engagement.

Let us examine some of the reasons why tourism merits more diligence.

Rethinking acceptable trade-offs

Tourism is both a complex social force and a multi-faceted industry, characterised by contradictions. On the surface it offers a convincing 'consumer pay' model for conservation and poverty alleviation, through ecotourism and other variations billed as 'responsible', 'conscious' or 'ethical'. But internationally the tourism industry's operations and growth destabilise climate, with unfathomable future costs and implications.[2] Meanwhile, its profit margins (even most 'fair trade' scenarios) often rely on poverty; its business practices (including most 'alternative' models) have normalised human rights violations; its mere presence (often mirroring underlying racism or other systemic discrimination) may trigger culture loss.[3]

Tourists on safari in Kenya's Maasai Mara national reserve. On ecological grounds alone, claims about 'sustainable' tourism warrant scrutiny.

This is the global context of tourism. It is hard to reconcile this bundle of serious impacts – and other known tourism by-products in popular hubs and destinations (such as child exploitation, food inflation, water shortages, groundwater pollution, ecosystem degradation, sacred sites desecration) – with UN policy now generously endorsing tourism. Although some photogenic partnerships balancing tourism business with other community-level needs, interests and rights do exist, these tend to be very localised and carry their own inherent inconsistencies (for instance, reliance on air travel which is a primary source of greenhouse gases[4]). The net impacts of tourism implore 'Caution!'.

Revisiting tourism's 'green' image

On ecological grounds alone, claims about 'sustainable' tourism warrant scrutiny.

In 2002 the UN International Year of Ecotourism took place, amid much international protest. Several advocacy groups tracking industry trends urged the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to stop promoting 'eco' tourism.[5] They warned that too many community-based evaluations of tourism contradict the glossy promotional reports from governments, conservation organisations and industry-linked think-tanks. Their message to UNEP was to operationalise the precautionary principle of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Many studies echo this message. In March 2004, *New Scientist* journal examined commercial wildlife viewing, publicising the stress and lingering trauma to animals – evident in altered migration routes, disrupted feeding patterns and reduced fertility. Afterward, The International Ecotourism Society (USA) admitted: 'These findings undermine the premise that ecotourism is an ecologically sustainable activity.'[6] Despite such revelations, UNEP and the CBD Secretariat still promote tourism as a preferred means of financing biodiversity conservation.

We must distinguish between very small-scale and isolated 'success stories' – such as volunteer programmes offered to paying travellers by the Cheetah Conservation Fund (Namibia) or Orangutan Foundation International (Borneo) to finance endangered species interventions, involving and supported by local peoples – and the widespread systemic failures represented by bulging Galapagos nature tours, over-subscribed Everest treks and Maasai Mara safari traffic jams. Worldwide, industrial 'eco' tourism is far off course and often without moral compass.

The clearest baseline for tourism remains the Berlin Declaration on Sustainable Tourism (1997), signed by UNEP, the CBD Secretariat and Global Environment Facility as well as several countries. This declaration states: 'Tourism should be restricted, and where necessary prevented, in ecologically and culturally sensitive areas.'

The Rio+20 outcome document, 'The Future We Want', should reinforce this standard for the tourism sector and support its implementation. The thrust should be specific safeguards for biological and cultural diversity, not vague permissiveness for industry.

Threats to cultural sustainability

The question of how suitable tourism is as a 'green' economy is best understood in relation to indigenous peoples. Globally, most ecosystems targeted for 'eco' tourism in its various forms and reincarnations are not simply wilderness, national parks or new frontiers, but longstanding cultural landscapes which are the ancestral lands of indigenous peoples.

This close correlation between cultural diversity and biological diversity is well documented and a core premise of the CBD.[7] Since the first UN Earth Summit in 1992, governments have meticulously mapped the location of world resources. Compilations produced by World Wildlife Fund International and Terralingua (www.terralingua.org) show that approximately 90% of 'what's left' globally lies in indigenous territories.[8] Consequently, indigenous peoples are under pressure to either make way for industry, relinquish traditional livelihoods for generic jobs, or participate firsthand in commercialising lands kept intact as spiritual trusts over millennia.

Among indigenous peoples, tourism is not necessarily compatible with customary systems for conservation, or with cultural revitalisation. It may stimulate community economic development and reinvigorate customary livelihoods over the short term, by creating markets for culturally grounded services, products, exhibits and cross-cultural education. However, it frequently leads to or deepens economic dependency and cultural assimilation – because most funding agreements, business relationships and management frameworks are negotiated or imposed under the duress of colonial poverty. The outcomes can be devastating to culture, including the erosion of language, customary practices and cultural knowledge systems central to inter-generational governance (and part of the indivisible heritage of indigenous peoples[9]).

Internationally, there are some models of tourism based on indigenous peoples' right to self-determination. Wildland Adventures (USA) stands out for the integrity of its partnership with the Maasai people in Kenya, fostering respectful inter-cultural visits. Maiwa (Canada) has developed cultural tours in collaboration with tribal peoples across India, showcasing their textile expertise and opening new markets for retail sales. That said, the Cofán people (Ecuador) remain both the glowing success story and cautionary tale. After crafting their own home-grown tourism economy that could co-exist with and support Cofán culture, they lost this financial pillar of government practically overnight due to economic globalisation: namely, changing political directives and economic policies from afar.[10]

Countering the few success stories, there are countless examples of business interests and conservation groups commandeering markets for 'eco' tourism and cultural tourism from the resident indigenous people(s), with help from discriminatory regulatory systems, as well as from discriminatory industry and governance structures. Indigenous peoples often find themselves:

- treated as either an accessory to tourism or the featured product of pseudo 'cultural' tourism (bringing 'value-added' profits for industry but serious psychological impacts and institutionalised poverty locally)
- relocated forcibly from 'parks', excluded from meaningful roles in 'protected areas' management, targeted for biopiracy, and/or deprived of access to the lands and resources necessary for cultural health and for existing as a people
- unable to continue practices integral to their culture and society (especially in relation to customary law) when sacred sites are annexed as star attractions.

Meanwhile, many indigenous peoples are on the frontlines of climate change, losing their traditional means of subsistence or becoming climate refugees.[11] Others are being displaced and/or marginalised by the carbon offset schemes and biofuel plantations associated with supposedly 'sustainable' tourism.

Tourism dynamics at iconic 'world heritage' sites such as Machu Picchu (Peru) and the Angkor temples (Cambodia) illustrate the magnitude of industry problems, plus the extent of inaccurate reporting and social exclusion caused by existing development models.

These trends do not inspire confidence in the loose 'sustainable' tourism prescriptions of Rio+20. We must ensure that cultural rights, and human rights generally, are central to standard setting for tourism. The free and prior informed consent of involved or affected indigenous peoples is a vital prerequisite for 'sustainable tourism'.[12]

Foundations for visionary policy

It would be an indefensible breach of common sense and science to include tourism as a UN sustainable development goal (SDG).

The tourism industry already has had a long season of misusing 'green' concepts for marketing, to drive and justify harmful patterns of growth. Starting in the 1970s scholars warned of the serious consequences.[13] Now an entire generation of expert dialogue has passed, without adequate regulatory breakthroughs.

The Rio+20 debates on tourism give us an opportunity to address serious oversights. According to the Center for Tourism Research & Development in India, most popular ecotourism sites lose their unique features within 15 years.[14] Mass tourism associated with cultural 'world heritage' centres, meanwhile, generally aggravates grassroots poverty and accelerates culture loss locally (further threatening biodiversity).[15] With biocultural diversity so endangered, we are called to take notice and to put real safeguards in place, without favouritism toward industry.

It is alarming that the very serious bundle of conservation and social justice issues entwined with tourism has been crammed into two short paragraphs at Rio+20, lacking balanced analysis and appropriate safeguards. The process must be corrected without delay, by using available tools.

In the Rio+20 outcome document, 'The Future We Want', basic safeguards with respect to tourism should include:

- Commitment to deep systemic and structural changes in the tourism industry, in accordance with the Rio Principles established in 1992
- Balanced analysis, inclusive of inter-generational considerations (e.g., climate change), key cultural rights issues and full ecological accounting
- Baselines meeting or exceeding minimum rights (both individual and collective) summarised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples[16]
- Strengthened process for standard setting, honouring the complete framework of human rights established in international law
- Interim measures congruent with the precautionary principle, to prevent harm and avoid foreclosing options for future generations
- Criteria, indicators and early warning systems fully operationalising the precautionary principle, to truly safeguard cultural and biological diversity
- Specific and detailed protections for cultural sustainability,[17] mainstreamed into all decision making
- Clear parameters for sustainable production, sustainable consumption and sustainable use based on the best available wisdom, including voices of youth
- Emphasis on child rights, including the specific cultural rights of indigenous children, as a window for meeting our inter-generational re-

sponsibility

• Strategies for clarifying what constitutes 'sustainable' tourism previously recommended to the UN by indigenous peoples and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through parallel processes[18]

• Active linkages to guidance forthcoming from the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Civil Society Reflection Group and The Elders council

• Reporting to the Expert Group of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and UN Independent Expert on Cultural Rights.

Above all, there must be commitment to establishing an open, equitable and transparent process within the UN to harmonise tourism standards with all applicable international law.

Conclusion: Our call to discipline

Tourism must be responsibly addressed as a theme of Rio+20. This means avoiding a discussion so constrained that the process itself endangers future generations. We must commit to:

• addressing tourism not as one sector, but as a set of high-impact activities that are highly cross-sectoral and therefore warrant our urgent attention

• learning from case studies that are genuine community-based evaluations, which are guided by both science and sacred knowledge (including customary law)

• ensuring that the dialogue process itself is not negligent or rights-infringing

• delivering the deepest expression of cultural rights and intergenerational care.

Let us recall the World Scientists' Warning to Humanity (1992) of Nobel Laureates and the UN Cry of the Earth Conference (1993) calling for our uncompromising care. The convergence of science and 'traditional knowledge' is highly significant. We have one decade at most to produce visionary and concrete action balancing our mutual rights and responsibilities – or unbearable costs will accrue to children globally. Negligence is not an option. ◆

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Endnotes

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17 For a definition see: Johnston, Alison M. *Honouring Our Diversity - Bringing Aboriginal Child Rights to Life Within Urban Child Welfare Policy & Practise*. Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services, Canada, 2012, p. 34.

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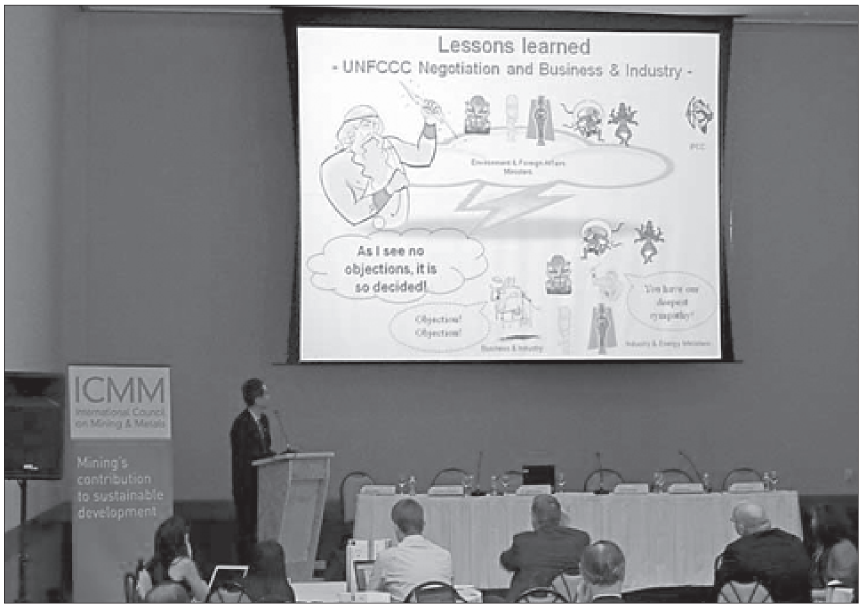
Rio, corporate power and the threat to democracy

Rio+20 was, among other things, a demonstration of corporate power, says *Julio Godoy*. But the threat posed by corporate lobbyists extends well beyond the UN.



Corporate Europe Observatory

A presentation session held on 19 June – which was designated 'Business Day' – on the sidelines of the Rio+20 summit. An NGO report has detailed the extraordinary level of businesses' influence over the positions of national governments in multilateral negotiations.

OVER a month has passed since the United Nations Rio+20 summit on sustainable development concluded in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, but the world still appears to be unaware of one of the most important statements made during the conference that drew some 50,000 delegates from all over the world.

Louise Kantrow, permanent representative of the International Chamber of Commerce, received thunderous applause when she told her audience on 19 June that 'businesses are taking the lead' in global negotiations on climate change and sustainable development.

For many observers, Kantrow's blunt words highlighted just how strong a grip private multinational companies have upon supposedly democratic processes.

In a report aptly titled 'Reclaim the UN from corporate capture', the environmental organisation Friends of the Earth (FoE) complained that '[t]here are ... real concerns about the increasing influence of major corporations and business lobby groups within the UN.'

The report went on to detail the extraordinary level of businesses' influence over the positions of national governments in multilateral negotiations.

'Business representatives dominate certain UN discussion spaces and some UN bodies; business groups are given a privileged advisory role; UN officials move back and forth [from] the private sector; and – last but not least – UN agencies are increasingly financially dependent on the private sector.'

One blatant example of this 'corporate capture' of the UN is the Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell, which, thanks to senior executive representatives in several corporate lobbying groups, was omnipresent during the Rio+20 negotiations.

Shell sent delegates to the discussions and roundtables of the abovementioned International Chamber of Commerce, the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association, the UN Global Compact, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and the International Emissions Trading Association.

Yet, according to Paul de Clerck, campaign coordinator at FoE, 'More than one year has passed since the UN presented its report on Shell's pollution of Ogoniland [in Nigeria]. But we are still waiting for a comprehensive plan from Shell to clean up its mess.'

The first step recommended by the UN was the establishment of a $1 billion emergency fund to clean up the region. 'So far, Shell has committed to nothing, despite its participation in all kind[s] of environmental and sustainable development debates,' de Clerck told Inter Press Service (IPS).

'It is not acceptable that companies like Shell should be in the driving seat of processes for sustainable development,' Nnimmo Bassey, of FoE International, told IPS. 'That is a recipe for disaster for our planet and peoples. Corporate polluters should not [be drafting] laws, they should face the laws.'

But the UN is not the only international institution threatened by the influence of multinational businesses.

Tightly woven groups of professional go-betweens and loyal supporters of multinationals who have passed through the revolving doors that link governments and private corporations are now facing growing scrutiny from civil society activists.

In Europe, the head of the Euro-

The President of the European Central Bank Mario Draghi *(pic)* **is facing a formal inquiry by the European Union ombudsman because of his membership in an international banking lobby group.**

pean Central Bank (ECB), Mario Draghi, is facing a formal inquiry by the European Union (EU) ombudsman because of his membership in a well-known international banking lobby group.

On 24 July, the ombudsman's office announced that it was launching the investigation following allegations that Draghi's membership in the so-called Group of 30 'is incompatible with the independence, reputation and integrity of the ECB'.

The EU has been the subject of multiple complaints, because, according to civil society groups, many of its agencies allow a revolving door to admit and dispatch senior executives who bring corporate agendas to democratic fora.

One of the leading critics of this policy, the Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), a multinational and public policy watchdog group, claims that many 'senior European decision-makers leave office and go straight into lobby jobs, or [alternately] lobbyists join the EU institutions'.

In such cases, Olivier Hoedeman of CEO told IPS, 'the risk of significant conflicts of interest is great, undermining democratic, public-interest decision-making.'

According to Hoedeman, CEO 'is working with the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation to challenge the revolving door and to demand that it is effectively regulated'.

CEO was the first group to complain about Draghi's membership in the Group of 30, whose members include heavy-hitters in the international banking sector like William C Dudley, former managing director at Goldman Sachs and former president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

European activists and analysts have been growing more anxious about the influence of private investment banks on public financial policies, especially as the European sovereign debt crisis continues to spiral out of control.

An oil spill at a facility owned by petroleum giant Shell in Ogoniland, Nigeria. Shell has still not provided a comprehensive plan to clean up the polluted region.

As CEO put it, 'Given the euro crisis, the huge bailout operations of big banks, and the ongoing debate on how to regulate banks in the light of the financial crisis, it should be obvious that safeguards are needed to ensure that the President of the European Central Bank remains independent.'

CEO argues that Draghi's participation 'in a closed, club-like structure with representatives from big international private banks could damage the integrity and reputation of the ECB'.

Indeed, Goldman Sachs' links to numerous present officials at ministries of finance and other state agencies in Europe are extraordinary and worrisome. In a recent debate in Berlin, sociologist Wolfgang Streeck, director of the prestigious Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, denounced what he called 'the diarchy in financial capitalism'.

Streeck said that European democratic states are presently suffering under the dictatorship of the deregulated financial markets, controlled by corporations like Goldman Sachs, while at the same time, most of their institutions are led by former executives of those very same corporations.

A salient example of Streeck's thesis is the current, non-elected Italian head of government Mario Monti, who was the international adviser to Goldman Sachs from 2005 until 2011. In Goldman Sachs' own words, Monti's mission was to provide advice 'on European business and major public policy initiatives worldwide'.

Given that Goldman Sachs and similar investment banks are pivotal in managing the sovereign debt of numerous European countries, it seems almost absurd that they are simultaneously preparing speculation schemes against the solvency of those very same states.

Following the announcement that the EU ombudsman had launched an official investigation into Draghi's professional past, CEO has urged him to step down as president of the ECB.

In a letter addressed to Draghi, the group wrote, 'Any president of the ECB has to make it absolutely clear that he or she is not under the influence of the financial lobby at any time. In particular at this dramatic point in the history of the EU, with the euro crisis and an ailing banking sector – recipient of trillions of euros in aid – it is completely unacceptable if doubt can be cast on the independence of the Bank's president from the financial lobby.' – *IPS* ◆

No strategy for civilisation in crisis

The Rio+20 summit ended without a glimmer of a strategy for humanity on how it can overcome the global ecological crisis. Civil society critics who advocate a new paradigm of production and consumption as the answer to the crisis have yet to clearly delineate this alternative or set out the strategy for realising it.

Mario Osava

THE Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul in 1996 was one of the international meetings most open to civil society participation.

Its conclusions, published as a voluminous Plan of Action, collected thousands of proposals and recommendations from participants.

But Jaime Lerner, the urban planner who decades ago was responsible for innovative management in the southern Brazilian city of Curitiba, said the document 'lacked strategies' to bring its aims into reality.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, or Rio+20, ended on 22 June without a glimmer of a strategy for humanity to exit the trap it has fallen into.

Proposals from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), meeting in a parallel forum, were excluded from the official outcome document. Indeed, how could a conference of national governments, 99% of them from countries with capitalist economies, swallow the anti-capitalist ideas of the civil society forum?

The final declaration of the People's Summit says, 'We assume the urgent challenge of putting a brake on the new phase of capitalism's re-composition,' in which only 'the people, organised and mobilised, can free the world from the control of the corporations and of financial capital.'

The main contribution of Rio+20 may be to provide a shock of realism to stimulate reflection and the realisation of previously unrecognised facts, such as the pretentiousness of calling the official outcome document 'The Future We Want', or convening a 'People's Summit' as the parallel event in Guanabara Bay, suggesting a hierarchy which the same 'people' reject when they meet in the World Social Forum.

The search for new ways forward has already begun. A movement launched on 23 June in Rio de Janeiro, named 'Rio+20+one day' or 'Day After', is aiming for 'a new social contract for the 21st century', based on the ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the humanist philosopher whose tricentennial falls this year.

The initiative of Carlos Lopes, executive director of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), 'Day After' was launched in the presence of prominent personalities like Rajendra Pachauri, chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and economist Ignacy Sachs, who coined the term 'eco-development'.

The main contribution of Rio+20 may be to provide a shock of realism to stimulate reflection.

There is a definite consensus on the need for a new paradigm of production and consumption. However, the new pattern remains undefined, and so do the means of attaining it, both questions that lead to inevitable disagreements. No one, not even the anti-capitalists at the People's Summit, is advocating a social revolution.

The impasse reached at Rio+20 puts a check on the idea of relying on autonomous action. Many people call for the present world leadership to exercise 'statesmanlike boldness and courage' to solve 'the crisis of civilisation', which combines environmental, economic, social and ethical crises. But do we want to see the return of enlightened despots?

The impeachment and dismissal of Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo during the Rio+20 conference showed that presidents, too, have their limits. They must respond to the real interests of national society and to the correlation of forces behind the political and economic elites, not to opinion polls in which a majority of respondents say they have environmental concerns.

The decision of US President Barack Obama not to attend Rio+20 was attributed to the risks he faces in the forthcoming November elections. To take on environmental commitments would likely threaten his re-election.

The divergence between short-term and long-term political dynamics on environmental issues might pose another hindrance to taking definite action on the challenges. But prolonging mandates is out of the question, and recent examples show the increasing intolerance of perpetuation in power.

A new institutionality seems essential to confront the challenges to humanity, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, scarcity of drinking water, ocean acidification and desertification.

The Rio+20 conference weakened multilateralism, in favour of the preference in the Americas for national initiatives and against binding global agreements, former Brazilian environment minister Marina Silva concluded.

The United Nations was trapped by corporate interests, according to many other activists. Therefore, the creation of a new environmental agency in the UN orbit, modelled on the World Health Organisation (WHO) or the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which was the main proposal for an environmental governance structure, does not appear very promising.

No significant progress was made on the issue of financing sustainable development either. Emerging nations proposed creating a $30 billion fund, but this was vetoed, principally by the United States.

Yet at the meeting of the Group of 20 rich and emerging countries (G20) held almost simultaneously in Mexico, a contribution of $456 billion was agreed for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), of which $75 billion were pledged by the emerging BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), sending a clear signal that the priority is to 'save the banks', activists complained.

Given the complexity of global problems, idle repetition of the need for new consumption patterns is a waste of time. There are measures well known to be effective, like the elimination of subsidies for fossil fuels, which totalled $409 billion last year, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Forecasts indicate that these subsidies will rise to $660 billion in 2020. Why has this incentive to destroy life not even been reduced, as was achieved in regard to tobacco?

Another action that would have significant results for the environment, society and health is the distribution of efficient wood-burning cook stoves, which have already been developed. Even better would be to use alternative fuels instead of wood, which is used for energy by three billion people worldwide.

People's organisations, such as NGOs, trade unions and social movements, all with their own specific goals, lack a common strategy to convert effective socio-environmental experiences into public policies, and to influence the national and global decisions that are key to the future of humanity.

Exploring pathways to political effectiveness – not including political parties, which have been generally ruled out because of their failures – is an exercise that deserves greater efforts on the part of activists.

– IPS ◆

Military intervention in Syria would be disastrous for its people

Syrians opposed to intervention are ignored by a de facto alliance against the 'Shia crescent' between the US, Saudi Arabia, Israel and al-Qaida.

Sami Ramadani

US general Wesley Clark, the former supreme commander of allied forces in Europe, once revealed that within weeks of the 9/11 terrorist atrocity the then secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld described how 'we're going to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finishing off, Iran'. After invading Afghanistan of course.

The 2003 occupation of Iraq, however, did not go according to plan, and Israel was defeated in Lebanon in 2006. The downfall of US-Saudi allies Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt raised more alarms, leading to the Nato bombing of Libya. Today's target is Syria, which is at the heart of what Jordan's King Abdullah called the 'Shia crescent': Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Reconsideration of priorities

It is opposition by the 'crescent' to hegemony by the US and Israel, rather than religion or human rights, that worries Washington and its dictatorial allies in the region. For it wasn't very long ago that the Saudi rulers bankrolled the so-called 'Alawite-Shia' regime of former Syrian president Hafez al-Assad and had good relations with 'Shia' Iran under the shah's dictatorship. Today it still backs Iraq's former pro-US Shia prime minister Ayad Allawi against Nouri al-Maliki, the current Shia prime minister. And the US Congress has been pampering the Iranian Mujahideen e-Khalq, a 'Shia' organisation classified by the US itself as a terrorist group.

It is now obvious that a strategic reconsideration of US-Saudi-Israeli regional priorities followed big US losses in Iraq and rising American popular opposition to US wars. In his 2007 *New Yorker* essay, the journalist Seymour Hersh related that senior US officials changed strategy not only in Iraq, but also in Lebanon and Syria: 'In Lebanon, the administration has co-operated with Saudi Arabia's government, which is Sunni [Wahhabi], in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hezbollah, the Shia organisation that is backed by Iran. The US has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to al-Qaida.'

The Pentagon is 'fine-tuning' US military options against Syria and the CIA is organising the rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA). Picture shows FSA members in the city of Aleppo.

But it was deemed that Syria and Iran were 'more dangerous' than al-Qaida supporters. Congressional procedures were circumvented 'by leaving the execution or the funding to the Saudis'.

Iran has also officially pointed the finger at an Israeli 'terrorist training base' in Iraqi Kurdistan, which is a major route for intervention in Syria.

US and Nato tolerance of al-Qaida former terrorists was evident in Libya. And with al-Qaida officially declaring war on the Syrian regime, the de facto US-Saudi-al-Qaida-Israeli marriage of convenience against the anti-US 'crescent' is quite startling. It is an alliance not too dissimilar to the one that waged war on the communist 'infidels' in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Many Iraqis also believed that the US-led occupation forces followed the same strategy by turning a blind eye to al-Qaida-type sectarian terrorism in Iraq, because it weakened patriotic resistance to occupation and encouraged divisive sectarian conflict.

As the threat to their rule from the uprisings moved ever closer, engulfing neighbouring Yemen and Bahrain, headquarters of the US 5th fleet, the Saudi and Qatari rulers put their intense rivalry to one side and moved to violently crush the Bahraini people's uprising, and to undermine the democratic protest movements in Yemen and the entire region. Backed by the CIA and Turkey, their favoured means were throwing petro-dollars at selected opposition factions and militarising the conflicts. Meanwhile, the Pentagon is 'fine-tuning' US military options against Syria and the CIA is organising the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and backing the Syrian National Council (SNC).

But what goes unreported in relation to Syria is that democratic opposition organisations, at the receiving end of decades of regime repression and probably representing the will of the majority of Syrians, strongly opposed the militarisation of the protests. They argued that militarisation weakened the growing mass movement for radical democratic change, left the door wide open for foreign intervention, threatened the social fabric of Syrian society and helped Israeli forces occupying the Syrian Golan Heights, where Israeli tanks are an hour's drive away from Damascus. They also draw lessons from the destruction of Iraq and the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees who fled Iraq's fires to Syria after the US-led invasion.

However, the media in the West and in the Arab world, especially the influential al-Jazeera TV, owned by the Qatari ruling family, act as the cheerleaders for the pro-intervention factions of the SNC and the FSA, founded in and logistically backed by Nato member Turkey.

All this sadly reminds me of the drums of the Iraq war and the media circulation of made-up stories peddled by Blair, Bush and pro-intervention Iraqi factions, while the anti-Saddam but anti-war Iraqis were marginalised.

There was the WMD big lie of course. But also the lies that Iraqi soldiers tossed away babies from their incubators, and that Saddam used people-shredding machines. Murdoch's *Sun* newspaper editor boasted: 'Public opinion swung behind Tony Blair as voters learned how Saddam fed dissidents feet first into industrial shredders.'

Those who want Nato to 'humanely' intervene say that Syria is not Iraq. They are right; Syria will be much worse. They need to tell us what will happen to Syria's 25 minority ethnic and religious groups, including the 10% Christians and 10% Alawites, if some of the Saudi-Qatari-backed bloodcurdling clerics come to power. Or to millions of Syrian women, who have immeasurably more rights than in absolutist Saudi Arabia. Or to the Iraqi refugees still in Syria. ◆

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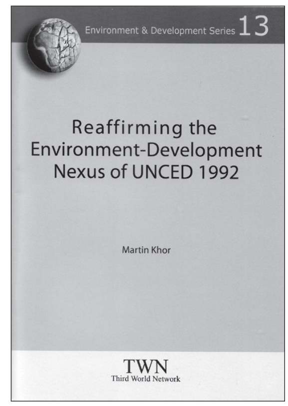
Reaffirming the Environment-Development Nexus of UNCED 1992

Martin Khor



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The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) ended with mixed feelings of euphoria, deep disappointment, concern about the future, and stirrings of hope.

Many of the Agenda 21 actions were not new but it was significant to collate together a comprehensive range of environment and development issues, put action programmes to them, and attach cost estimates for their implementation. Government leaders morally committed themselves to implement the agreed measures. In addition a finely balanced set of environmental obligations and development rights was achieved in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

Implementation was estimated at US$600 billion for the South alone, of which the external aid component was US$l25 billion. The South regained a high-profile place on the international agenda for development assistance and technology transfer. However, as the Earth Summit ended, there were doubts that the promises would be fulfilled. Today it is undeniable that the North has failed to deliver on the means of implementation: finance and technology.

Nevertheless UNCED saw the first global discourse on the environment-development nexus in the context of North-South relations.

In the current debate on "a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication", one of the two themes of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), there are concerns that lack of clarity and common understanding of the term "green economy" risks the substitution of the framework of sustainable development adopted at UNCED and a marginalisation of the social and economic dimensions. This booklet provides an account of the evolution of the UNCED approach to this nexus, and recalls the necessity of the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

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Legacies of the US invasion of Panama

Although more than two decades have passed since the 1989 US invasion of Panama, its legacy lives on in profound ways that continue to shape this Latin American state's domestic and foreign policy.

Julio Yao

The 1989 US invasion of Panama *(pic)* **paved the way for new forms of foreign domination, and the Panamanian people continue to suffer its legacy.**

ON 20 December 1989, former president George HW Bush ordered the invasion of Panama. The US 82nd Airborne division pummelled Panama City from the air, as US soldiers from the 193rd Brigade clashed in the streets with troops from the Panamanian Defence Forces (PDF) and the Dignity Battalions, a militia of workers and campesinos (peasants). Thousands of civilians were caught in the crossfire as the heavily populated El Chorrillo neighbourhood was set ablaze. By the time General Manuel Noriega surrendered on 3 January 1990, 23 US soldiers and 314 PDF troops had been officially killed in the fighting.[1] Civilian casualties were estimated in the thousands. According to an independent investigation by former US attorney general Ramsey Clark, as many as 7,000 people may have been killed.[2] Mass graves were uncovered after US troops had withdrawn, and over 15,000 civilians were displaced.

Despite the civilian body count, no Panamanian government since has authorised a commission to investigate the killings that took place during the foreign military aggression. No administration has attempted to demand reparations from the United States, nor filed a lawsuit against the United States before the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

Over 22 years later, the US 'Christmas invasion' of Panama is being lost to memory, yet its legacy lives on in profound ways that continue to shape both domestic and foreign policy in Panama.

On the day of the invasion, shortly after US troops began to move, Guillermo Endara was sworn in as Panamanian president, along with his vice presidents, Guillermo Ford and Ricardo Arias Calderón, at Fort Clayton, a US military base in the Panama Canal Zone. In a telling sign of their political allegiance, few Panamanian citizens were present at the swearing-in, and Panama's new leaders remained at the base for 36 hours.[3]

Dismantling the PDF

Following the invasion, and in obedience to the invading forces, the new Endara government dismantled the PDF on 10 February 1990, replacing it with the unarmed National Police. The new government also dissolved the PDF's intelligence bodies and its personnel and eliminated the military character of the police force, allowing the Bush administration to appropriate the PDF's weapons, vehicles, and equipment. Panama's ability to defend itself was further prohibited when Panama's Legislative Assembly approved a constitutional amendment in 1994 that barred the creation of a standing military force.

The importance of these decisions can only be understood by taking into account the pre-invasion functions and responsibilities of the PDF – a police force composed of 16,000 troops, including 4,000 lightly-armed soldiers that lacked air, naval, and artillery capabilities. The PDF had a professional intelligence service, in addition to the National Department of Investigations (DENI). The intelligence service was charged with protecting national security and sovereignty, as well as other strategic and geopolitical tasks, including counterintelligence and spying.

Among other things, the PDF was responsible for ensuring that the United States adhered to treaties between the two countries, and containing US influence generated by the

Undercover officers unload bags of seized drugs at a police station in Panama City. Drug trafficking in Panama has been on the rise – in 2009 the country ranked the third highest in drug seizures behind Ecuador and Colombia.

presence of 14 US military bases in Panama. It was tasked with monitoring and protecting national territory against interventions and aggressions, and regulating the movement of US troops. Finally, it supervised the state transfer of US-controlled Canal Zone areas to Panama, a process that began on 1 October 1979, as a result of the September 1977 treaties between US president Jimmy Carter and Panamanian leader Omar Torrijos, which set the timeline for the United States to return full sovereignty over the Panama Canal to Panama by 31 December 1999.

Apart from ensuring the United States' full respect for Panama's national sovereignty, the PDF carried out other strategic and geopolitical responsibilities, both nationally and internationally, which brought the defence force into contact with intelligence agencies in Cuba, Israel, the Soviet Union, Taiwan, and the United States. The PDF also maintained contact with national-liberation and insurgent movements, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the 19th of April Movement (M-19), and the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador, the Polisario Front in Morocco, and movements inside other nations including Libya.

Despite pressure from the US Southern Command – which was based in Panama through 1997 and charged with military operations across the region – the PDF supported the 1983 decision to expel the School of the Americas from Panama. The PDF was responsible for fighting drug cartels, which were prohibited from bringing drugs into the country. In fact, before the invasion, drug addiction, drug trafficking, and gangs did not constitute a national problem in Panama as they do today. Moreover, the homicide rate averaged 2.1 murders per 100,000 people in the 1970s and early 1980s. By the 1990s, however, that number jumped to nearly 11 murders per 100,000 people and in 2011 was 20 murders per 100,000 people.[4] Drug trafficking has also been on the rise. In 2009, Panama ranked the third highest in drug seizures behind Ecuador and Colombia, with over 58 tons of cocaine seized by police. That's up from almost six tons in 1994 and 13 tons in 1998.[5]

Four different administrations have been in power in Panama since the US invasion, and yet Panama still has no intelligence organisation. There is only a Security Council,which carries out illegal activities, including wiretapping, recording private conversations, making intimidating threats to protect the interests of foreign corporations, raising false charges against alleged enemies, and spying on the lives of private citizens.

Partial sovereignty

US interventions, military and otherwise, have been legalised by treaties that fail to meet constitutional requirements and international norms and principles, such as the Salas-Becker Agreement in 2002, which authorises free entry into national territory by land, water, and air; the Arias Cerjack-Watt Accord in 2003, which grants impunity to US war criminals; and the Escalona-Bolton Amendment in 2004, which allows the United States, along with two dozen other countries, to board Panamanian flagships on the open seas.

Currently, Panama has only partial sovereignty. The 1977 Neutrality Treaty, signed between Panama and the United States, prohibits any foreign military presence on Panamanian territory. Yet the treaty is not enforced because post-invasion governments have, without any formal agreement, allowed the United States to be responsible for the Canal's defence. Such is the case with the annual Panamax war-game manoeuvres that the US Southern Command coordinates with surrounding countries. In 2010, the manoeuvres were focused on a mock campesino-indigenous revolt (which ironically is almost precisely what is taking place with the Ngöbe-Buglé protests against mining and hydro projects on their indigenous reservation in western Panama). In 2011, 17 nations, including Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru, participated in the military exercises in Panama.[6]

As uncovered by WikiLeaks, Panama has established more than a dozen air and naval bases with US financing and material support. In turn, however, the United States uses these bases to fight drug trafficking and the

Panamanian and US forces taking part in the Panamax war games in 2011. The annual Panamax exercise is coordinated by the US Southern Command with surrounding countries.

Colombian insurgency, further violating the Neutrality Treaty. Furthermore, there is increasing militarisation of Panama's police forces, including the National Border Service (SENAFRONT) and segments of the National Police, through arming police with heavy weapons like rocket launchers and training officers in interrogation, torture, and counterterrorism techniques at the School of the Americas. These measures violate Panama's constitution, which forbids the formation of a standing military.

Unlike in the past, a ceasefire policy no longer exists along Panama's southern border with Colombia's FARC guerrillas. In the past this respect ensured decades of peaceful coexistence between Panamanians and Colombians. However, encouraged by the United States, on 7 September 2010, Panamanian president Ricardo Martinelli declared war on the FARC. Panama has also raised police spending from $490 million in 2011 to an estimated $548 million this year, and has increasingly enrolled National Police personnel in the new School of the Americas, known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), in Fort Benning, Georgia, and in other military-training centres.

Crime and corruption

As a result of the PDF's disappearance and that of some of its national and international functions, drug consumption and trafficking in Panama is out of control. Gangs dependent on drug trafficking and international organised crime have proliferated. According to the government, about 238 gangs are operating in Panama, with more than 5,000 members.[7] Gang activity has drastically increased the level of crime throughout the country, with 200 killed in 2009 alone as a result of gang violence.[8] It is well known that all of the political parties that participated in the last election were financed by international organised crime.

Corruption existed during the governments of Torrijos (1972-81) and Noriega (1983-89), but it was limited. Now corruption has reached crisis proportions – even at the international level. This is largely a result of the Ricardo Martinelli government's elimination of all state controls and investigative mechanisms to prevent corruption. Since taking office in 2009, Martinelli has also limited the independence of state organisms and weakened the National Comptroller's Office and the National Environmental Authority, among other state offices, as part of a broader initiative to concentrate power in the executive, while dismantling Panama's democratic institutions.[9]

Martinelli's administration now controls every branch of Panama's government – executive, legislative, and judicial. In order to fix the upcoming 2014 presidential election, the only thing left to control is the Electoral Court, which Martinelli also appears to be working to bring under his control.

Foreign policy

Panama's tendency to submit to US policy has resulted in a foreign policy devoid of independence. For example, Panama is one of the few countries in the world that have not established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, though it maintains relations with Taiwan in accordance with 'chequebook diplomacy'. The US government has prohibited Panama's gestures toward diplomatic relations with Beijing.

Guided by this protectorate concept and right-wing policy, Martinelli's administration has offered its unconditional support to Israel and withdrawn all backing for Palestine. It has distanced Panama from the Central American process of regional integration, withdrawn from the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN), and increased ties with France and Italy's conservative former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, who was blackmailed by Italian arms company Finmeccanica into brokering a corrupt bilateral security agreement with Panama in which Panama was overcharged for military hardware, including helicopters, radar, and mapping systems.[10] It signed a free trade agreement with the United States and Canada, and has given natural resources to foreign corporations, especially mining companies, including Vancouver-based Bellhaven Copper and Gold, Ontario's Aur Resources, Toronto's Inmet Mining, and New York's Dominium Minerals Corporation.[11] All of these actions are fully aligned with the foreign policy and national security interests of the United States.

Panama's President Ricardo Martinelli. Corruption in Panama has reached crisis proportions, largely as a result of the Martinelli government's elimination of state controls and investigative mechanisms to prevent corruption.

This was, after all, the ultimate goal of the 1989 US invasion. At a meeting on 10 December 1985, four years before Bush ordered Operation Just Cause, then US national security adviser John Poindexter met with Noriega with several US demands: (1) Panama should allow the training of Nicaraguan Contras in the Canal Zone; (2) PDF troops should invade Nicaragua to justify US aggression toward Nicaragua's Sandinista government; (3) Panama should help dismantle the Contadora Group, a regional initiative to resolve the military conflicts that were destabilising Central America; and (4) Panama should consent to continued US military presence in Panama.

Noriega rejected the demands and Poindexter warned him that he 'had better think of the consequences'.[12] The rest is history. In retaliation, the United States refused to recognise the Noriega government and suspended its Canal treaties and the Combined Board, a US-Panama military arrangement for the defence of the Canal.[13] The United States launched diplomatic, economic, commercial, and monetary blockades, and suspended payments of all foreign aid, including its annual payments for the Canal. The economic blockade prohibited money transfers from US individuals and companies to the Panamanian government, which faced increasing escalation of US military presence and aggression in Panama. Finally, after years of Panama's resistance to sanctions, punishments, and aggressions, the Bush administration launched the 1989 invasion.

The move destroyed Panamanian sovereignty and the PDF, dismantled security structures, reformed the political system, and returned power to the old oligarchy. This paved the way for new forms of foreign domination, and the Panamanian people continue to suffer its legacy. ◆

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The shredding of our fundamental rights and the common good

As we approach the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest of 1215, it is becoming increasingly clear that these human rights documents are assuming a greater significance for the Third World than ever before. Though English in their origin, the jettisoning of the rights enshrined in them should be a matter of concern for all.

Noam Chomsky

RECENT events trace a threatening trajectory, sufficiently so that it may be worthwhile to look ahead a few generations to the millennium anniversary of one of the great events in the establishment of civil and human rights: the issuance of the Magna Carta, the charter of English liberties imposed on King John in 1215.

What we do right now, or fail to do, will determine what kind of world will greet that anniversary. It is not an attractive prospect – not least because the Great Charter is being shredded before our eyes.

The first scholarly edition of the Magna Carta was published in 1759 by the English jurist William Blackstone, whose work was a source for US constitutional law. It was entitled 'The Great Charter and the Charter of the Forest', following earlier practice. Both charters are highly significant today.

The first, the Charter of Liberties, is widely recognised to be the cornerstone of the fundamental rights of the English-speaking peoples – or as Winston Churchill put it more expansively, 'the charter of every self-respecting man at any time in any land'.

In 1679 the Charter was enriched by the Habeas Corpus Act, formally titled 'an Act for the better securing the liberty of the subject, and for prevention of imprisonment beyond the seas'. The modern harsher version is called 'rendition' – imprisonment for the purpose of torture.

Along with much of English law, the Act was incorporated into the US

An illustration of England's King John signing the Magna Carta in 1215. The 'Great Charter', seen as the cornerstone of the fundamental rights of the English-speaking peoples, is now 'being shredded before our eyes'.

Constitution, which affirms that 'the writ of habeas corpus shall not be suspended' except in case of rebellion or invasion. In 1961, the US Supreme Court held that the rights guaranteed by this Act were '[c]onsidered by the Founders as the highest safeguard of liberty'.

More specifically, the Constitution provides that no 'person [shall] be deprived of life, liberty or property, without due process of law [and] a speedy and public trial' by peers.

The Department of Justice has recently explained that these guarantees are satisfied by internal deliberations in the executive branch, as Jo Becker and Scott Shane reported in the *New York Times* on 29 May. Barack Obama, the constitutional lawyer in the White House, agreed. King John would have nodded with satisfaction.

The underlying principle of 'presumption of innocence' has also been given an original interpretation. In the calculus of the president's 'kill list' of terrorists, 'all military-age males in a strike zone' are in effect counted as combatants 'unless there is explicit intelligence posthumously proving them innocent', Becker and Shane summarised. Thus post-assassination determination of innocence now suffices to maintain the sacred principle.

This is the merest sample of the dismantling of 'the charter of every self-respecting man'.

The companion Charter of the Forest is perhaps even more pertinent today. It demanded protection of the commons from external power. The commons were the source of sustenance for the general population – their fuel, their food, their construction materials. The Forest was no wilderness. It was carefully nurtured, maintained in common, its riches available to all, and preserved for future generations.

By the 17th century, the Charter of the Forest had fallen victim to the commodity economy and capitalist practice and morality. No longer protected for cooperative care and use, the commons were restricted to what could not be privatised – a category that continues to shrink before our eyes.

Recently the World Bank ruled that the mining multinational Pacific Rim can proceed with its case against El Salvador for trying to preserve lands and communities from highly destructive gold mining. Environmental protection would deprive the company of future profits, a crime under the rules of the investor rights regime mislabelled as 'free trade'.

This is only one example of struggles under way over much of the world, some with extreme violence, as in resource-rich eastern Congo, where millions have been killed in recent years to ensure an ample supply of minerals for cellphones and other uses, and of course ample profits.

The dismantling of the Charter of the Forest brought with it a radical revision of how the commons are conceived, captured by Garrett Hardin's influential thesis in 1968 that 'Freedom in a commons brings ruin to us all', the famous 'tragedy of the commons': What is not privately owned will be destroyed by individual avarice.

The doctrine is not without challenge. Elinor Olstrom won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 2009 for her work showing the superiority of user-managed commons.

But the doctrine has force if we accept its unstated premise: that humans are blindly driven by what American workers, at the dawn of the industrial revolution, called 'the New Spirit of the Age, Gain Wealth forgetting all but Self' – a doctrine they bitterly condemned as demeaning and destructive, an assault on the very nature of free people.

The World Bank has ruled that the mining multinational Pacific Rim can proceed with its case against El Salvador for trying to protect lands and communities from highly destructive gold mining. Picture shows a demonstration against the company's mining operations – the sign reads 'Pacific Rim out'.

Huge efforts have been devoted since to inculcating the New Spirit of the Age. Major industries are dedicated to what political economist Thorstein Veblen called 'fabricating wants' – directing people to 'the superficial things' of life, like 'fashionable consumption', in the words of Columbia University marketing professor Paul Nystrom.

That way people can be atomised, seeking personal gain alone and diverted from dangerous efforts to think for themselves, act in concert and challenge authority.

It's unnecessary to dwell on the extreme dangers posed by one central element of the destruction of the commons: the reliance on fossil fuels, which courts global disaster. Details may be debated, but there is little serious doubt that the problems are all too real and that the longer we delay in addressing them, the more awful will be the legacy left to generations to come. The recent Rio+20 conference is the latest effort. Its aspirations were meagre, its outcome derisory.

In the lead in confronting the crisis, throughout the world, are indigenous communities. The strongest stand has been taken by the one country they govern, Bolivia, the poorest country in South America and for centuries a victim of Western destruction of its rich resources.

After the ignominious collapse of the Copenhagen global climate change summit in 2009, Bolivia organised a People's Summit with 35,000 participants from 140 countries. The summit called for very sharp reduction in emissions, and a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth. That is a key demand of indigenous communities all over the world.

The demand is ridiculed by sophisticated Westerners, but unless we can acquire some of the sensibility of the indigenous communities, they are likely to have the last laugh – a laugh of grim despair. ◆

The World People's Conference on Climate Change organised by Bolivia in 2010 *(pic)* **called for a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.**

Noam Chomsky's most recent book is Occupy. *Chomsky is emeritus professor of linguistics and philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass. The above, which is reproduced from the AlterNet website (alternet.org), is adapted from an address given on 19 June at the University of St. Andrews in Fife, Scotland, as part of its 600th anniversary celebration. The full text of the address is available on TomDispatch.com.*

The battle over women's rights in Tunisia

The revolution to overthrow Tunisia's hated dictator Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali may be over, but for the country's women, their battle is just beginning.

Mischa Benoit-Lavelle

THE newly written constitutional clause protecting women's rights in the Tunisian constitution has angered feminists and opposition politicians with wording that calls women the 'associate' of man.

The article – article 27 of the constitution – states that women's rights should be protected 'under the principle of complementarity at the heart of the family and as man's associate in the development of the country', according to versions of the text, translated from Arabic to French, which have circulated on the Internet and in Tunisian media.

It was approved by a vote of 12 to 8 by the Commission of Rights and Liberties, with nine of those voting for the clause coming from Tunisia's ruling Islamist party, Ennahdha.

'A step backwards'

The article was quickly and publicly condemned by Salma Mabrouk, a member of the centre-left Ettakatol party who voted against the version of the clause passed by the committee. In a statement on her official Facebook page that quickly spread throughout the activist and feminist communities, she stated, 'The majority version completely annuls the concept of equality of the sexes.'

She went on to criticise the wording of the clause for contradicting other, previously approved clauses which also treat citizens' and families' rights.

Another committee member who voted against the clause, Hasna Mrsit of the centrist Wafa party, lamented the fact that the description seemed to marginalise the rights of single mothers, who would not seem to enjoy the 'complementarity at the heart of the family' mentioned in the text.

Feminist activists say that under a proposed women's rights clause in the Tunisian constituion, 'women are not given rights as individuals, only in reference to men'.

In November, Ennahdha representative Souad Abderrahim stated that single mothers 'do not have a right to exist'.

'It's a step backwards,' said Mrsit.

The distressed reactions of these politicians were echoed by human and women's rights activists in Tunisia.

'I am distraught and worried,' said Salma Hajri of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, a longstanding women's rights organisation. 'Women are not given rights as individuals, only in reference to men.'

While she said that her organisation had not yet taken a position on the issue, she was confident that feminists will do all they can to push against the article's ratification.

'We will bring all possible pressure. We are not ready to accept this,' said Hajri.

Amna Guellali, who is associated with Human Rights Watch in Tunisia, was concerned not just about the apparently secondary place given to women in the article, but also by its failure to specifically forbid discrimination and its lack of reference to legal standards, domestic or international.

'It's a very weak protection. It doesn't achieve the protections that our organisation would have wanted,' said Guellali, who added that she expected Human Rights Watch to issue a statement on the article in the coming days.

However, head of the Commission of Rights and Liberties Farida Laabidi, a member of Ennahdha, felt that the wording of the accepted version was misunderstood by its opponents. The 'complementarity' mentioned in the text, according to Laabidi, was meant to stress that the relation between man and woman was not one of 'competition'.

Concerning the seeming exclusion of single mothers from the clause, Laabidi stated that the commission had simply not considered this group in their formulation of the text.

'We shouldn't construe a situation which is perhaps quite rare as a phenomenon in this country,' said Laabidi, who went on to state that single mothers' rights were covered by the article and by other rights articles in the constitution.

The women's rights clause is scheduled to be brought to the floor of the National Constituent Assembly later in August for final approval. – *Tunisia Live (www.tunisia-live.net)*◆

Poet and journalist *Shamsur Rahman* (1929-2006), one of the most distinguished figures in modern Bengali literature, was regarded as the poet laureate of Bangladesh. His famous declaration that a poet's 'true religion is to protest against anti-human activities' summed up his worldview.

The memory of you

Shamsur Rahman

A bridge collapses inside me, a house burns,
    ashes blow, perhaps
    the fading melody of an old song.
On the grey rutted road inside me someone calls.
Turning my eyes from the wall
through the dark I glimpse
a torn lonely bat
lying on the cold floor like a dead child.
Memory like a spider's web in moonlight, the memory of you
    a kind of elegy in my soul.

A procession of ducks in the street – a tide
    of white ripples: people suddenly
    make way for them amazed.
The traffic policeman hangs in mid-air, his whistle
    between his lips.
The conductor waves his baton through tattered clouds,
the music transforms the street into a flower-market
and a white skull dances madly in the blue sky
    with a bird.
Memory like a spider's web in moonlight, the memory of you
    a kind of elegy in my soul.

The magician from my childhood far away
    turns into a monkey dressed in a billowing skirt
    and smiling plays his rattle-drum.
I smoke a few cigarettes, dreaming;
suddenly I see a body
in a pond in Vietnam, muddy water:
in its head, hollow, deaf, arms and legs are flailing.
Memory like a spider's web in moonlight, the memory of you
    a kind of elegy in my soul.

Translated by Syed Shamsul Haq and Keith Bosley