



Global Civil Society Workshop on the Rio+20 “Zero Draft” and Rights for Sustainability

January 24, 2012

14:00h - 17:00h

2nd Floor Conference Room

Church Center for the United Nations

777 UN Plaza

(corner of 1st Avenue and 44th Street)

New York, NY, USA



Background

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) will take place in 2012, marking two decades of official international action on sustainable development. In the first Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the international community came to recognize the unequal and unsustainable character of dominant development patterns. At the same time, it committed to take steps towards more equitable and sustainable development, and produced the conventions on climate change, biodiversity, and Agenda 21.

Twenty years on, the world finds itself far off track in realizing the vision of Rio, even before the explosion of the multiple financial and economic crises of 2007-08. Global economic expansion continues to severely strain the environment. Humanity’s ecological footprint now exceeds the planet’s biocapacity by over 50%, and three of nine planetary boundaries that define the safe operating space for human life on Earth have been breached.

Yet, despite the vast amounts of wealth being produced, the benefits are shared very unequally, with the wealthiest 20 per cent of humankind enjoying over 70 per cent of total world income, while the bottom 20 per cent enjoys only 1 per cent. Half of the world’s population live on less than \$2.50 a day, nearly 1 billion live in hunger, and close to 2 billion are trapped in multidimensional poverty.

Rio+20 therefore provides an excellent opportunity for the world’s leaders to assess the failings of the current modes of production, distribution and consumption that are keeping vast swathes of the world’s population in dire poverty, furthering the gap between the rich and poor, and damaging the environment and ecosystems.

But civil society groups express concern that the chosen major themes of the 2012 UNCSD – the “Green Economy for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication” and the “Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development” – do not adequately or holistically address the social, economic and ecological dimensions of sustainable development. For instance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) notes that this chosen focus of Rio+20 is in response



to the “growing recognition that achieving sustainability rests almost entirely on getting the economy right”.

Civil society groups are particularly worried that proposals for a green economy transition will centre on “green” technological fixes, “green consumerism” and market-led approaches to “greening the economy”. While poverty eradication is the stated goal of a green economy, it appears that exponents assume this will follow inevitably from low-carbon growth. But based on people’s experience over the last three decades of market fundamentalism or neoliberalism, civil society groups fear that such a “business as usual” approach to a green transition would likely reinforce North-South and inter-group inequalities, further undermine food security, health, social protection, human rights, gender equality, decent work, poverty reduction and ecological justice.

Therefore there is a need to draw more civil society organizations (CSOs), especially from the South, to take advantage of the upcoming Rio+20 and draw attention once more to fundamental roots of the multiple crises and genuine alternatives to the prevailing international system. In terms of engaging the UNCSO process, there is a need to push for a more holistic and transformative agenda for sustainable development in Rio+20 and beyond. Civil society groups should bolster the social pillar of sustainable development – underscoring the need to refocus development on enhancing people’s well-being and transforming social structures, institutions and power relations that underpin various forms of deprivation, vulnerability and inequality.

The Rights for Sustainability Initiative

The Rights for Sustainability Initiative aims to promote a rights-based approach to sustainable development as a way of ensuring that inter- and intra-generational equity and justice are central concerns in the reform agenda at Rio+20 and beyond.

A rights-based approach to sustainable development is founded on the principles of empowerment, equity and justice. It holds that the realization of human rights is the ultimate aim of development strategies. It recognizes peoples’ collective rights to common goods – the indispensable elements for life such as water, food and land, as well as public goods and services such as health, education, electricity, transportation, communications, and other utilities. It acknowledges that the present generation has obligations to safeguard and lay the basis for ensuring the well-being of future generations.

It requires -- as a matter of right -- the participation of the ultimate beneficiaries of development in the determination of the goals and means of achieving sustainable development, as well as the design, implementation and evaluation of development policies.

It lays down a clear mandate for public officials to take action and provides conditions for rights claimants to hold duty bearers accountable, including governments, intergovernmental



organizations, donors, international financial institutions, transnational corporations, international NGOs and other actors.

Main objectives of the workshop

This workshop shall gather civil society representatives from various Major Groups and Stakeholders to examine the content of the “Zero Draft” to be presented to member states in January and strategize how to influence the outcome of the Rio+20 negotiations to strengthen rights for sustainability.

This will be held back-to-back with the UN DESA training session for members of the Major Groups in connection with the Jan. 25-27 Informal Consultation on Rio plus 20 Zero Draft which will be held in the same venue (the Church Center) on Jan. 24, 09:00 until 13:00h.

Specific Objectives:

- a) to analyze to what extent key CSO asks on human rights, equity and justice are reflected in the draft;
- b) To bring civil society voices from the South to engage in the Rio+20 process
- c) to analyze the positions of key countries in the UNCSD process;
- d) to strategize how to influence the negotiating positions of members states in favour of the rights-based approach to sustainability
- e) to plan how to promote rights for sustainability among the different major groups and stakeholders

Workshop Agenda

Panel Presentations

Chaired by: Uchita de Zoysa

Center for Environment and Development (CED)

14:00 Sumak Kawsay Principles and new paradigms for sustainability
Ivonne Yanez, Oilwatch

14:15 Linking Rights and the Zero Draft
Alyssa Johl, CIEL

14:30 Political Mapping. Major Players/ Blocs in negotiations for
outcome document
Juan Hoffmaister, TWN

14:45 Promoting Rights for Sustainability
Paul Quintos, Ibon International



Breakout Session

15:00 Introduction (objectives and mechanics)
Azra Sayeed, Roots for Equity

The purpose of the breakout session is to discuss how to further develop the lobby positions of the various major groups and stakeholders particularly in terms of strengthening a rights-based framework to sustainable development.

Participants shall form four breakout groups according to the four biggest major groups represented in the workshop. Each group will select their own facilitator, documentor and rapporteur.

The outcomes of each breakout group should be:

- 5 key messages for policy makers and negotiators for promoting rights for sustainability
- 5 suggestions for ways and means of lobbying
- 5 suggestions for outreach to civil society and the general public, especially in the global South

16:00 Report Back
Moderator: Azra Sayeed, Roots for Equity

16:45 Wrap-up and closing [The Road to Rio]
Laura Lopes, Abong

References

To save on paper, we encourage everyone to download e-copies of background materials for the UN meeting which include the Zero Draft, Provisional Programme of Work, Letter from co-chairs, and Major Groups capacity building workshop agenda, from this link:

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&nr=409&type=13&menu=23>

You can also download Ibon's Policy Brief on the Green Economy from this link:

http://iboninternational.org/resources/policy_briefs/114