



A Special Report on Selected Side Events at the
Second Round of 'Informal-Informal' Negotiations on the zero draft of
outcome document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development
(UNCSD or Rio+20)

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Events convened on Monday, 30 April 2012

Meeting of Major Groups and the Rio+20 Bureau on the Preparatory Process for Rio+20

Organized by the Rio+20 Secretariat, Major Groups and the Rio+20 Bureau



John Ashe, Co-Chair of the Rio+20 Bureau, spoke of the complexities and frustrations of the Rio+20 Preparatory process.

This event addressed Major Groups issues and concerns leading up to Rio+20.

John Ashe, Co-Chair of the Rio+20 Bureau, emphasizing the importance of Major Groups' involvement in the Rio+20 preparatory process, stressed the progress made due to their contributions. Susanne Salz, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, moderating the event, called for participation from Major Groups to be strengthened throughout all stages of Rio+20.

The Science and Technological Community Major Group said that Rio+20 should provide a platform for, among others, technological and financial support in developing countries and increased levels of international collaboration. Business and Industry Major Group called for governments to provide clear policies that support economic growth, education and promotion of competition at all levels. Local Authorities Major Group underscored urbanization as a driver for economic growth.



Keith Christie, UNCSD Bureau Member for the Western European and Others Group, encouraged innovation and centrality of intellectual property rights.

Indigenous Peoples Major Group urged the Rio+20 outcomes to build on the human rights of women, workers and indigenous people as an integral part of sustainable development. Women Major Group said the protection of women's rights requires political will through supporting language in national policies. Workers and Trade Unions Major Group called for international support to secure a framework that ensures access to safe working environments and reduces unemployment.

Children and Youth Major Group emphasized the strong need to enhance environmental protection through legal instruments. Farmers Major Group called for a policy framework that will support climate-smart agriculture, achieve food security and revise the current path of development.

More information:

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/>

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Kim Sook, Co-Chair of the Rio+20 Bureau, pledged to take Major Groups' statements into account during the upcoming week's negotiations.

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Introducing ENB Mobile
<http://enb.iisd.mobi/>

From Harmful Subsidies to Safe Subsidies

Organized by the Global Campaign for Climate Action (GCCA), hosted by Greenpeace International

This side event discussed the continued harmful effects of subsidies to the social and natural environment, which continues to undermine the objectives of the Rio+20 Conference.

Rémi Parmentier, Varda Group, urged fast-tracking the elimination of harmful subsidies, as well as a transition to “safe” or smart subsidies.

Brice Lalonde, Rio+20 Executive Coordinator, spoke of the need to revise the energy sector and to find alternatives to harmful subsidies, particularly through targeted measures for the poor.

On agricultural and fossil fuel subsidies, Ambassador Jim McLay, Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the UN, underscored that Rio+20 provides the perfect opportunity to transform the harmful subsidies regime, even though they were originally intended to do good.

On the issue of fishery subsidies, Rashid Sumaila, University of British Columbia, said subsidies are transfers from society to the private entities, and taxes for unwanted actions. He cited examples of “good” incentives including funding for: collecting scientific data; monitoring illegal fishing activities; and educating communities to increase their options in terms of job opportunities.

Ted Hesser, Bloomberg New Energy Finance, emphasized that the energy sector is still broadly fossil fuel-based, but commended the exponential growth of the solar industry.

Kaisa Kosonen, Greenpeace International, underlined transparency, regular reporting on commitment implementation, and better coordination for countries who aim to transform their subsidies.

Antonio Hill, Oxfam International, suggested: focusing on opportunities that have both social and environmental benefits; and defining and strengthening new markets to “do the right thing” such as the solar and biofuel markets.

Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz, Chief Executive Officer, International Centre on Trade and Sustainable Development (ITCSD), questioned the continued practice of subsidies in spite of many international agreements over the past decade, and called for a specific multilateral agreement on trade and energy.

Participants deliberated on: fuel subsidies in the marine environment; governance reforms ahead of subsidies transformation; a global agreement on fossil fuel subsidies; actions by civil society to ensure transformation from “bad” to “good” subsidies; gaining parity with renewable energy and fossil fuel subsidies; and resistance from countries that intend to keep subsidies.

Kelly Rigg, Executive Director, GCCA, stressed the importance of moving forward after many years of agreement on the need to phase out harmful subsidies.



Rashid Sumaila, University of British Columbia, said society subsidizes activities it wants to encourage and taxes those it wants to discourage.



Brice Lalonde, Rio+20 Executive Coordinator, remarked that markets are very good “servants”, but not such good “masters”.



Amb. Jim McLay, Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the UN, called for specific targets, dates and times for elimination or transformation of subsidies.

More information:
<http://www.tckctck.org/>

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Rio+20 Commitments

Organized by the Rio+20 Secretariat

This event discussed the mechanics of voluntary commitments that can be made in the lead up to Rio+20.

Brice Lalonde, Rio+20 Executive Coordinator, outlined pertinent questions to be addressed including: how commitments be will captured; how to provide the commitments with necessary gravitas; and how to ensure accountability. Elizabeth Thompson, Rio+20 Executive Coordinator, noted that the concept of commitments has evolved to broaden and enhance the issue of implementation, moving discussions beyond the dialogue of text.

James Tee, Rio+20 Secretariat, noted that commitments made must be new, specific, measurable and funded. He said that side event organizers are strongly encouraged to register commitments that arise from their side events. Jacob Scherr, Natural Resources Defense Council, with Michael Davidson, outlined a proposal to develop a global registry of commitments, noting that there has been a movement towards making “non-globally negotiated” commitments for globally negotiated agreements.

Sean Cruse, UN Global Compact, highlighted UN Global Compact’s efforts for registering voluntary commitments for Rio+20. He noted the criteria established for commitments, including that commitments must: advance a sustainable development goal; be time-bound; measurable; and include an agreement to publicly disclose progress on an annual basis. Lalinath de Silva, The Access Initiative, outlined the Access Initiative’s “3Ds Campaign,” in which civil society groups across the globe have submitted a list of achievable demands for their governments, in order to ensure reforms to strengthen environmental democracy.

In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed: timelines for implementing commitments; progress beyond Rio+20; the ultimate objective of the Rio+20 commitments; and keeping a global view of voluntary commitments.



James Tee, Rio+20 Secretariat, outlined 15 areas for stakeholders to make commitments.

More information:

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/voluntarycommitments.html>

Contacts:

Rio+20 Secretariat <uncsd2012@un.org>

Advancing the Sustainability Science Agenda

Organized by UNEP

Moderated by Nick Nuttal, UNEP Spokesperson, this event discussed how to advance the sustainability science agenda through bridging the science-policy gap, how to refine the science generated from bridging the gap, and how this could assist Rio+20 with its outcomes.

Gisbert Glaser, ICSU, highlighted the outcomes of the Planet Under Pressure conference, which was held recently in London, England. He noted that the conference supported the creation of universal sustainable development goals (SDGs) based on sound science, urged increased scientific collaboration, and encouraged science-policy dialogue, which will reinforce the science-policy interface at all levels.

Alice Abreu, ICSU Regional Coordinator for Rio+20, highlighted five regional workshops, which addressed the main themes of Rio+20 for input to the preparatory process. She said that the regions stressed the urgency needed for action, called for strong global commitment and urged governments to recognize and enhance the relationship between policy, science, technology and innovations.

Joseph Alcamo, UNEP Chief Scientist, provided an overview of the UNEP Foresight Process, which was initiated to canvass the UNEP community for opinion on important emerging issues. He noted that the two most important issues were identified as: a governance system lacking representativeness, accountability and effectiveness; and a need for training in green skills and multi-disciplinary programmes to take advantage of the green economy.

Opening the panel discussion, Gretchen Kalonji, UNESCO, stressed the need for including women and local and indigenous people in Rio+20 discussions. Delegates also addressed: the relationship between civil society and scientists; data dissemination; and the need for science to “find solutions.”



Alice Abreu, ICSU Regional Coordinator for Rio+20, highlighted the challenges faced due to human-induced climate change and overconsumption.

More information:

<http://www.unep.org/publications/ebooks/foresightreport/>

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New York+20: Youth-led action for sustainable development

Organized by Columbia University Coalition for Sustainable Development

This event presented youth and students with an opportunity to voice their opinions on sustainable development at the UN.

Esperanza Garcia, President, Columbia University Coalition for Sustainable Development, moderating the event, said the youth's role in the negotiating process leads to better policy formation and implementation.

Elizabeth Thompson, Rio+20 Executive Coordinator, spoke on the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative, which asks universities to commit to: shrinking their ecological footprint; addressing issues of water waste, energy and transport; greening their physical structures; supporting the development of a body of literature on sustainability and sustainable development; and teaching sustainable development as a core module across disciplines.

Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo, Permanent Representative of Kenya to the UN, commending the activities of the NY+20 initiative, warned of the economic and environmental hazards that disproportionately affect the youth, and encouraged young people to use their energy to "shake off" complacency and old habits of unsustainable living.

Kate Offerdahl, Columbia University, applauded the efforts of New York youth as well as internet participants from across the world in producing their formal statement. Brendan Guy, Yale University, read the formal statement to the UN, highlighting: accountable sovereignty; inclusive representation of youth in international governance; and responsible finance through stringent environmental and social impact assessments.

Céline Ramstein, Sciences Po Environment, told of the major cities who have joined in the youth movement called MyCityPlus 20, describing how the idea was realized through social media and stressed the importance of engaging the youth in generating enthusiasm into the sustainability process.

Ivana Savic, Children and Youth Major Group, outlined the focus of the group's actions, which is to provide policy inputs and build a movement around sustainable development in the form of proper implementation, focused on youth needs.

Jean-Pierre Thébault, French Ambassador for the Environment, warned of the many difficult subjects that need to be addressed prior to Rio+20, and said that the youth's "job" only starts at Rio, continuing for the next two to three decades.



Youth and student representatives from NY+20 discussed sustainable development perspectives.



Esperanza Garcia, President, Columbia University Coalition for Sustainable Development, applauded the actions by the "real" leaders at the forefront of sustainable development.



Amb. Josephine Ojiambo, Permanent Representative of Kenya to the UN, said "those not able to, must be persuaded to, or asked not to hold back" the process of change.



Elizabeth Thompson, Rio+20 Executive Coordinator, said it is a wonderful time to be young as the challenges present many opportunities for creating new ways of "acting."

More information:

<http://www.newyorkplus20.wordpress.com/>

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