

A Special Report on Selected Side Events at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or Rio+20)

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Events convened on Thursday, 14 June 2012

Learning from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Sustainable development goals (SDGs) within a transformative post-2015 development agenda

Organized by IBON International and the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS)



David Payton, UNDP, said that we should "keep pushing and playing hard right until the whistle blows."

This side event gathered experts from the UN System, governments and civil society to draw lessons from the implementation of the MDGs, examine proposals for SDGs in the outcome document of Rio+20 in light of these lessons, and outline concrete ideas for a transformative post-2015 development agenda.

Hamish Jenkins, UN-NGLS, chairing the event, introduced the proposed global discussion on the possible outline of a post-2015 development framework to supersede the eight MDGs. Reminding that the shortcomings of the MDGs should inform a participatory process, he urged participants to use the current negotiations in preparing the ground for potential SDGs.

David Payton, UN Development Programme (UNDP), applauding achievements by countries to attain MDGs, called for an acceleration of the goals with a continued focus by all countries. He urged: realism rather than perfection; actionable and "brave" leadership; clarity between governments' commitments and those of civil society; and putting people at the centre of sustainable development whilst not excluding other factors.

Jens Martens, Global Policy Forum Europe, outlined the options for retaining or elaborating on MDGs, and defining new goals and concepts of development that will be reflected in global goals, saying that the latter is "the only sensible option available." He said MDGs have proved to be effective and suitable instruments toward sustainable development, that are easy to understand and communicate to the broader public, lamenting that they are relatively narrow with deficiencies and weaknesses. He called for structural transformation and strong accountability.

Applauding the success of the MDGs, Paul Quintos, IBON International, emphasized that developing a new sustainable framework without tackling the roots of poverty will fail. Noting that new goals should be truly transformative, he called for alternative visions of development grounded in national policies and human rights.

On the development of a post-2015 sustainable development framework, Yahya Msangi, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Africa, stressed that the UN should remain a strong standard-setting institution, and urged an end to the era of exclusion, calling for an era that guarantees inclusiveness. He called for moving away from "targeting the bottom line", and replacing the focus on "setting minimums" with ambitious targets. Msangi said a new framework should uphold human rights and good governance.

During the discussion, participants commented on, *inter alia*: natural resource efficiency; ways of fostering effective participation by civil societies; ensuring adequate political will to agree to new goals; mobilization of civil society to secure political will; and the process of establishing the SDGs.

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Developing an Economic Framework which Respects Human Rights and Planet Boundaries

Organized by the Vitae Civilis Institute

This event discussed the possibility of a framework to protect human rights in the transition to green and inclusive economies. It addressed issues such as providing concrete tools for policy makers to ensure human rights are safeguarded.

Aron Belinky, Vitae Civilis Institute, presented on opportunities and risks for protecting human rights in the transition towards green and inclusive economies. He presented a publication on shaping a new economy, which addresses the governance, finance and jobs components in the transition. He noted that a broad consensus emerged from the publication, calling for preventing another financial “meltdown” and treating social, economic and environmental issues in an integrated manner. Noting that reforming the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was insufficient, he said there is a consensus to establish a stronger environmental body within the UN system that includes civil society as a key player. On financial instruments, he said the shifting of money flows to sustainable development activities should be accompanied with clear and strict regulations.

Anabella Rosemberg, ITUC, highlighted the need for collaboration between union groups to build a prosperous society. She underscored the importance of ensuring equity between and within countries, genders and generations. She urged for a just transition to a sustainable economy with a planned, democratic and long-term vision, which has the foresight to prevent negative impacts on future generations.

Comparing the challenges of sustainable development to a “human patient with multiple health problems,” Sheng Fulai, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said there have been “multiple treatments and policy prescriptions” emerging since the UNCED to treat such a “patient.” He said the green economy initiative has taken into account many such policy prescriptions in the past 20 years, however financial flows towards sustainable development activities remain a key challenge. He noted that inappropriate financial flows are at the heart of many of the ills, and policies should reflect the real cost of human activities on the environment. In conclusion, he noted that money is not everything, but that financial flows need to be revolutionized to begin the cure of this sustainable development “patient.”

Paul Quintos, IBON International, highlighted the importance of redistribution policies such as progressive and financial transaction taxation. He added that financial reforms should address equity between generations and countries and said that technology transfer should be mandatory. He noted that the financial crisis should not be used as an excuse in Rio+20 to continue relying on private and voluntary sources of funding to assist developing countries, rather than official development assistance. He deplored that the Rio+20 negotiations omitted references to mandatory reporting on human rights for companies operating abroad.

In the ensuing discussion, a participant commented on the need for a new economy to be based on a new human conscience grounded in “heart” rather than on money. He insisted that the new environmental governance structure presently being negotiated must go beyond governments to include civil society groups and underscored the importance of a peaceful transition to a green economy.



Paul Quintos, IBON International, cautioned on environmental policies that may have deleterious and perverse social impacts on future generations, such as land grabs.



Anabella Rosemberg, ITUC, bemoaned that 70% of the world's population is not formally employed.

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L-R: Anabella Rosemberg, ITUC; Aron Belinky, Vitae Civilis Institute; Sheng Fulai, UNEP; and Paul Quintos, IBON International

The Future of the Amazon: A low-carbon production model

Organized by the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM)

This side event focused on recent scientific research in climate change and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), measured and assessed through exchanging information and including the perspectives of traditional knowledge in the Amazon region.

Paulo Moutinho, IPAM, chairing the event, emphasized the need to develop a new model for rural development with low emissions, social justice, and equitable income distribution. He called for a participatory approach that recognized the new dynamics in settlements within the Amazon rainforest.

Celso Lacerda, President, Brazil's National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), spoke of the forest governance challenges in Brazil, citing barriers including: size; quality of governance; land tenure; lack of adequate infrastructure; and the need to improve social conditions. He described land reform programmes in the Amazon under various governance regimes over the past two decades, which have complicated policy formulation and interpretation by local communities.

Carlos Sturm, INCRA, presented on land reform efforts in the Amazon, emphasizing the importance of understanding the dynamics and historic context within settlements. He explained the change in deforestation patterns as connected to historic settlement patterns, from large deforestation patches towards increasingly fragmented, smaller deforestation patches characterized by different land uses.

Cássio Pereira, IPAM, elaborated on smallholder production in floodplain areas through agro-extractive settlements, which provides a model for traditional communities to preserve biodiversity. He emphasized the complexity of the institutional arrangements that include the federal government, state, and traditional communities. He discussed smallholder production regularization and planning in floodplain areas, and emphasized that the planning activities are participatory in nature, consisting of rules defined by each community in terms of resource use in their territories.

Oswaldo Stella, IPAM, spoke of the challenges of changing from frontier or smallholder production to a low-carbon economy. He said research findings indicated that command-and-control policies reduced large-scale landclearing, while the trend in fragmented deforestation has led to increased monitoring costs. He spoke of continued technical assistance, infrastructure, logistics and technology through an inter-municipal consortium for sustainable development in the Xingu region of the Amazon.

Participants posed questions on: payment for ecosystem services (PES) as envisaged for the Amazon; indigenous communities; and new developments in governance for the region.



Celso Lacerda, INCRA president, lamented that Amazonian settlements have difficulty competing in the market place.



Paulo Moutinho, IPAM, stressed the importance of changing policies at national level to reflect changes in land use patterns.

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L-R: Cássio Pereira, IPAM; Celso Lacerda, President, INCRA; Paulo Moutinho, IPAM; Oswaldo Stella, IPAM; and Carlo Sturm, INCA

Energy for All: Equity as fundamental goal

Organized by the Beyond Copenhagen Collective, Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society (CECOEDECON) and the Public Advocacy Initiatives for Rights and Values in India (PAIRVI)

The event discussed the importance of equitable access to energy as well as fundamental changes in energy production and consumption in the UN's Sustainable Energy for All initiative.

Gustav Grob, President, International Sustainable Energy Organization (ISEO), presented on the sources, carriers and storage of clean, sustainable energy. He urged for uranium, coal, petroleum and gas to be replaced by clean energy by the end of the century. He said that 80% of global energy sources are presently non-renewable as opposed to 20% that are renewable, expressing hope that Rio+20 could reverse this distribution. He noted that improved energy efficiency must be accompanied by human population control. Acknowledging that China has become a coal importer, he applauded its leadership in other sectors such as wind energy and electric mobility. He said that the rise of renewable energy must be at a large scale in order to meet expected demand, and predicted that the world's cumulative energy consumption in 2050 would include significant amounts of wind energy.

He enumerated factors that affect electricity generation costs, including fuel prices, carbon credits, and risks from nuclear power plants as seen in Fukushima. He showed that the cost of renewable energy will decrease compared to that of nuclear power and fossil fuel, underscoring that solar and wind-powered applications will become cheaper than conventional sources by 2020. He said that space-based photovoltaic (PV) power is significantly more efficient than ground-based PV, but its costs remain prohibitive. Noting that Germany and Switzerland are phasing out nuclear energy, he lamented that China is still building new nuclear power plants.

He outlined tools for clean energy implementation such as the International Organization for Standardization's (ISO) Energy Systems Analysis Standard, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), the Joint Implementation (JI) mechanism, the polluter pays principle and tax reforms on international financial transactions. He stressed that ISO standards are indispensable to finance and implement renewable energy technologies. Highlighting examples of electric cars which were already available 15 years ago, he explained that electric vehicles are significantly more efficient than vehicles powered by combustion engines.

In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed: tools to implement renewable energy technologies; green employment opportunities; reallocation of money from defense to renewable energy; the global increase in energy demand; and affordable renewable energy to the world's poor.



Deploing the US\$1.5 trillion global defense budget, Gustav Grob, President, International Sustainable Energy Organization (ISEO), urged redirecting these funds to renewable energy technologies and implementation.



Bo-Alex Fredvik, ENB, requested clarification on cold fusion and inquired how global governmental military budgets compare to subsidies for renewable energy.

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Participants during the side event.

The Technology Economy? Know-how, Know-what, Know-why

Organized by ETC Group, La Via Campesina, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF)/Women International for a Common Future, Consumers International, and Amigos de la Tierra de América Latina y el Caribe

In this event, panelists underscored the need for new international mechanisms to assess the risk and merit of technologies, particularly synthetic biology, biotechnology, geoengineering and other new and emerging technologies.

Neth Daño, ETC Group, chairing the session, called for countries at Rio+20 to adopt a binding multilateral mechanism that addresses the transboundary dimensions of technological risk.

Pat Mooney, Director, ETC Group, said that the radical changes the world has undergone over the last twenty years make technology assessment more important than ever. He argued that the green economy is premised on technological solutions but pays little attention to what those technologies are, how they work, and how they can be used in a safe and responsible manner. Mooney stressed that a UN-level mechanism for technology assessment is not to impede technology transfer, but rather to facilitate the most appropriate and least hazardous technologies based on the principles of national sovereignty and democratic review.

Sascha Gabizon, WECF, advocated for a technology assessment that promotes a healthy environment for all and contrasted poor-friendly technologies with those that treat vulnerable populations as “guinea pigs.” She compared the risks from new threats due to nanoparticles and other technologies to historical and current exposure to asbestos, lead, radioactive materials, and other pollutants. Gabizon suggested ways to mitigate technological risk, including: the UN Committee on Rights of the Child; free, prior and informed consent; international information exchange; monitoring and assessment; an immediate moratorium on nanotechnology; and the polluter-pays principle.

Carlos Marentes, La Via Campesina, described the importance of technology assessment for peasant agriculture, rural communities, and poverty eradication, stressing the need to empower communities to not only be aware of potentially perilous technologies but to be able to refuse them. He critiqued existing approaches that promote commercial technologies and undercut biodiversity and local livelihoods, and lack adequate risk assessment and guarantees against manipulation for corporate profit. He said that technology cannot be used for sustainable development unless centered on the people and communities whose problems it seeks to address, and that existing traditional and indigenous knowledge deserves additional acknowledgement, protection and support.

The ensuing discussion considered: exclusion of nuclear issues from the Rio+20 negotiating text; means to identify appropriate technologies; and collaborative mechanisms for open decision-making on emerging technologies.



On the lack of an international mechanism for assessing geoengineering technologies, Pat Mooney, Director, ETC Group, stated that it is “not up to some governments to control the planetary thermostat on behalf of the rest of us.”



Sascha Gabizon, WECF, implored countries to avoid violence against human rights incurred from the ongoing release of known pollutants on the world’s poor.

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 Sustainable Development



L-R: Sascha Gabizon, WECF; Neth Daño, ETC Group; Pat Mooney, Director, ETC Group; and Carlos Marentes, La Via Campesina

Multi-stakeholder Engagement in the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) and Compendium of Commitments

Organized by CIVICUS, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Stakeholder Forum and UN-NGLS

This event discussed the participation, representation and accountability of Major Groups in the reformed IFSD, as well as whether the implementation and design of a Compendium of Commitments through a number of mechanisms will provide suitable accountability frameworks for all stakeholders.

Noting that this is the third in a series of events discussing multi-stakeholder participation in the IFSD, Jeffrey Huffines, CIVICUS, as co-facilitator, reminded participants that broad public participation in decision-making at the international, national and local levels is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development, as has been underscored in the zero draft of the outcome document for Rio+20.

Hamish Jenkins, UN-NGLS, co-facilitating the event, said improving multi-stakeholder participation is about making the system more coherent, highlighting the need for global reforms to be reflected at national levels. He said that there is currently a disconnect between policy making and the “substance” of the issues being addressed, and urged for this to be remedied.

Farooq Ullah, Executive Director Designate, Stakeholder Forum, spoke on stakeholder democracy and opportunities arising out of Rio+20 for multi-stakeholder engagement. He stressed that the processes currently available are not being fully utilized, but that opportunities to “remodel” these processes must still be taken advantage of. He said that good governance at all levels is paramount and fundamental to achieve sustainable development, and highlighted a number of principles of stakeholder engagement to ensure this, including: participation and engagement at all levels; ensuring mechanisms for stakeholders to be involved with governments; involving stakeholders in the initial design and preparations of intergovernmental meetings; transparency in all processes and bodies; and capacity building.

Suzanne Salz, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, lauded the unprecedented level of Major Groups’ involvement in the Rio+20 preparatory process. She lamented that having only nine Major Groups poses limitations and needs to be improved in the future. Highlighting the ongoing negotiations in IFSD, she called for stakeholders to ensure their involvement in these negotiations.

Pat Mooney, Executive Director, ETC Group, outlined the process of the establishing the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) under FAO as an example of successful multi-stakeholder engagement. He noted that the CFS allows governments to voice their concerns and considers comments from a broad range of other stakeholders on these topics. He underscored that global civil society organizations encourage more members to join, noting that this takes place through being elected by existing members. He said the broad participation has also led to collaboration with a number of other agencies.

Joseph Foti, World Resources Institute, questioned the Compendium of Commitments, outlining the elements of a “good” commitment, including level of ambition, accountability and transparency. He underscored the need for a measuring and reporting mechanism to ensure that commitments operate effectively. While expressing hope for the potential of the voluntary commitments emerging from Rio+20, he suggested that these should be made public, to ensure their implementation follows through after being announced.

In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed: a posited decrease in Major Groups’ participation in the UN system during the recent past; support needed from governments and other stakeholders to scale up voluntary commitments; the possible structure and role of institutions to implement the outcomes of Rio+20; and how the current negotiation text addresses Principle 10 under Agenda 21 on access to information.



Suzanne Salz, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, recalled that when the UN was established, national governments were the only important actors.



Farooq Ullah, Executive Director Designate, Stakeholder Forum, underscored Principle 10 on access to information as a starting point for empowering stakeholders to engage with multi-stakeholder processes.

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Implementation of the SEEA: The international statistical standard for environmental-economic accounting (SEEA)

Organized by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)

The event, co-chaired by Ivo Havinga, DESA, and Wadih João Scandar Neto, IBGE, addressed the development and application of the SEEA for producing internationally comparable statistics on the environment and its relationship with the economy.

Pedro Díaz, Eurostat, reported on progress being made in Europe on the implementation of environmental-economic accounts through partnerships between Eurostat and the statistical organizations of EU member states. Díaz noted the contributions that high-quality, methodologically-consistent accounting offers for a wide range of policy making through providing indicators on, *inter alia*, protected areas, renewable energy, waste generation, resource productivity and the carbon footprint.

Veerle Vandeweerd, UNDP, identified opportunities for SEEA in assessment-making and decision-making processes. On assessments, Vandeweerd identified ongoing efforts where environmental-economic accounts are required for holistic sustainable management, including the SDGs and the recently-established Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). On decision making, Vandeweerd noted the potential for SEEA to make contributions through improved monitoring and reporting, highlighting the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative, the UN Common Country Assessment, and the UN Secretary-General's Initiative on Sustainable Energy for All.

Steven Stone, UNEP, offered a "big-picture" perspective on why the upcoming century calls for a new accounting paradigm that reframes prevailing measures of progress and wealth at a fundamental level. Stone cited Ecuador's National Plan for Good Living and Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index as evidence that such reframing is possible at a national level. Stone pointed to international investment and knowledge sharing as key areas where the next generation of accounting can address the market failures and impending ecological thresholds that present mounting challenges to sustainability.

Peter Harper, Australian Bureau of Statistics, recounted the maturation of environmental-economic accounting from a nascent academic pursuit in the 1990s to today's internationally-accepted standards. He noted that while countries largely agree on material accounting methodologies, methodologies for attributing a value to the environment remain contested. Harper stressed the consequent need to incorporate diverse stakeholders in devising new standards, and pointed to the ecosystem-accounting approach as an area where SEEA can be advanced over the near-term.

Glenn-Marie Lange, World Bank, described the importance of SEEA to the global partnership on Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services (WAVES), a five-year, US\$15 million effort to develop and promote credible methods for ecosystem accounting in both developed and developing countries.

Aldo Ravazzi, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), noted that it is significant that the OECD, a traditional economics organization, has begun to adopt SEEA and the language of green growth, reminding the panel that the now-dominant Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has also evolved over the course of many decades.

Jean-Louis Weber, European Environment Agency (EEA), highlighted cooperation between the European Commission and EEA on the Water Framework Directive as an example of how consistent statistics can benefit international policy coordination.

In the ensuing discussion, panellists identified technical capacity as a critical barrier to the implementation of the WAVES global partnership, and suggested that scientists should determine relevant methodologies based on prior policy goals.



Veerle Vandeweerd, UNDP, said that ecosystem degradation poses a global problem that is as significant as climate change.



Peter Harper, Australian Bureau of Statistics, said that environmental-economic accounts are making headway in some countries, but remain in their infancy among many more.

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