

ESDN Conference 2012 – Rio+20 and its implications for Sustainable Development Policy at the EU and national level

28-29 June 2012, Copenhagen

ESDN Office Team

Conference Discussion Paper



European Sustainable Development Network

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The **European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)** is an informal network of public administrators and other experts who deal with sustainable development strategies and policies. The network covers all 27 EU Member States, plus other European countries. The ESDN is active in promoting sustainable development and facilitating the exchange of good practices in Europe and gives advice to policy-makers at the European and national level.

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1. Introduction

This discussion paper provides background information for the ESDN Conference 2012, including the working group session. This year's conference is entitled, "Rio+20 and its implications for Sustainable Development Policy at the EU and national level", and has two main objectives:

- **To provide a platform for reflection regarding the Rio+20 conference results** and to discuss **their implications for SD objectives and SD governance** for the different political levels.
- To develop, together with the conference participants, **recommendations for implementing the Rio+20 results in practice.**

This year's ESDN Conference is the 11th annual conference of the network. For a comprehensive documentation of all previous ESDN conferences, please go to the [ESDN homepage](#). The ESDN Conference 2012 is organised by the ESDN in cooperation with the [Danish EU Presidency](#).

The ESDN Conference 2012 will comprise **five sessions**:

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Session 1: | 20 years of UNCSD and growing socio-economic challenges in Europe |
| Session 2: | Rio+20 results and their implications |
| Session 3: | Working groups – in-depth discussion of Rio+20 results & current crises and their implications for SD |
| Session 4: | Rio+20 and its implications – future needs and challenges |
| Session 5: | Recommendations for implementing Rio+20 results |

This discussion paper has the following structure: chapter 2 outlines several procedural issues of the ESDN conference in general; chapter 3 provides an overview on global SD governance; chapter 4 sketches the history on international SD mega-conferences; and chapter 5 elaborates on the process, the objectives and the content of the Rio+20 conference and the final outcome document "The future we want".

A full documentation of the conference will be published as ESDN Conference Proceedings shortly after the event.

2. Procedural issues and conference flow

Similarly to previous ESDN conferences, the 2012 event will deal with the conference topic in **different formats** (for details, please see the conference programme):

- Keynote presentations will highlight general issues and key aspects of the conference topics;
- Panel discussions will provide an overview of experiences and standpoints of different actors and institutions;
- Plenary discussion will give ample time for the conference participants to discuss and reflect on the different topics amongst themselves as well as to bring in their own experiences;
- Working groups will discuss specific aspects of the conference topics in-depth;
- Summaries of the results of panels and working group discussions during the conference can be used for immediate reactions and further discussions.

A professional moderator (Mr. Peter Woodward, Quest Associates, UK) will guarantee a good conference flow, moderate panel and plenary discussion, facilitate questions and inputs from the participants, and weave the intellectual content together. Peter will also use several innovative and creative methods to foster discussions and interactions among the conference participants.

After the welcome address and the overview on the conference topic in the introductory session, the **keynotes in Session 1** will provide a broad framing of, on the one hand, the road to Rio+20 and the challenges of SD governance and, on the other hand, the current socio-economic crises situation in Europe. The **various presentations in Session 2** will offer an understanding how different institutions and political level interpret the Rio+20 outcomes.

The **parallel working groups in Session 3** will allow an in-depth discussion in smaller groups about different dimensions of the Rio+20 results and socio-economic challenges in Europe (WG 1: Rio+20 results on Green Economy; WG 2: Institutional reforms and SD governance after Rio+20; WG 3: Euro/debt crises and their implications for SD in Europe). Each working group will be kicked-off by a flashlight presentation to highlight important issues and present some critical remarks. After a general discussion on the working group theme, the participants in each working group will be invited to develop recommendations for each topic. The results of all working groups will be presented in the plenary and followed by a panel discussion with different stakeholder representatives to reflect on the different implications the Rio+20 results. The first conference day will be completed by an interlude session in which the results of two European research projects on “knowledge brokerage in sustainable consumption” (RESPONDER and CORPUS, both funded by DG Research in FP 7), both closely linked to the ESDN, will be presented

The second conference day will be kicked off in **Session 4 with two keynotes**, both reflecting on future need and challenges of sustainable development after Rio+20. At the end of this session, the conference participants will, in an interactive format, discuss future challenges and needs and what they imply for the EU and national level in sustainable development policy-making. The final **Session 5 will reflect on the recommendations** for implementing Rio+20 results that have been developed by the conference participants during the event. In the final slot, the ESDN Steering Group will reflect upon the ESDN Conference 2012, emerging issues, expected challenges and further steps the ESDN will undertake with the conference results.

3. Global sustainable development governance

3.1 Introduction

Global sustainable development (SD) governance is understood as organised action of institutions, organisations, communities and individuals taken in order to achieve sustainable development objectives concerning issues that have international facets and global interests (Hanson, 2007). In this context, national governments and sub-national levels, intergovernmental and transnational bodies, businesses and industries, non-governmental and civil-society organisations, communities and individuals can have a stake in the promotion of sustainable development.

In the last 40 years, a crucial role in global SD governance has been played by the United Nations (UN), especially through a series of international summits and conferences: these forums have undoubtedly shaped what today is referred as global SD governance. Notwithstanding a number of backdrops (see for instance, Seyfang and Jordan, 2002), the UN system and UN conferences have certainly had a number of positive functions (Haas 2002; Baker, 2006).

Others, like Death (2011) or Swyngedouw (2010), are more sceptical about global SD and environmental summits or conferences. While acknowledging that these events have become firmly established as “landmark moments” of SD and environmental governance, Death (2011, p.2) argues that they reinforce “dominant hierarchical, state-centric, elitist and rationalist models of politics” and mainly have “symbolic, performative and theatrical roles”. This would also imply, Death further argues, that symbolic politics and public relations are key to heads-of-state and other politicians, rather than addressing the complex nature of sustainable development, offer short-term solutions, or establishing political visions. In other words, as Swyngedouw (2010, p. 223) puts it, political elites at such global mega-summit stages tend to “undertake action such that nothing really has to change, so that life can basically go on as before” and these events fail to “create real possibilities for constructing different socio-environmental futures” (ibid., p. 228).

However, building on Haas (2002), Baker (2006) pointed out a number of important positive aspects and functions of global SD conferences, such as: agenda setting; popularizing issues; raising consciousness; generating new information and new challenges for government; providing general alerts and warning of new threats; galvanizing administrative reform; adopting new norms and doctrinal consensus; promoting mass involvement.

In fact, “there is little doubt that the UN environment Summits and conferences have contributed to each and every one of these developments, [establishing] the agenda of global environmental politics around the aim of promoting sustainable development” (Baker, 2006, p.73). Moreover, as Death (2011, p.2) mentions, global summits play a crucial role in showing global audiences that political elites are serious about issues like sustainable development and climate change and that they offer a platform for non-state actors to engage in and demonstrate for/against respective conference topics.

3.2 Bodies of global SD governance

In the **UN system**, a high number of international institutions, organisations and bodies have been created over the past 40 years to foster global SD and environmental governance, and this is also why “the UN system for the promotion of SD penetrates into all areas of international governance” (Baker, 2006, p.73), as it is shown in the following figure:

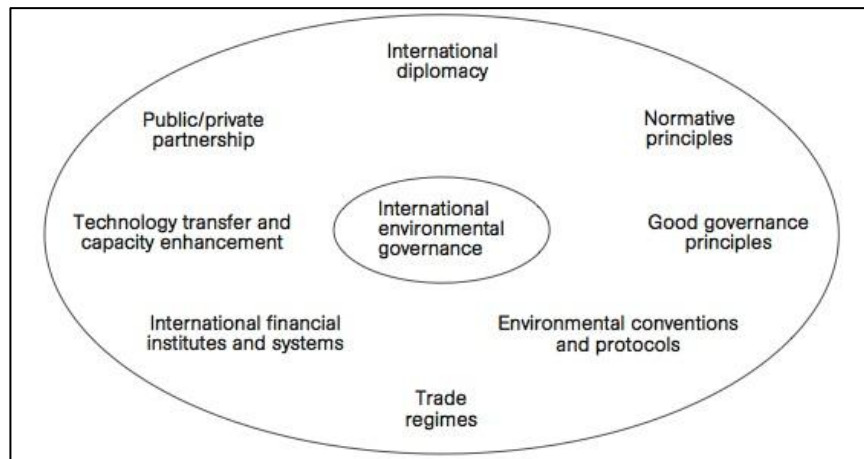


Figure 1: UN System of global SD and environmental governance (Source: Baker, 2006)

However, as Rogers et al. (2008) pointed out, a **great number of international institutions**, in addition to the UN, are involved in global SD governance. Figure 2 below provides a flavour of the impressive list of bodies involved:

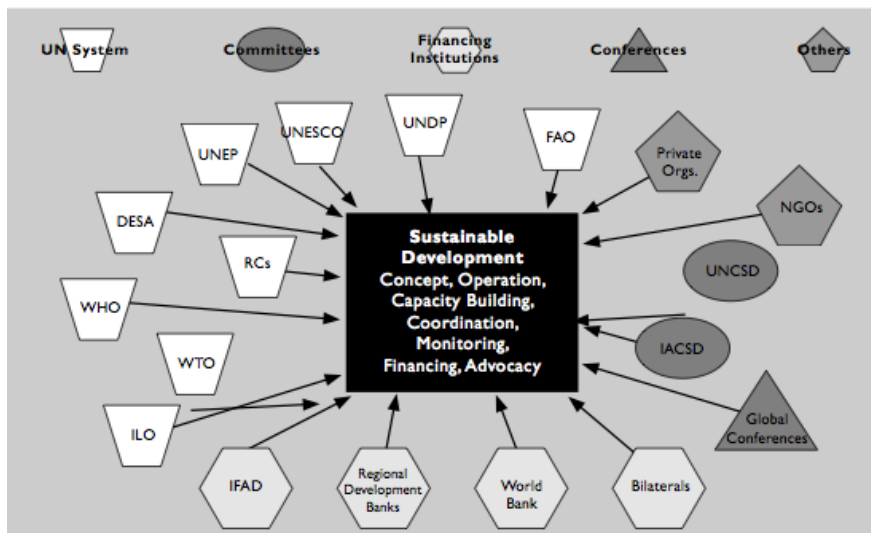


Figure 2: Bodies involved in global SD governance (Source: Rogers et al., 2008)

This array of actors has been contributing to shape global SD governance since many years. To give some examples, these bodies are: international organisations (i.e. OECD); not-for-profit organisations (i.e. Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future); international financial organizations (i.e. ADB); NGOs (i.e. ANPED); business associations (i.e. WBCSD); educational entities (i.e. Pardee Center); charitable organisations (i.e. IISD); or private foundations (i.e. MacArthur Foundation).

3.3 International SD declarations and principles

In addition, **international declarations and principles** have been established and still are shaping what today is referred as 'global SD governance'. While the most prominent definition of sustainable development – a “development, that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987) – is provided by the [Brundtland report](#), it is the [Rio Declaration](#) of 1992 ([UN, 1992](#)), a result of the UN Conference on SD, that offers the most recognised list of principles for global SD governance. Among the 27 principles included in the Rio Declaration, the following 6 are usually regarded as the most significant ones for SD governance: inter- and intra-generational equity (Principle 3); environmental policy integration (Principle 4); common but differentiated responsibilities (Principle 7); public participation (Principle 10); the precautionary principle (Principle 15); polluter pays principle (Principle 16).

4. From 1972 to 2012: A brief history

4.1 The first 20 years: from 1972-1991

As mentioned above, the work of the UN on SD issues has had a decisive impact on global SD governance. The fact that a number of environmental problems do not respect national boundaries led the UN General Assembly, to examine “problems of the human environment... [a]nd also to identify those aspects of it that can only, or best be solved through international cooperation and agreement” through an international conference (UN General Assembly, 1968). This was the context in which the [1972 UN Conference on Human Environment \(UNCHE\)](#) was held in Stockholm, being the first global environmental conference where the conflicts between environment, development, and ideas later subsumed under the term ‘sustainable development’ were expressed. As Waas et al. (2011) point out, the conference succeeded in creating an increased global environmental awareness and put the environment on the international political agenda for the first time. UNCHE produced the **Stockholm Declaration** with 26 principles on the preservation and enhancement of the human environment and an Action Plan that enriched and complemented the declaration with 109 recommendations. It also led directly to the establishment of UNEP, which is the UN body for environmental affairs.

The “**World Conservation Strategy—Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development**” (**WCS**) was published in 1980. The WCS advanced already the idea of sustainable development but, while recognizing the challenge to integrate development and environment it did not succeed in the integration of both objectives. It dealt primarily with the environment—achieving sustainable development through the conservation of living resources (Waas et al, 2011).

In 1982, the ‘**Stockholm plus ten**’ conference in Nairobi proposed to establish the **World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)** which was formally established in 1983 – especially known by its former chair Gro Harlem Brundtland – and convened to develop long-term environmental strategies for achieving SD. In 1987, these efforts converged into the publication of the famous report “[Our common future](#)”, also known as the ‘**Brundtland Report**’. The Brundtland Report serves as a vital milestone in current development thinking for at least four reasons: (1) it launched a famous definition of sustainable development; (2) it established sustainable development as a substantial component of international development thinking and practice; (3) it initiated an explosion of work on the theme; and (4) it represents the worldwide breakthrough and popularization of the sustainability concept (Waas et al., 2011)

Following the publication of the Brundtland Report and the Hague Declaration on the Environment (1989), the UN General Assembly decided to convene for the [UN Conference on Environment and Development \(UNCED or the ‘Earth Summit’ or ‘Rio Summit’\)](#) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The following sub-chapter will provide a detailed view on Rio 1992.

4.2. The Rio Summit 1992

Following the reception of the Brundtland Report, the UN General Assembly decided to convene the [UN Conference on Environment and Development \(UNCED or the ‘Earth Summit’ or ‘Rio Summit’\)](#) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The conference resulted in several crucial developments: (1) the [Rio Declaration](#) containing 27 legally non-binding principles, committing governments to ensure protection and safeguarding of the environment, as well as economic growth that is respectful to the

environment, human rights, and development needs of poor; (2) a set of **international conventions**¹, and (3) a document entitled [Agenda 21](#) also known as the 'Rio action plan', Agenda 21 is – until today – the most comprehensive document on sustainable development that also provides a series of measures to be taken in implementing SD on the ground. Following the Rio Earth Summit 1992, the UN General Assembly established the [United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development \(UNCSD\)](#) as a follow-up to the Brundtland Commission, mandated to monitor and review progress on the implementation of Agenda 21 as well as the establishment of the [Global Environment Facility \(GEF\)](#) to channel international funds allocated to environmental programs and projects.

Overall, the conferences managed to reconcile the developing countries' claim for economic and human development, and industrialised countries' plea for environmental protection reflected in the resulting Rio Declaration's principles 'precautionary and the polluter pays principle' and 'common but differentiated responsibilities'. However, the conference failed to deliver instruments of binding international environmental law through the Rio Declaration or other follow-up agreements (Giorgetti, 2010). Moreover, the Rio Earth Summit 1992 failed to acquire financial commitments to support all of Agenda 21. In fact, the mechanisms for financing remained as they were before the conference (i.e. covering existing aid agencies and potential ad-hoc unilateral pledges). In this sense, over 90 % of issues mentioned in Agenda 21 remain without financial means for implementation (Upton, 2002) as the GEF provides funding only for the incremental costs of projects, only related to three conventions (Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biological Diversity and Convention to Combat Desertification). One of the reasons why Rio failed to implement financial instruments for implementation (UN, 2010) was the fact that the conference was seen a conference for the environment and, therefore, captured attention mostly of corresponding ministries.

Agenda 21, UN's blueprint for implementing sustainable development, facilitated the creation of new institutional processes of change that subsequently unfolded at national and sub-national tiers of governance - the Local Agenda 21 (LA21) process is one prominent example (Seyfang & Jordan, 2002). In this sense, the involvement of major groups from civil society in the implementation through Agenda 21 as well as in the preparatory process of the conference is marked as a cornerstone for the "beginning of the participatory turn of global environmental governance and a template for subsequent parallel forums at mega-summits on population, environment, development and poverty" (Bäckstrand, 2006). However, the questions how to effectively link stakeholder practices with formal intergovernmental decision-making and negotiations arenas remains open and unsolved (UN, 2010).

The establishment of **UNCSD** in fostering vertical as well as horizontal policy integration at the international level shows a rather mixed picture of success: On the one hand, through benchmarking, it succeeded to encourage states to provide a comprehensive account on their national SD governance processes. On the other hand, doubts remain about UNCSD's value and effectiveness as (i) it does not influence countries' commitments and actions towards SD to any significant degree (Hyvarinen & Brack, 2000), and (ii) its influence on the agendas of international institutions within the UN system also appears to be limited (Karlsson & Hämäläinen, 2005).

¹ the [UN Framework Conventions on Climate Change](#) and the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#); also the [Statement of Principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests](#)

4.3. The Johannesburg Summit 2002

Despite the positive effects in the aftermath and the results of UNCED, governments have not been implementing the plans for action the UNCED and other conferences have produced. Thus the [World Summit on Sustainable Development \(WSSD\)](#) in Johannesburg in 2002 convened in order to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development and review the progress. In this regard, the report assessing the implementation status of Agenda 21 identified some serious deficiencies: fragmented approach to SD; lack of progress in addressing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; inadequate attention of core issues (WEHAB); coherence policies on finance, trade, investment, technology and SD; insufficient financial resources; and absence of a robust mechanism for technology transfer (Hens & Nath, 2005).

The Johannesburg Summit delivered three outcomes: a political declaration, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and the establishment of numerous partnership initiatives (most importantly so-called Type II partnerships). The [Johannesburg Declaration](#) confirmed the commitments from Stockholm 1972 and Rio 1992 as well as of some of the Millennium Development Goals. Another important deliverable – the [Johannesburg Plan of Implementation \(JPOI\)](#) – can be regarded as a programme of action to guide government activities, negotiated and agreed between governments covering key commitments and targets in the areas of sustainable consumption and production, water and sanitation, and energy. In addition, the Johannesburg Summit 2002 produced so-called [Type II Partnerships](#) (i.e. voluntary transnational multi-stakeholder agreements between government and non-state actors) allowing civil society to contribute to the implementation of sustainable development.

Although the **Johannesburg Declaration** refers to strategic approaches on how to deliver the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, it had no specific mandate to contribute to the development of international environmental law, nor even to further elaborate general principles of non-binding nature to guide the conduct of states with respect to SD. (von Frantzius, 2007; Hens & Nath, 2005). Negotiations on the document were rather short due to time constraints and, especially the part on implementation with regard to finance and trade was heavily controversial with an agreement of about 11 and 15 %, respectively (Hens & Nath, 2005).

The **Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI)** – a guide for further implementation of Agenda 21 – comprises measures of implementation and specific measureable targets and associated time frames, which, however, are in most cases reiterated from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed at the Millennium Summit in 2000 and other agreements (Bigg, 2003). Nevertheless, according to Hens & Nath (2005), by doing so the JPOI confirmed and lifted some of these targets to a higher level of international agreement in response to lack of progress to date.

Type II partnerships are generally perceived as powerful tools and more democratic instruments for the implementation of Agenda 21, however, they are also seen as an ambivalent instrument, as they offer the ‘possibility to deliver some results without really committing governments to hard action’ (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2002). Consequently, it remains unclear whether the formal recognition of type II partnerships would strengthen the principal inter-governmental commitments or marginalise them. Von Frantzius (2007) goes one step further by claiming that these partnerships potentially mask the failure of governments resulting in a ‘privatisation of sustainable development’, whereas Bäckstrand (2006) perceives these instruments as key innovations in a shift from purely top-down to bottom-up governance approaches.

Overall, the discussions that took place during the conference shifted the attention of SD away from the environmental and more towards the social and economic development perspective. This shift was mainly driven by the developing countries' needs and particularly influenced by the Millennium Declaration and its associated goals partly reiterated into the conference's final deliverables. In this sense, Rajamani (2003) argues that this shift is reflected by the introduction of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and the focus on issues such as poverty, education, sanitation. Conversely, Seyfang (2003) and von Frantzius (2007) experience the inclusion of poverty alleviation and eradication in the JPOI as an important step towards integrating social and economic aspects of sustainable development with environmental goals.

Despite the conferences efforts to integrate civil society in the negotiations of the outcome (i.e. Multi-stakeholder dialogues), they remained rather secondary to traditional state-centric negotiations or public relations exercises (Death, 2011). The failure of multi-stakeholder involvement can be explained by the facts that they (1) came too late in the negotiation process for being substantially influential (Karlsson, 2012); (2) were characterized by a lack of participation from government delegations (Hiblin et al., 2002; IISD, 2002); (3) and had rather formal monologue style of discussion than being an interactive dialogue (Bäckstrand, 2006). In this sense, the multi-stakeholder dialogues remained a rather symbolic gesture of global democratic governance within the negotiation process and, according to Karlsson (2012), 'final negotiations were as usual dominated by diplomats defending their country's particular priorities and sensitivities linked to national sovereignty'. However, the institutionalization of new and innovative deliberative practices, according to Bäckstrand (2006), represented a shift toward enacting a model which reflects key features of the stakeholder model of democracy (i.e. deliberative democracy) and which Sneddon et al. (2006) believe 'is crucial to any discussion of SD policies and sustainability politics'.

5. Rio+20 - the process, the objectives and the EU position

The aim of this chapter is to present the preparation and outcomes of the **Rio+20 Conference** in detail and to complement studies already produced. An overview of the conference, its crucial objectives and themes will be offered, together with insights on the process. Most of the information is retrieved from the [Rio+20 website](#) and from other official sources, especially United Nations. Particular attention will be also devoted to the EU position. In addition, we offer a word cloud analysis of the final 'draft' Rio+20 text, "The Future We Want", that was presented to the heads-of-state (version of 19 June), with the final texts of the Rio declaration 1992 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation 2002.

5.1 Rio+20: The conference start

*"We have **enough** papers; we have **enough** conferences. What we need to do now is **something really different**: Rio+20 should be **not** another conference in normal sense; it should be a conference of **action**, a conference of **implementation** of what we have agreed twenty or ten years ago."*

Sha Zukang (Conference Secretary-General for Rio+20)²

Commonly known as the [Rio+20 Conference](#), the **United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD)** took place in Rio de Janeiro between the 20th and 22nd of June 2012, twenty years after the UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), which was also hosted in Rio in 1992.

More than 150 heads-of-state and ministers kicked off the Rio+20 Conference on 20 June 2012. Until one week before the conference, the Brazilian hosts predicted 118 heads-of-state would attend. On the first day of the conference, on 20 June, the number looked more likely to be around 100. Important heads-of-state, like Barack Obama (USA), David Cameron (UK), and Angela Merkel (Germany) as well as dozens of other leaders "have snubbed the talks" (The Guardian, 20 June 2012, a³). The most important heads-of-state are, as the New York Times put it, "preoccupied by domestic politics and the financial turmoil in Europe" (New York Times, 18 June⁴). The Guardian argued that "the absence of so many key figures has dismayed the architects of global sustainability governance" (The Guardian, 20 June 2012, a). Gro Harlem Brundtland, famous for her 1987 WCED report, also pointed out that "it's not good and it doesn't look good" (ibid.).

Apart from a lower number of important heads-of-state compared to what was expected, widespread disappointment regarding the strategy the politicians will adopt at Rio+20 predominated the start of the mega-conference. The deal reached by advance negotiators was criticised as too weak to be effective (The Guardian, 20 June 2012, a). For example, Connie Hedegaard, EU climate commissioner, said via twitter that "nobody in that room adopting the text was happy. That's how weak it is" (ibid). Jim Leape, head of WWF, said that, "if this text proposed by Brazil is accepted, then the last year of negotiations has been a colossal waste of time (...) you might think Rio+20 was convened as a seminar" (ibid). It seems that the Brazilian hosts were eager to provide a final

² <http://www.southsouthnews.com/pages/SSN.aspx?nc=1&t=s&s=1&h=false&lo=false&v=2012/05/20120502125805032&vid=ec10a05b-f071-4b29-8df2-7ad3a0f72702&cid=cc6ab798-bd10-4c02-8d35-a39ce5a769f6&r=5160>

³ The Guardian, "Rio+20 Earth summit: pressure for deal – but will leaders hold their nerves", 20 June 2012, a

⁴ New York Times, "Global Economy Limits Expectations at Earth Summit in Brazil", 18 June 2012

conference text before the heads-of –states arrived in order to “avoid a repeat of the shambles at the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009” (The Guardian, 20 June, b⁵). Having the more or less final text ready before the conference days worried many observers and gave way to fears that “delegates’ presence would be reduced to a largely ceremonial role, making – at most – minor tweaks to the agreement” (ibid).

The reason for the low expectations regarding the results of Rio+20 seem to be the lack of clear commitments, timetables, financing or means of monitoring progress. Gro Harlem Brundtland argued that the lack of political commitment may also be due to the current situation of economic and financial crises: “The financial and economic problems that some countries face don’t make it easier for them to agree on things that they would have agreed before 2008.” (The Guardian, 20 June 2012). Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, also argued that the timing of the conference was unfortunate in times of debt and budget crises shaking the EU: “Europe has been the great leader of environmental action, but Europe is hardly functioning right now.” (New York Times, 18 June). And for President Obama, as argued in the New York Time, it was impossible to go because he had no financial resources to offer and because he would face substantial criticism at home for seeming to be more concerned with global problems than domestic issues – it is a US presidential election year after all (ibid.) Nevertheless, Gro Harlem Brundtland predicted that, like it had been the case in many international negotiations, the final days may produce some surprises: “There are more than 100 leaders coming after all. They are not going to leave with nothing.” (ibid.)

5.2 Rio+20 objectives

The main three objectives of the conference were:

- *to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development,*
- *to assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and*
- *to address new and emerging challenges.*

The conference focused mainly on **two themes**:

- I. a **green economy** in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication;
- II. the **institutional framework** for sustainable development.

In addition, **seven critical issues**⁶ were recognised during the preparatory work for the conference that were given ‘priority attention’: Jobs, Energy, Cities, Food, Water, Oceans, and Disasters.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Green economy in the context of SD and poverty eradication

The [Green Economy](#) according to UNEP (2010) is defined as an economy that results in “**improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities**”; therefore, an economy that is “**low-carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive**” ([UNEP, 2011](#)).

The UNEP’s initiative - [the Green Economy initiative](#) – has recently reached a climax with the publication of the report ‘[Towards a Green Economy](#)’ (2011), which is defined by UNEP as this

⁵ The Guardian, “Rio+20 Earth summit talks turn into rubber-stamp job”, 20 June 2012, b

⁶ see also <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/7issues.html>

initiative's *main output* and that is used as one of the main sources not only for this chapter but also in the official documents that can be found on the Rio+20 official website.

In a green economy, **“growth in income and employment are driven by public and private investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services”** (ibid.).

The **“key aim for a transition to a green economy is to enable economic growth and investment while increasing environmental quality and social inclusiveness”** (ibid.). Some critical issues with regard to the before mentioned aspects would then be how to:

- a) *to create the conditions for public and private investments to incorporate broader environmental and social criteria;*
- b) *to adjust the main indicators of economic performance (such as growth in GDP) in order to account for pollution, resource depletion, declining ecosystem services, and the distributional consequences of natural capital loss to the poor.*

The green economy approach is also an “attempt to unite under one banner a broad suite of economic instruments relevant to sustainable development” ([UN GA, 2010](#), p.2)⁷. In the case of the Rio+20 conference, these economic instruments should also be taken into consideration in relation to the global concerns towards poverty eradication. Additionally, the green economy has to take care of the three pillars of sustainability (environmental protection, social equity and economic development) as being a tool for sustainable development and not its substitute. Nevertheless, apart from achieving a balanced approach on the three pillars of SD poverty eradication should be kept as a primary objective.

These two focuses (i.e. green economy and poverty eradication) are not mutually exclusive, but are very much linked. As explained in UNEP's report (2011), in most of the developing countries, the majority of their populations and their livelihoods depends directly on natural resources, while being at the same time especially vulnerable to climate-driven risks (i.e. rising sea levels, coastal erosion, more frequent storms) and to ecological scarcity (i.e. water scarcity, access to clean water and basic sanitation). While a green economy – per se – will not address all poverty issues, a ‘pro-poor’ orientation in its initiatives and a focus towards “finding ways to protect global ecosystems, reduce the risks of global climate change, improve energy security, and simultaneously improve the livelihoods of the poor” (p. 20) will contribute to sustainable development.

In order to come up to the interests of environmental protection and development by developing and developed countries, respectively, UNEP (2011) argues that a green economy could provide a "development path that reduces carbon dependency, promotes resource and energy efficiency and lessens environmental degradation" (p.17) and, at the same time, "reconciling the competing economic development aspirations of rich and poor countries in a world economy that is facing increasing climate change, energy insecurity and ecological scarcity" (p.16).

Another important source in this context is the work done by the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** on the similar concept of ‘Green growth’ that is defined as:

⁷ UN GA. 2010. *Progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits in the area of sustainable development, as well as an analysis of the themes of the Conference. Report of the Secretary-General.* A/CONF.216/PC/2.

“fostering economic growth and development while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies. To do this it must catalyse investment and innovation which will underpin sustained growth and give rise to new economic opportunities.” (OECD, 2011, p.9)

In fact, the [OECD Green Growth Strategy](#) is described as developing “a clear and focused agenda for delivering on a number of Rio’s key aspirations [whilst] not been conceived as a replacement for sustainable development, but rather (...) a subset of it” (OECD, 2011, p.11).

For a critical perspective on the Green Economy please see the [Draft ESDN Policy Brief](#) for the Rio+20 Side event on “National Sustainable Development Strategies – What Future Role with Respect to Green Economy?”

5.2.2 Theme 2: Institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD)

The second theme of the conference builds on the mandate of the Johannesburg Plan Of Implementation (JPOI) that was the outcome document of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002. Chapter XI of the JPOI addresses the **necessity to strengthen the [Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development \(IFSD\)](#)**. Whilst, the subsequent paragraph 138 in the JPOI explains how “Good governance is essential for sustainable development”, paragraph 139 states the need to take a number of measures to “**strengthen institutional arrangements on sustainable development, at all levels**” in order to achieve a list of nine objectives:

1. Strengthening commitments to sustainable development;
2. Integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced manner;
3. Strengthening of the implementation of Agenda 21, including through the mobilization of financial and technological resources, as well as capacity-building programmes, particularly for developing countries;
4. Strengthening coherence, coordination and monitoring;
5. Promoting the rule of law and strengthening of governmental institutions;
6. Increasing effectiveness and efficiency through limiting overlap and duplication of activities of international organizations, within and outside the United Nations system, based on their mandates and comparative advantages;
7. Enhancing participation and effective involvement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of Agenda 21, as well as promoting transparency and broad public participation;
8. Strengthening capacities for sustainable development at all levels, including the local level, in particular those of developing countries;
9. Strengthening international cooperation aimed at reinforcing the implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the Summit.

These options were then analysed again in [Solo \(Indonesia, 19-21 July 2011\)](#) by the High Level Dialogue on Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) that produced progress in the discussions as part of the Rio+20 preparations, which is summarized as follows:

1. **Linkages among the three pillars:** three main options received most consensus:
 - a. strengthening CSD,
 - b. adjusting the mandate of ECOSOC, and

- c. establishing a Sustainable Development Council, that received the most “heightened interest (...) by all groups of countries”;
2. **Strengthening UNEP:** again consensus was registered and, especially, the “willingness by all groups of countries to explore the question of a specialized agency status”;
3. **Delivering as One:** while recognising “the need to balance a top down approach to sustainable development with a bottom up approach based on the expressed needs of countries”, special attention was devoted “to enhance the coherence of international support to national sustainable development plans”;
4. **Science-Policy Interface:** reaffirming the “need to strengthen the linkages between science and policy”, the “idea of an Inter-governmental Panel on Sustainable Development (IPSD), along the lines of the IPCC” was put forward;
5. **Financing:** discussions were mainly directed to:
 - a. a dedicated fund for sustainable development,
 - b. an adequate and additional finance needed for implementation and,
 - c. the use of innovative sources of financing to complement ODA.
6. **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** although not easy to converge upon, it was felt that future agreement on SDGs development might be found;
7. **National Level Institutions:** consensus was found on the need for “more systematic mainstreaming of a sustainable development perspective into the work of the key economic ministries”;
8. **Involving non-State Actors:** convergence was found on the need to support “the engagement between governments and non-State actors (...) as a means of strengthening both decision making and implementation of sustainable development”.

With this in mind, a study produced by [Bernstein and Brunnée](#) tried to “clarify to what ends reform efforts are aimed” (2011, p.2). In their analysis, a number of pros and cons on the current IFSD are therefore suggested, taken from official sources, academic and previous studies. In terms of **gaps**, the authors identified amongst others: (1) Fragmentation of SD institutions, instruments and authority; (2) lack of policy coherence and enforcement capability; (3) decision-making is not yet integrated with SD; (4) the environmental pillar is still weak in authority, priority and profile, and capacity relative to the economic pillar; and (5) the science-policy interface remains inadequate and suffers from a lack of capacity, especially at the national level.

Also **strengths** of the IFSD are worth mentioning from Bernstein and Brunnée (2011). The most significant ones seem to be: (1) UNEP in spurring environmental awareness and action, in catalysing international agreements and in providing legal drafting advice to Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) negotiations; (2) the Millennium Development Goals and related processes to achieve them have generated strong political support and an accountability mechanism (e.g., through the Millennium Development Goals Report) to measure progress on longstanding development concerns; and (3) the “Delivering as One” model and pilots have generated strong support for the scaling up of this approach for sustainable development implementation at the national level.

5.3 The process of developing an international set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In the course of preparing the Rio+20 conference, growing support has been given to an elaboration of global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2015 ‘based on Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, fully respect all Rio Principles...’ and ‘for pursuing focused and coherent action on sustainable development’ (UN Final ‘Draft’ of the outcome document: para. 246, 2012), and to develop mechanisms for their monitoring and reporting, as well as to develop indicators complementing GDP in measuring well-being and integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

The initial debate on SDGs has been backed and further elaborated in the outcome document of the UN Department of Public Information/NGO Conference (Bonn, Germany, September 2011) and by the UN Secretary General’s High level Panel on Global Sustainability⁸. Furthermore, gathered wider political attention at the subsequent Informal and Inter-sessional negotiations convened to elaborate the Zero draft document and are featured prominently in the Final ‘Draft’ presented to the world leader⁹ of the Rio+20 Outcome Document.

A summary of the various consultations on SDGs on the way to elaborate the Zero draft document in terms of its objectives, characteristics, and the scope of SDGs is shown below in table 1 (references to the Final outcome document are indicated in parenthesis).

Table 1: Objectives, characteristics and scope of SDGs (IGES, 2012)

Objectives	Address broader challenges threatening sustainable development
	Reaffirm the past political commitments of all actors and ensure tangible actions towards sustainable development (Final outcome document, para. 246, 2012)
Characteristics	Action-oriented (para. 247, 2012)
	Complementary to MDGs (para. 246, 2012)
	Strongly linked to Agenda 21 and JPoI (para. 246, 2012)
	Universal in application, but allowing for national and regional circumstances and respective capabilities (para. 247, 2012)
	Voluntary application, in keeping with national realities, priorities, and capabilities (para. 247, 2012)

⁸ UN Secretary General's High level Panel on Global Sustainability, 2012. RESILIENT PEOPLE RESILIENT PLANET A Future Worth Choosing. http://www.un.org/gsp/sites/default/files/attachments/GSP_Report_web_final.pdf

⁹ Henceforth written as „Final draft document“

Scope	Poverty eradication as an overarching goal
	Address economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development
	Enable articulation of the nexus between the different issue areas covered by the SDGs
	Time bound and measurable, with targets and indicators
	Few in number and easy to communicate and understand (para. 247, 2012)

The development of SDGs could assist in focusing the broad international sustainable development agenda at a practical level, and in the case of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) framework, could act as extension of the original framework in its post-2015 period. Furthermore, as the MDGs are known for their success in (1) rallying public, private and political support for global poverty reduction, (2) providing an effective tool to stimulate the production of new poverty-related data and additional aid commitments, and (3) facilitating greater coordination of international development efforts between nation states and other development actors, newly formed or added SDGs might benefit from wide political commitment, experience and support through MDGs. However, as the current MDG framework does not fully cover emerging or urgent issues such as climate change, energy security, resilience or disaster preparedness, an upcoming set of SDGs could address shortcomings and challenges of the MDGs and broaden their goals to reflect other SD objectives. In this regard, Lingán et al. (2012) confirm that, for example, the MDGs have not assisted developing countries in governance related issues such as development of robust government institutions, social welfare systems and an enabling environment for civil society and, thus, left them particularly vulnerable to emerging global development challenges such as climate change. Moreover, an elaboration of SDGs would need to take into account that the UN process on MDGs is still ongoing with regard to implementation and review of the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 UN Development Agenda.

The United Nations Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Global Sustainability Report "Resilient people, resilient planet" (2012) recommends to governments to agree on the development of a set of key universal sustainable development goals, covering all three dimensions of sustainable development as well as their interconnections. So far, several options for Rio+20 deliverables have been articulated during ongoing informal consultations on SDGs, organised by the Government of Columbia. The proposals so far and their corresponding thematic areas are listed the table below:

Table 2: SDG Thematic area proposals (adapted from to Lingán et al., 2012)

Pre-Rio+20 negotiations		Proposals for Rio+20 negotiations	
Declaration Panel Report UN DPI/NGO Conference (2011)	Global Sustainability Panel Report (January,	European Commission non-paper Rio+20	Governments of Colombia, Peru, and United Arab Emirates (May 2 nd 2012)

	30 th 2012)	(April, 4 th 2012)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Consumption and Production • Sustainable livelihoods, youth & education • Climate sustainability • Clean energy • Biodiversity • Water • Healthy seas and oceans • Healthy forests • Sustainable agriculture • Green cities • Subsidies and investment • New Indicators of progress • Access to information • Public participation • Access to redress and remedy • Environmental justice for the poor and marginalized • Basic health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food security • Water • Energy • Sustainable consumption and production • Sustainable cities • Climate change • Biodiversity • Oceans • Green jobs • Decent work and social inclusion • Disaster risk reduction and resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Oceans and marine environment • Sustainable land management and ecosystems • Sustainable energy • Resource efficiency, in particular waste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food security: production, access and nutrition • Integrated water management for sustainable growth • Energy for sustainable development • Sustainable and resilient cities • Healthy and productive oceans • Enhanced capacity of natural systems to support human welfare • Improved efficiency and sustainability in resource use (sustainable consumption and production patterns) • Enhanced employment and livelihood security

5.4 The EU position

Many, especially from the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, advocated for a strong role of the European Union at the Rio+20 conference. Accordingly, in 2011, the European Commission declared to be “determined to help make Rio+20 a success”. The European Union committed itself to play an active and constructive role in order to achieve global action on how to lift people out of poverty and how to use resources better to ensure prosperity also for future generations¹⁰. *On behalf of the European Commission, the Directorate-General for Environment led the negotiations at the RIO +20 Conference.*

A number of official documents delineate where the EU stands. In this regards, particularly relevant are the following three official documents:

- the European Commission’s communication “[Rio+20: towards the green economy and better governance](#)”;
- the Council of the European Union’s Council conclusions “[Rio+20: Pathways to a Sustainable Future](#)”;
- the European Council’s conclusions “[1/2 March 2012](#)”.

The Communication “[Rio+20: towards the green economy and better governance](#)” sets out the Commission's initial views as part of the preparatory process that leads to the Rio+20 Conference where the EU seeks “tangible actions (...) in enabling the transition to the green economy and better governance” (EC, 2011).

¹⁰ see also http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/sustainable-development/rio-un-conference_june-2012_en.htm

The European Commission expressed very clearly its opinion on the importance of the Rio+20 conference. On the one hand, it is pointed out that “Rio+20 offers a **unique opportunity** for our mutually interdependent world to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development [while assessing] progress made and address[ing] implementation gaps and emerging challenges” (EC, 2011). On the other hand, the Commission highlighted that “Rio+20 can mark the start of an **accelerated and profound, world-wide transition towards a green economy** – an economy that generates growth, creates jobs and eradicates poverty by investing in and preserving the natural capital offers upon which the long-term survival of our planet depends. It can also launch the needed reform of international sustainable development governance” (EC, 2011).

Therefore, in the Communication, the EC suggested **four crucial points** to be followed to boost sustainable development at the Rio+20 conference:

1. a broad political "rallying call" with a shared, ambitious vision and goals;
2. a set of specific actions at international, regional and national level - mapped out as a "**Green Economy Roadmap**";
3. a "toolbox" of policy approaches and best practice examples to be used to reach agreed objectives;
4. a mechanism to promote and monitor overall progress.

A particular focus of these suggestions seems to be on the necessity of an internationally agreed **Green Economy Roadmap** in order to “guarantee continued commitment beyond Rio+20, ensuring that the agreed vision and goals will be followed through in a systematic manner (...) with milestones, indicators and targets, as well as mechanisms to monitor overall progress”. Essential seems therefore the establishment of strategies for greening the economy **as part of the overall economic and development policies and plans of countries** while, at the same time, the Green Economy Roadmap needs also to include actions at global and regional level.

In its 1-2 March 2012 meeting, among other topics, the European Council discussed the Rio+20 conference. The Council conclusions, entitled “[Rio+20: Pathways to a Sustainable Future](#)”, reiterated its support to the road drawn by the European Commission in June 2011 and pointed out its **strong support** for an “ambitious outcome at the Rio+20 UN Conference” stressing the need for a “strong participation from the private sector and civil society”. As guidance for the EU in the preparation for the Rio+20 conference, four main key points can be summarized that are completely in line with the European Commission’s Communication described above:

1. **advancing the global transition towards a green economy;**
2. **working towards clear operational targets and concrete actions** at national and international level within agreed time frames;
3. **contributing to a strengthened global institutional framework for sustainable development** which should include the **upgrading of UNEP to a specialised agency;**
4. **furthering the work on global and coherent post-2015 goals for sustainable development,** also having regard to the review process of the Millennium Development Goals.

On the 9th of March 2012, the Council of the European Union’s, in its Council conclusions titled “Rio+20: Pathways to a Sustainable Future”, reiterated its support to the road drawn by the European Commission in June 2011.

5.5 The preparatory process and the negotiations pre-Rio

On the 24th of December 2009, the UN General Assembly (UNGA 64) adopted Resolution 64/236 and agreed to convene the UNCSD in Rio, Brazil.¹¹ In preparation for the Conference, and with the purpose of discussing substantive and procedural issues, three Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meetings were held in the context of the UN. This decision was taken in resolutions [64/236](#) and [65/152](#). Also an inclusive preparatory process was carried out with the aim of involving various stakeholders and at different levels.

The [first meeting](#) was held between the 16th and the 18th May 2010 in New York and discussed the agreed substantive themes of the Conference, addressed pending procedural matters, and elected the Bureau. Elected by Member States, the [10-member Bureau](#) was formed by 2 representatives from each region, and Brazil as ex-officio member to steer the preparatory process and decide on the roadmap and organization of work of the preparatory process. On the 7th and 8th March 2011, in New York, the [second preparatory meeting](#) was held with the objective to discuss further the substantive themes of the Conference. A [third meeting](#) took place one week prior to the Conference itself, between the 13th and the 15th of June 2012.

Additionally, three inter-sessional meetings took place: [one in January 2010](#), the [second one](#) in December 2011 and the [third one](#) in March 2012, in New York. During the second half of 2011, a series of regional and sub-regional meetings were also held to prepare inputs for the UNCSD preparatory process.

The Initial discussions of the 'Zero Draft' of the outcome document started in a meeting that convened at the UN Headquarters from the 25th to the 27th January 2012 in New York. Following this meeting, a first "Informal Informal" consultations meeting was held in March 2012 together with the third intersessional meeting. In this meeting, "delegates engaged in lengthy discussions on the text, proposing amendments and responding to other delegations' suggestions. (...) most sections of the text had been reviewed and discussed more than once, with the text expanding to more than 200 pages" (ENB, 2012)¹².

A second round of "Informal Informal" consultations was held from the 23rd of April to the 4th of May 2012. In this meeting, delegates "agreed ad referendum to 21 out of 420 paragraphs in the text, and so the Bureau decided to hold an additional negotiating session prior to the UNCSD" (ibid.).

From 29 May to 2 June 2012, a third round of "informal informal" consultations on the draft outcome was again held in New York. "Delegates discussed the 80-page revised draft text produced by the Co-Chairs, [agreeing] 70 paragraphs (...) ad referendum, with 259 containing bracketed text" (ibid.).

The third PrepCom meeting did not produced a complete and agreed 'draft' of the outcome document. It concluded at 12:16 am on Saturday, 16 June 2012, following a full day of negotiations in multiple "splinter" groups and informal consultations. Finally, Brazil was invited in the role of organiser to conduct "pre- conference informal consultations led by the host country" since only 116 paragraphs were agreed ad referendum while 199 were yet to be agreed.

¹¹ This section is prepared using mainly UN sources and the work of the [Earth Negotiations Bulletin \(ENB\)](#), which, since 1992 provides a "balanced, timely and independent reporting service that provides daily information in print and electronic formats from multilateral negotiations on environment and development" (UNEP).

¹² <http://www.iisd.ca/download/pdf/enb2741e.pdf>

Finally, on Tuesday 19th of June, during a plenary meeting of the Pre-Conference Informal Consultations, delegates agreed to the outcome document *ad referendum*.

5.6 The Final Outcome Document

The [final 'draft' outcome document](#)¹³ – **The future we want** – was published on 19 June 2012 during a plenary meeting of the Pre-Conference Informal Consultations. During the conference from 20th to 22nd of June this document was then handed over to and discussed by the head of states and their representatives and, finally, became the [“The Future We Want - Outcome Document”](#)¹⁴ (henceforth referred to as “Final outcome document”). More specifically, the document was based on the so-called ‘[zero draft](#)’, a draft of the outcome document that was submitted by the co-Chairs on behalf of the Bureau in accordance with the decision taken in the second preparatory committee meeting, also known as Prepcom 2. The objective was to present a Zero Draft to be considered by Member States and other stakeholders no later than early January 2012. Therefore, the **Zero Draft** was published on the 10th of January 2012; it consisted of 19 pages with 128 paragraphs divided in five sections, with a table of contents on the first two pages.

The **final outcome document** of Rio+20 is very different from the Zero Draft. In fact, it consisted of 53 pages instead of 19 and 283 paragraphs instead of 128. Additionally, the structure changed notably and we show the differences *in red* in the box-text below. The new structure comprehends six main sections:

- I. **Our Common vision**
- II. **Renewing Political Commitment**
- III. **Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication**
- IV. **Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development**
- V. **Framework for action and follow-up**
- VI. **Means of Implementation**

Box-text: Final Outcome structure (compared to the Zero Draft of January 2012; changes in Outcome Document in red)

- I. **Our Common vision**
- II. **Renewing Political Commitment**
 - A. Reaffirming Rio principles and past action plans;
 - B. **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;
 - C. Engaging major groups **and other stakeholders;**
- III. **Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication**
- IV. **Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development**
 - A. **Strengthening the three dimensions of sustainable development;**
 - B. **Strengthening intergovernmental arrangements for sustainable development;**
 - i. General Assembly
 - ii. Economic and Social Council
 - iii. **High level political forum**
 - C. **Environmental pillar in the context of sustainable development;**
 - D. **International financial institutions and United Nations operational activities;**
 - E. **Regional, national, sub-national, local levels.**
- V. **Framework for action and follow-up**
 - A. **Thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues;**
 - i. **Poverty eradication**
 - ii. **Food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture**
 - iii. **Water and sanitation**

¹³ NB: The differences between the Final 'draft' outcome document and the Final outcome document are marginal, but for the sake of completeness the Final outcome document has been used for the text analysis

¹⁴ UNCSD, 2012: The future we want. A/CONF.216/L.1. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 20-22 June 2012

iv.	Energy
v.	Sustainable tourism
vi.	Sustainable transport
vii.	Sustainable cities and human settlements
viii.	Health and population
ix.	Promoting full and productive employment, decent work for all, and social protection
x.	Oceans and Seas
xi.	Small island developing States (SIDS)
xii.	Least developed countries
xiii.	Landlocked least developed countries
xiv.	Africa
xv.	Regional efforts
xvi.	Disaster risk reduction
xvii.	Climate change
xviii.	Forests
xix.	Biodiversity
xx.	Desertification, land degradation and drought
xxi.	Mountains
xxii.	Chemicals and waste
xxiii.	Sustainable Consumption and Production
xxiv.	Mining
xxv.	Education
xxvi.	Gender equality and the empowerment of women
B.	Sustainable development goals
VI.	Means of Implementation
A.	Finance
B.	Technology
C.	Capacity-building
D.	Trade
E.	Registry of commitments

Our Common Vision

The first section delineates the vision of the document in 13 paragraphs that mainly leverages on a globally renewed commitment toward sustainable development while “ensuring the “promotion of economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations” (UNCSD, 2012). Poverty eradication is then recognized as the greatest global challenge and as an “indispensable requirement for sustainable development”.

In the fourth paragraph, it is especially well described what is intended for sustainable development, its objectives and its requirements:

*4. We recognize 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. We also reaffirm the need to achieve sustainable development by promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, and promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems that supports, inter alia, economic, social and human development while facilitating ecosystem conservation, regeneration and restoration and resilience in the face of new and emerging challenges.*

In the second part of the fourth paragraph, it is interesting to notice how strong the European Union’s vision in this formulation apparently was (see also the European Commission’s 2011

Communication); this is especially visible in the passage “promoting *sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth*”.

Although very much focused on solving the poverty issue and sustainable development through the ‘usual recipe’ of economic growth, it is also possible to highlight the role of natural resources and of ecosystems conservation in this text, suggesting progress for the environmental pillar of SD. Also social justice and equity is present (especially in paragraph 6) and words such *freedom, peace, democracy* and *participation* in decision-making, are stressed in the text.

Renewing Political Commitment

Section two, **Renewing Political Commitment**, consists of 42 paragraphs divided in 3 subsections.

First, it mainly reaffirms the Rio 1992 principles and past action plans. Secondly, it is suggested to undertake an assessment of progresses made and gaps that have remained since the 1992 Rio Declaration. In this context, especially four urgent problems seem to be still far away from the solution: (I.) Poverty (par.21, 23), (II.) Unemployment (par.24), (III.) Climate Change (par.25), and (IV.) the relationship between people and ecosystems (and particularly considering the poor and their livelihoods) (par.30).

The third subsection, in its 14 paragraphs, stresses the necessity of “engaging major groups and other stakeholders” and highlighted especially that “broad public participation and access to information and judicial and administrative proceedings are essential to the promotion of sustainable development” that also requires **involvement and active participation** (par.43).

Green economy in the context of SD and poverty eradication

The first of the two Conference’s themes is then treated in section three, which is titled accordingly **Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication** and is tackled in 19 paragraphs.

While addressing the role of the green economy as an important tool for SD and poverty eradication, it is, nonetheless, undoubtedly reaffirmed that sustainable development is humankind’s overarching goal. Accordingly, no critiques can be advanced on the possibility of a substitution of the green economy as a global goal for humanity.

Paragraph 58 appeared to be a crucial passage because it somehow explained how this green economy should work. In this regards, it is again possible to notice a lower importance of the environmental pillars, which it is not considered in this key paragraph. Environment is only touched in the following paragraphs 60 and 61 where one could have expected its inclusion in the ‘functioning’ of the green economy.

In paragraph 59, it is suggested that countries, **when implementing green economy policies, they can choose an appropriate approach “in accordance with national sustainable development plans, strategies and priorities”**.

Another critique is here advised: it is suggested that, especially reading between the lines of paragraph 56, 58 (letters b, e and h), 59 and 74, real commitments and practical decisions are evaded and, moreover, there seems to be a very visible effort to underplay the possibility to have similar targets and similar green economy strategies. For instance: par. 59 says “(...) each country can choose an appropriate approach in accordance with national sustainable development plans,

strategies and priorities”. Also indicative is par. 58 (h) that addresses the possibility of posing trade closures for environmental matters; in fact, it affirms, “avoid unilateral actions to deal with environmental challenges outside the jurisdiction of the importing country”.

Institutional framework for SD

Section 4 addresses the second theme of the conference: **the institutional framework for sustainable development**. This section consists of 29 paragraphs divided into the following 5 subsections.

First, the importance of the institutional framework for sustainable development is recognised but this should, on the one hand, strengthen the three dimensions of sustainable development and, on the other hand, it should not be “an end in itself, but a means to achieve sustainable development” (par. 76). To do so the institutional framework for SD will be strengthened in order to, inter alia:

- a) promote the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development;*
- b) be based on an action- and result-oriented approach giving due regard to all relevant cross-cutting issues with the aim to contribute to the implementation of sustainable development;*
- c) underscore the importance of interlinkages among key issues and challenges and the need for a systematic approach to them at all relevant levels;*
- d) enhance coherence, reduce fragmentation and overlap and increase effectiveness, efficiency and transparency, while reinforcing coordination and cooperation;*
- e) promote full and effective participation of all countries in decision-making processes;*
- f) engage high level political leaders, provide policy guidance, as well as identify specific actions to promote effective implementation of sustainable development, including through voluntary sharing of experiences and lessons learned;*
- g) promote the science-policy interface through inclusive, evidence-based and transparent scientific assessments, as well as access to reliable, relevant and timely data in areas related to the three dimensions of sustainable development, building on existing mechanisms, as appropriate; in this regard, strengthen participation of all countries in international sustainable development processes and capacity building especially for developing countries, including in conducting their own monitoring and assessments;*
- h) enhance the participation and effective engagement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the relevant international fora and in this regard promote transparency and broad public participation and partnerships to implement sustainable development;*
- i) promote the review and stocktaking of progress in the implementation of all sustainable development commitments, including commitments related to means of implementation.*

Subsection B on “Strengthening intergovernmental arrangements for sustainable development” regards mainly the UN system governance. In this regards, the most significant paragraph seems number 78 that recognized and highlighted the need for strengthening the “United Nations system-wide **coherence and coordination**, while ensuring appropriate **accountability** to Member States” again underscoring the importance of advancing the “**integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development**”.

Additionally, an improved and effective institutional framework for SD should: (1) “be guided by the specific functions required and mandates involved”; (2) “address the shortcomings of the current system”; (3) “take into account all relevant implications”; (4) “promote synergies and coherence”; (5) “seek to avoid duplication and eliminate unnecessary overlaps within the UN system”; and (6) “reduce administrative burdens, and build on existing arrangements”.

The third subsection mainly regards the **strengthening of the environmental pillar in the context of sustainable development** and the *reinforcement of international environmental governance*. To do so, UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme) will be upgraded and strengthened as follows:

- a) *Establish universal membership in the Governing Council of UNEP, as well as other measures to strengthen its governance as well its responsiveness and accountability to Member States;*
- b) *Have secure, stable, adequate and increased financial resources from the regular budget of the UN and voluntary contributions to fulfill its mandate;*
- c) *Enhance UNEP's voice and ability to fulfill its coordination mandate within the UN system by strengthening UNEP engagement in key UN coordination bodies and empowering UNEP to lead efforts to formulate UN system-wide strategies on the environment;*
- d) *Promote a strong science-policy interface, building on existing international instruments, assessments, panels and information networks, including the Global Environmental Outlook, as one of the processes aimed at bringing together information and assessment to support informed decision-making;*
- e) *Disseminate and share evidence-based environmental information and raise public awareness on critical as well as emerging environmental issues;*
- f) *Provide capacity building to countries as well as support and facilitate access to technology;*
- g) *Progressively consolidate headquarters functions in Nairobi, as well as strengthen its regional presence, in order to assist countries, upon request, in the implementation of their national environmental policies, collaborating closely with other relevant entities of the UN system;*
- h) *Ensure the active participation of all relevant stakeholders drawing on best practices and models from relevant multilateral institutions and exploring new mechanisms to promote transparency and the effective engagement of civil society.*

In subsection D - **International financial institutions and UN operational activities** –a very important aspect is mentioned to the need to “**further enhance mainstreaming of sustainable development**” in the activities of “the programmes, funds and specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other relevant entities such as international financial institutions, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development”.

Especially interesting in terms of sustainable development governance is subsection E “**Regional, national, sub-national and local levels**”. First, the importance of the regional dimension of sustainable development is acknowledged. Accordingly “**regional frameworks can complement and facilitate effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at national level**”.

In terms of **sustainable development strategies**, very significant are par. 98 and 99:

*98. We encourage regional, national, subnational and local authorities as appropriate to **develop and utilize sustainable development strategies as key instruments for guiding decision-making and implementation of sustainable development at all levels**, and in this regard we recognize that integrated social, economic and environmental data and information, as well as effective analysis and assessment of implementation, is important in decision-making processes.*

*99. We encourage action at the regional, national, subnational and local levels **to promote access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters**, as appropriate.*

Also emphasized is the role of regional and sub-regional organisations in promoting a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their respective regions”.

Particularly highlighted are the need for **long-term political commitment to SD** and the necessity of more “**more coherent and integrated planning and decision-making at the national**, subnational and local levels”. Therefore, paragraph 101 calls on countries to “strengthen national, sub-national and/or local institutions or relevant multi-stakeholder bodies and processes” dealing with sustainable development.

Framework for action and follow-up

The subsequent fifth section, **framework for action and follow-up**, is divided into 2 sub-sections and 148 paragraphs. In the first subsection, a fairly high number of twenty-six thematic areas and cross-sectoral issues are addressed; therefore, the heads of State and Government and high-level representatives should be committed “to address remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, to address new and emerging challenges and to seize new opportunities through the actions enumerated below in this framework for action” enumerated below:

- i. Poverty eradication*
- ii. Food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture*
- iii. Water and sanitation*
- iv. Energy*
- v. Sustainable tourism*
- vi. Sustainable transport*
- vii. Sustainable cities and human settlements*
- viii. Health and population*
- ix. Promoting full and productive employment, decent work for all, and social protections*
- x. Oceans and Seas*
- xi. Small island developing States (SIDS)*
- xii. Least developed countries*
- xiii. Landlocked least developed countries*
- xiv. Africa*
- xv. Regional efforts*
- xvi. Disaster risk reduction*
- xvii. Climate change*
- xviii. Forests*
- xix. Biodiversity*
- xx. Desertification, land degradation and drought*
- xxi. Mountains*
- xxii. Chemicals and waste*
- xxiii. Sustainable Consumption and Production*
- xxiv. Mining*
- xxv. Education*
- xxvi. Gender equality and women’s empowerment*

Sustainable development goals

The second subsection deals with the elaboration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The very first sentence (par. 245) already indicates a very strong statement to the further commitment to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and underscores their success with regard to a framework for the development activities of the United Nations. This paragraph potentially reflects the idea or fears that a new framework on SDGs would need to take into account that the UN process on MDGs is still ongoing with regard to implementation and review of the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 UN Development Agenda. Thus, as later on stated (par. 246) “these goals should not divert focus or effort from the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals” and need to be “coherent with the processes considering the post-2015 development agenda” (par. 249). In this sense, integrating SDGs with MDGs would be, on the one hand, a critical challenge as well as opportunity to harmonise development aspiration of developing countries and the plea for environmental protection of the developed countries in a single framework.

By reaffirming past political commitments instead of agreeing on and inventing principles and objectives of SD anew, the Final Draft confirms (par. 246) to base SDGs “on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation” and, furthermore, “fully respect all Rio Principles”. In this sense, the agreement on a framework for SDGs would be a first but nevertheless important step in their elaboration process.

The final outcome document already gives an indication about the approximate nature of SDGs by underscoring that they “should be action oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities”. These characteristics and scope of SDGs have been previously suggested through the public consultation process by Member States and other stakeholders (IGES, 2012; for more details see Table 1). Furthermore, the challenge for developing these SDGs is that at the same time these goals need to be sufficiently rigorous to provide a valuable basis for decision making, especially at the national level, and should be of use to the national policy community. To overcome some of these challenges, developing regionally and locally relevant good practice models for each goal would help countries develop their support for SDGs (IGES, 2012).

According to the Final Draft document (par. 248/249) the elaboration process of a set of SDGs will be done through a prior input by the United Nations Secretary General supported by consultations with national governments feeding into an open working group consisting of UN Member States and civil society representatives, the scientific community and other relevant stakeholders. The aim of this working group will be to submit a report prior to the 68th session of the UNGA containing a proposal for sustainable development goals. In this sense, the conference’s essential outcome with regard to SDGs will be the launch of an elaboration process to set up such a universal set and not, as expected by several proposal on SDGs, a list of already defined thematic areas or foci of action. This, consequently, further delays any process on how these goals will look like, let alone their quantifiable targets, corresponding times frames or structured implementation. Moreover, the

questions of political commitment for their implementation so far remains unsolved and, as Lafferty (2004) put it strongly and persistently, political leadership would have been a necessary condition for the realization of the Rio Earth Summit 1992 programme and will still be for the realization of recent Summit twenty years later.

Means of implementation

The last section of the final draft document is called Means of implementation and comprehends 32 paragraphs divided in five subsections: A. Finance, B. Technology, C. Capacity-building, D. Trade and E. Registry of commitments.

In the Finance subsection, the call on all countries “to prioritize sustainable development in the allocation of resources in accordance with national priorities and needs” is significant. Moreover, it is agreed that, by 2014, an intergovernmental committee, comprising thirty experts nominated by regional groups, with equitable geographical representation, will implement a process that will (i) assess financing needs, (ii) consider the effectiveness, consistency and synergies of existing instruments and frameworks, and (iii) evaluate additional initiatives. This will serve to **prepare a report proposing options on an effective Sustainable Development Financing Strategy** to facilitate the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objectives.

The roles of technology, of technology transfer and of the science-policy interface are also emphasized with a special focus on the “the need to facilitate informed policy decision-making on sustainable development issues”. In this regards, capacity building has a major status together with the importance of human resource development that includes “training, the exchange of experiences and expertise, knowledge transfer and technical assistance for capacity-building”. Therefore, with the purpose of enhancing national capabilities and the quality of research for decision- and policy-making processes, **scientists and researchers** are encouraged in “the participation and representation (...) in *processes related to global environmental and sustainable development assessment and monitoring*”.

5.7 A word-cloud analysis

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, many observers and stakeholders were disappointed by the final draft text of Rio+20. As reported by the Guardian of 20 June 2012¹⁵, “most timetables, targets, financing figures, methods of monitoring and strong language on commitments were stripped from the document by the [Brazilian] hosts”, mainly in order to secure a compromise before the world leader arrived and to avoid the negative experiences made in Copenhagen in 2009. The Guardian also looked into the words used in the final draft text. The word “encourage” appears 50 times, “support” is used 99 times; whereas “we will” occurred only 5 times and “must” just three. This encouraged us to develop a “word-cloud” analysis of the Rio+20 final draft as well as the Rio+20 Zero Draft, the Rio 1992 Declaration and the Johannesburg Implementation Plan in order to see which words are used most frequently and how the texts differ.

¹⁵ The Guardian, “Rio+20 Earth summit talks turn into rubber-stamp job”, 20 June 2012

'Implementation' is again very prominent. 'Economy' and 'economic', which are repeated 50 times altogether, appear then to be very important, showing how the economic pillar receives increasingly more attention than the social and the environmental pillars. The latter two words appear 20 and 17 times, respectively. Then, the word 'green' is expressed many times (39 repetitions) like the word 'sustainable', that is present 32 times. Very prominent are also 'support', 'poverty', 'progress', and 'cooperation'.



Figure 4: Zero Draft word cloud

With the exception of the word 'states', that is the most prominent one in the **Rio Declaration 1992**, the main differences to the Final Draft Document of Rio+20 are to be found especially in the much higher importance given to the word 'environment' and 'environmental'. This might signify that, in 1992, the issues related to environmental degradation and the need to save the ecosystems were much stronger than 20 years later in 2012. This is also in line with the appearance and prominence in the 1992 text of the words 'degradation' and 'damage'. Also very noticeable are the words 'people', 'cooperate', 'participation' and 'partnership' that could mean a more attention to the social pillar of sustainable development.



A main difference between the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002) and the Rio+20 final draft is given by the words like 'support', 'regional', 'resources', 'programmes' and 'implementation' – these are much more prominently used in the Johannesburg text compared to the final draft outcome 2012. Another difference is the higher relevance in the Johannesburg text of the words 'energy', 'management' and 'financial' - words that are not among the 50 most frequently used in the Rio+20 final draft.

5.8 Reflection on Rio+20 and SD/environmental mega-conferences

After more than a year of negotiations and a 10-day mega-conference, involving about 45,000 people, at the end of the Rio+20 Earth Summit, heads-of-state and ministers from more than 190 nations agreed on the final outcome document, ["The Future We Want"](#).

Although some politicians – like UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, and US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton – were eager to point out that Rio+20 was an important event to guide the world on a more sustainable path and that it would be time to be optimistic, most civil society groups and scientists were very unsatisfied with the outcomes (The Guardian, 23 June 2012¹⁸). The general echo of the media coverage on Rio+20 was that the conference was a “missed opportunity”. Even business leaders criticized the “lack of vision, clear commitments and targets” (politics.co.uk, 22 June 2012¹⁹) of the Rio+20 final outcome document. Frustration was highest among the NGOs: Greenpeace International Executive Director, Kumi Naidoo, called the summit an epic failure and said that “we didn’t get the Future We Want in Rio, because we do not have the leaders we need. The leaders of the most powerful countries supported business as usual (...)” (The Guardian, 23 June 2012).

What are some of the major results achieved at Rio+20?

The main outcome of the event seems the plan to set up **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. However, negotiators in Rio were unable to agree on themes, which will now be left to an “open working group” of 30 nations to decide upon by September 2013. Two years later, the SDGs will be blended with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The **UN Environment Program (UNEP)** will get a more secure budget, a broader membership and strong powers to initiate scientific research and coordinate global environment strategies.

The hope of some to move towards a **Green Economy** was diluted by suspicions among developing countries that this was another way for wealthy nations to impose a “one-mode-fits-all” approach. Therefore, the Green Economy was named an “important tool” that countries could use if they wished.

Particularly interesting for the ESDN and its members, the final outcome document includes a paragraph on **SD strategies**: “We encourage regional, national, subnational and local authorities as appropriate *to develop and utilize sustainable development strategies as key instruments for guiding decision-making and implementation of sustainable development at all levels*, and in this regard we recognize that integrated social, economic and environmental data and information, as well as effective analysis and assessment of implementation, is important in decision-making processes.” (The Future We Want, para 98)

Nevertheless, the **absence of important heads-of-state** (e.g. Barack Obama, Angela Merkel, David Cameron, Vladimir Putin) and “the weak leadership shown in the conference halls” (The Guardian,

¹⁸ The Guardian, “Rio+20 Earth Summit: campaigners decry final document”, 23 June 2012

¹⁹ Politics.co.uk, “Comment: Rio+20 is a missed opportunity”, 22 June 2012

23 June 2012), let the New York Times to identify “big power shifts around the world” (New York Times, 23 June 2012²⁰): “These include a new assertiveness by developing nations in international forums and the growing capacity of grass-roots organizations and corporations to mold effective environmental action without the blessing of governments.”

Indeed, the activities outside the main negotiation sessions produced hundreds of **side agreements** that do not require ratification or direct financing by governments. For instance, Microsoft said it would roll out an internal carbon fee on its operations in more than 100 countries, part of a plan to go carbon-neutral by 2030. The Italian oil giant Eni said it would reduce its flaring of natural gas. Femsas, a Latin American soft-drink bottler, said it would obtain 85 percent of its energy needs in Mexico from renewable sources. The Maldives islands, already experiencing dangerous sea-level rise, announced the world’s largest marine reserve, encompassing all 1,192 of its islands by 2017. A group of development banks announced a \$175 billion initiative to promote public transportation and bicycle lanes over road and highway construction in the world’s largest cities.

But this ubiquity of corporate and financial initiatives made some quite uneasy. For instance, Jagdish N. Bhagwati, professor of economics at Columbia University, argued in his essay, [“Rio’s Unsustainable Nonsense”](#), that “if George Orwell were alive today, he would be irritated, and then shocked, by the cynical way in which every lobby with an ax to grind and money to burn has hitched its wagon to the alluring phrase ‘sustainable development’”.

Gro Harlem Brundtland, one of the architects of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, said about the Rio+20 conference and its results: “We are not going to get out of the crisis without turning some stones and taking seriously the need to create jobs and make changes. Forward-looking leaders should be taking that on board to create a sustainable development model instead of digging down and not daring to take initiatives with a longer-term perspective.” (The Guardian, 22 June 2012²¹)

Box-text: The value of international mega-conferences for pushing forward sustainable development

In general, international conferences such as the Rio 1992, Johannesburg 2002 Summit or the Rio+20 Conference give an overview on fundamental human development trajectories over longer time frames and, in this regard, reflect the relationship between human society and the natural world. Nonetheless, as argued by Najam et al. (2002) these summits are not sufficient to bring a long-lasting real commitment. However, according to Seyfang & Jordan (2002), they provide a forum for discussion and, therefore, play an important role in 'entrenching the language and practice of sustainable development into national policies, business operations, and public discourse'.

As these conferences cover a rather comprehensive agenda, they are quite limited with regard to very specific problems, such as trade or finance. In the context of Johannesburg, the scope of negotiations on trade and the environment was limited by the fact that these issues were passed onto the Doha round by the WTO. In this sense, they embrace in a rather broad view to light the

²⁰ New York Times, “Progress on the Sidelines as Rio Conference Ends”, 23 June 2012

²¹ The Guardian, “Eurozone crisis and US presidential elections race ‘damaged Rio+20 prospects’”, 22 June 2012

path for up-coming events or conferences dealing with more specific issues regarding thematic and regional aspects.

With regard to reflections and critics to their accomplishments and follow-up implementation, it is difficult to assess their direct contribution towards achieving sustainable development. However, these conferences account for some major functions for international governance on sustainable development (Seyfang & Jordan, 2002; Seyfang, 2003):

- setting global agendas;
- facilitating 'joined-up' thinking;
- endorsing common principles;
- exercising leadership by defining new objectives;
- building institutional capacity
- making global governance more legitimate in the eyes of governments, business, and civil society by promoting social inclusiveness.

Others, like Death (2011) or Swyngedouw (2010), are more sceptical about global SD and environmental summits and conferences. While acknowledging that these events have become firmly established as “landmark moments” of SD and environmental governance, Death (2011) argues that they reinforce “dominant hierarchical, state-centric, elitist and rationalist models of politics” and mainly have “symbolic, performative and theatrical roles”. This would also imply, Death further argues, that symbolic politics and public relations are key to heads-of-state and other politicians, rather than addressing the complex nature of sustainable development, offering short-term solutions, or establishing political visions.

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