The Rio+20 Conference 2012: Objectives, processes and outcomes

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The Rio+20 Conference 2012: Objectives, processes and outcomes

by

Umberto Pisano, Andreas Endl, & Gerald Berger

Being published soon after the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 (Rio+20) that took place on 20-22 June 2012, this ESDN Quarterly Report (QR) provides a comprehensive overview of the road to the Rio+20 and what the outcomes the conference produced.

The introductory chapter of this QR provides an overview about the concept of **global sustainable development (SD) governance** and its links with the UN system as well as the large array of actors that are involved in it. In the second chapter, a brief history of the various UN environmental and SD mega-conferences is portrayed. This will provide an extensive background and will help to understand the background for the Rio+20 Conference.

The third chapter summarizes what happened in the negotiations prior to Rio+20 and how the conference came into form, its objectives and the main two themes taken into consideration: firstly, a **green economy in the context of SD** and poverty eradication; and, secondly, the **institutional framework for SD**. These two themes are substantially analysed and described. In addition, a thorough examination of the development process of an international set of **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** is included in this chapter. Additionally, a particular focus has been devoted to the European Union and its position toward SD, especially in the context of the Rio+20 Conference.

The report then offers a dedicated and meticulous **analysis of the text of the final Rio+20 outcome document**, entitled "The future we want", where a number of interesting reflections are suggested. Additionally, an unusual analysis of the outcome document is proposed; known as *word-cloud analysis*, the outcome document of Rio+20 is compared with the 'Zero draft' document (January 2012), the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002) and of the 'Rio declaration' (1992).

Finally, some **conclusions and reflections** are suggested at the end of the report where we propose an interesting way to understand, assess and judge the conference and its outcomes.

Contents

1   Introduction

The overall aim of this ESDN Quarterly Report is to present and review the preparation phase and outcomes of the **United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD)** that took place in Rio de Janeiro from 20-22 June 2012. The conference was hosted 20 years after the crucial **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)** held in Rio in 1992, also known as the 1992 **Earth Summit**. For this reason, the report will refer to it as the **Rio+20 Conference**, as it is also commonly addressed by the UN and in the media. Before we go into the details of sketching the road to Rio+20 and the analysis of the Rio+20 process and outcome document, we elaborate in the next chapter on global sustainable development (SD) governance as the conceptual framework for the Rio+20 Conference.

2   Global Sustainable Development Governance

2.1   Definition of global SD governance

Finding a useful and commonly accepted definition for **"global SD governance"** is not an easy task. Controversies could certainly emerge either regarding the definition of 'sustainable development' or the concept of 'governance' (Waas et al., 2011; Steurer, 2009; George, 2007; Hanson, 2007; Baker, 2006; Sneddon et al., 2006; Redclift, 2005; Robinson, 2004). We nevertheless find it useful to present some basic definitions of both: **Governance** usually "refers to the managing, steering and guiding of public affairs by governing procedures and institutions in a democratic manner, especially in relation to public policy decision-making" (Baker, 2009; Jordan, 2008; Lafferty, 2004). Furthermore, **'governance for SD'** can be defined as "processes of socio-political governance oriented towards the attainment of sustainable development. It encompasses public debate, political decision-making, policy formation and implementation, and complex interactions among public authorities, private business and civil society – in so far as these relate to steering societal development along more sustainable lines" (Meadowcroft, 2007, p.299).

Global SD governance is, therefore, understood as organised action of institutions, organisations, communities and individuals taken in order to achieve SD objectives concerning issues that have **international facets and global interests** (Hanson, 2008). 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 SD.

Over 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 had a number of positive functions, such as those identified by Haas (2002) and Baker (2006): 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.
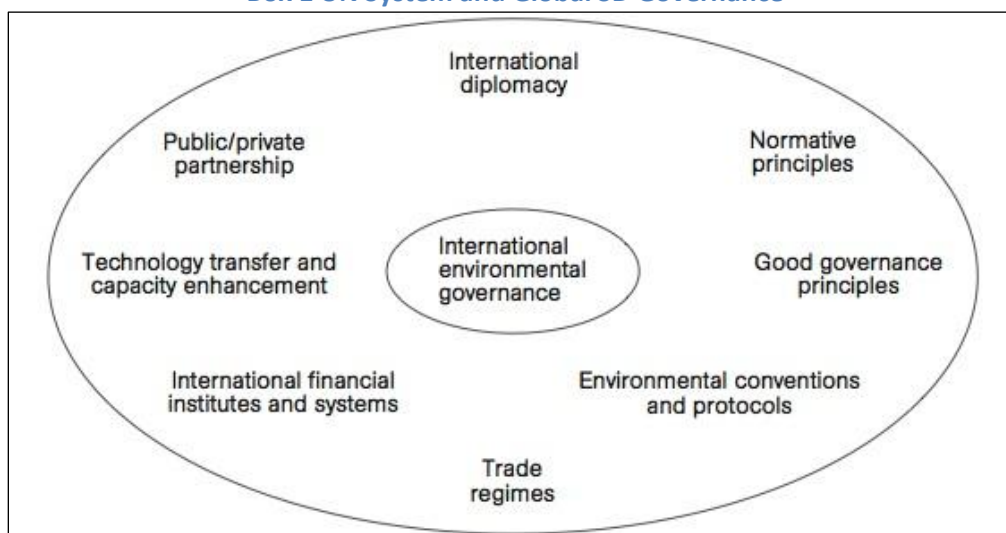
Others, like Death (2011) or Swyngedouw (2010), are more sceptical about global SD and environmental summits and conferences. While acknowledging that these events have become firmly established as "landmark moments" of SD and environmental governance, Death (2011, p.2) argues that they reinforce "dominant hierarchical, state-centric, elitist and rationalist models of politics" and mainly have "symbolic, performative and theatrical roles". This also implies, Death further argues, that symbolic politics and public relations, which are key to heads-of-state and other politicians, dominate rather than addressing the complex nature of SD, offer short-term solutions, or establishing political visions. In other words, as Swyngedouw (2010, p. 223) put 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, "there is little doubt that the UN environment summits and conferences have contributed to ... [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 still offer, maybe paradoxically, a platform for non-state actors to engage in and demonstrate for/against respective conference topics.

2.2 Bodies of global SD governance

In the **UN system**, a high number of international institutions, organisations and bodies have been created over the last 40 years to foster global SD 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.

Box 1 UN System and Global SD Governance

International diplomacy

Public/private partnership

Normative principles

Technology transfer and capacity enhancement

International environmental governance

Good governance principles

International financial institutes and systems

Environmental conventions and protocols

Trade regimes

Source: Baker 2006

In Rogers et. al. (2008), an impressive list of more than 20 institutions participating in the global SD governance are depicted (p.348):

1) United Nations (UN)

2) United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

3) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

4) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

5) International Labor Organization (ILO)

6) United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

7) United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

8) World Health Organization (WHO)

9) World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

10) International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

11) World Bank (WB)

12) World Trade Organization (WTO)

13) United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA)

14) United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

15) World Conservation Union (IUCN)

16) World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF)

17) United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (UNCSD)

18) Interagency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD)

19) Regional development banks (RDBs),

20) International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD),

21) Bilateral agencies,

22) NGOs,

23) Private foundations.

Notwithstanding the importance of all UN bodies, in 2011, the Stakeholder Forum and the Commonwealth Secretariat pointed out the following seven as the **most relevant UN bodies responsible for implementing SD**[1].

<div align="center">

Box 2 The 7 most relevant UN bodies for SD implementation

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1. **UN General Assembly**: This is the key operational body of the United Nations, with functions of deliberation, policy-making and representation. Through its adoption of SD-related resolutions (i.e. Rio Declaration) which "reaffirm the connection in the fields of economic, social and environmental development (…) sustainable development becomes a central element in the UN framework. Subsequently, the General Assembly deals with sustainable development in the process of standard setting, draft laws and regulation, as well in the implementation of measures adopted. Finally, it liaises with all other UN bodies in order to achieve improved coordination of UN activities on sustainable development-related issues" (p.27);

2. **Second Committee or Economic and Financial Committee (ECOFIN)**: Although mainly concerned with macroeconomic issues, the Second Committee is a committee within the United Nations that addresses issues in the areas of global finances and economics, including issues relating to international trade, financing for development, sustainable development and poverty eradication;

3. **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**: It consists of 54 UN member states, elected by the General Assembly. Its function is to restructure and revitalise UN activities in economic, social and related fields and manage sustainable development coordination within the UN system, integrating environmental and developmental issues within UN policies and programmes. ECOSOC is also in charge of undertaking studies and publishing reports on international issues of development, health, education, and sustainable development, among others, and making recommendations on such issues to the General Assembly, UN members and specialised agencies;

4. **UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD)**: It was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1992 to ensure effective follow-up of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), as a functioning commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The Secretariat functions of the CSD are performed by the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) which has a broader remit to provide leadership and an authoritative source of expertise within the UN on sustainable development. In turn the DSD resides within the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), whose mission is to promote 'development for all', with sub-divisions focusing on particular elements of that vision. The CSD acts as a coordination organ for sustainable development issues at ECOSOC. Its main function is to monitor progress towards internationally agreed goals on sustainable development,

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[1] see also Stakeholder Forum and Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011 (available at: http://www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/sdgpocketguideFINAL-no%20crop%20marks.pdf).

and to enhance dialogue among and between governments, NGOs, UN agencies and other stakeholders, and to make recommendations to the General Assembly via ECOSOC;

5. **Environmental Management Group (EMG)**: Is an inter-agency coordinating body for environmental issues across the UN system with the objective to address inefficiencies and overlaps in the environmental governance system. The EMG coordinates and supports many UN consultative processes that aim to further understanding on environmental governance and to develop approaches that result in sound cooperation at an international level. The EMG also plays an important role in enhancing coherence and mainstreaming environmental considerations at a country level, through operational activities. There are clear and necessary responsibilities on national governments to promote a coherent national governance framework for multilateral environmental obligations. In supporting countries at the operational level, the EMG can also help to improve States' approaches to environmental governance.

6. **UN Environmental Programme (UNEP)**: Founded as a result of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972, UNEP is responsible for the coordination of environmental activities across the UN system, assisting developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices. Seen as 'the voice for the environment within the United Nations System', UNEP is a cross-sectoral body which works in partnership with a range of actors, i.e. UN bodies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, etc. UNEP promotes environmental protection and the sustainable use of global natural resources by providing funding, education, facilitating multilateral discussion and pushing forward international environmental regimes. Furthermore, a large part of UNEP's recent activities focus on understanding, mitigating and adapting to climate change. UNEP established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) together with the World Meteorological Organisation;

7. **UN Development Programme (UNDP)**: 'An organization advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help build a better life', the UNDP is the UN's global development network. A major focus of the UNDP is poverty alleviation and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, focusing on the following areas: i) Democratic Governance, ii) Poverty Reduction, iii) Crisis Prevention and Recovery, iv) Environment and Energy, v) HIV/AIDS. UNDP was identified in Agenda 21 as one of the core agencies for delivering sustainable development. The UNDP is a critical global institution for the implementation of sustainable development, partly because it focuses on issues that are highly relevant to all three pillars of sustainable development, but also because it has the capacity, budget, and global reach to significantly advance sustainable development objectives. Though UNDP primarily represents the 'social' pillar of sustainable development, it also focuses heavily on the environmental pillar through its Environment and Energy programme, and can play a key role in integrating the three pillars of sustainable development at a global level.

Source: Elaborated from Stakeholder Forum, 2011

The following figure is retrieved from Rogers et al. (2008), which interestingly tries to show the network of actors involved in global SD activities.

Box 3 Actors and Global SD Governance
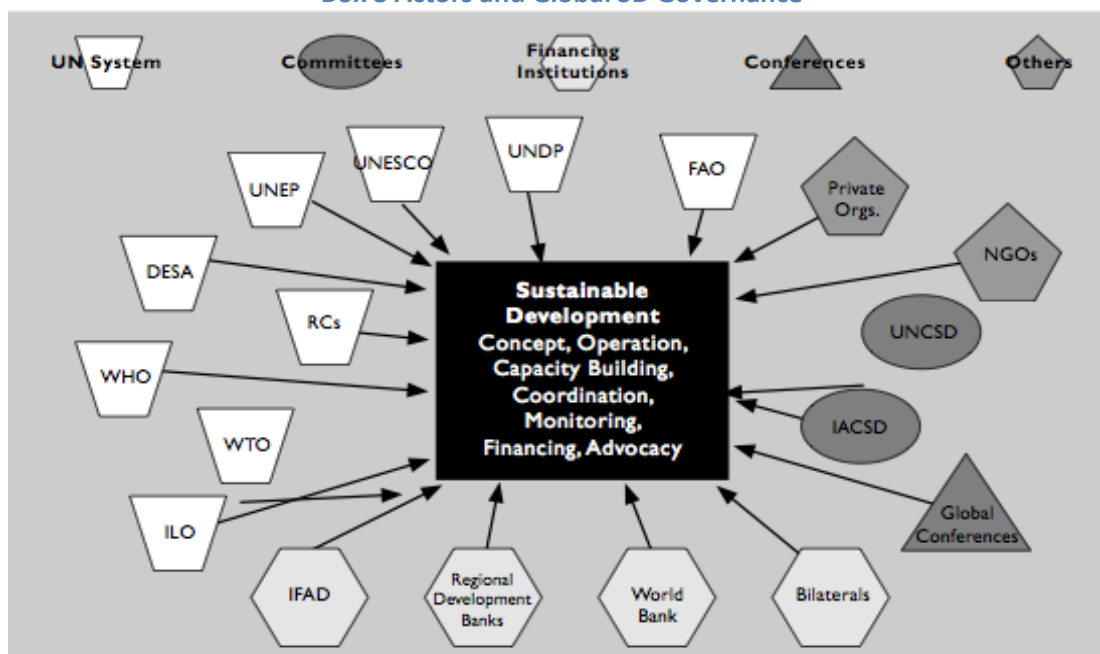
Source: Rogers et al. 2008

In this array of actors, there are certainly more organisations, apart from UN organisations, that are part of global SD governance and have contributed – and still do – to shape it. To give just some examples: 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**). In the box below, a short description for the cited bodies is provided:

Box 4 Selected organisations active in Global SD Governance

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) addresses a broad spectrum of sustainable development concerns across its programme of work. By providing member countries with a unique forum to share challenges, solutions and best practices, and by supporting those activities with analytical research and expertise on economic, environmental and social issues, the OECD helps provide countries with practical approaches for achieving sustainable development.

In recent years, the OECD has worked in six thematic areas of SD: 1) sustainable consumption

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and production; 2) climate change and sustainable development; 3) sustainable trade and foreign investment; 4) subsidy reform and sustainable development; 5) education for sustainable development; and 6) environment and health. Two key crosscutting issues are also addressed: a) governance practices for sustainable development and b) measurement and statistics. Moreover, the OECD has been engaged in developing a 'green growth' strategy and indicators.

Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future

Stakeholder Forum is an international not-for-profit organisation working to advance sustainable development and promote democracy at a global level. Its aims are to enhance open, accountable and participatory international decision-making on sustainable development through enhancing the involvement of stakeholders in intergovernmental processes while it seeks to provide a bridge between those who have a stake in sustainable development, and the international forums where decisions are made in their name.

Founded in 1987 as UNED UK – United Nations Environment and Development UK – it was renamed Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future in 2000 to reflect the broad range of activities that the organization undertakes. Stakeholder Forum is the organisation leading on global stakeholder engagement and is also the leading organisation in developing and facilitating global multi-stakeholder processes on sustainable development.

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Since its founding in 1966, ADB has been driven by an inspiration and dedication to improving people's lives in Asia and the Pacific. Whether through investment in infrastructure, health care services, financial and public administration systems, or helping nations prepare for the impact of climate change or better manage their natural resources, ADB is committed to helping developing member countries evolve into thriving, modern economies that are well integrated with each other and the world.

Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED)

ANPED is an international not-for-profit organization representing a vast network of NGOs in the Northern hemisphere with a mission to pro-actively promote the agenda on environmental justice and systemic change for the Economy. We also empower Northern civil society through capacity development, exchanges and knowledge sharing while working in close cooperation with Southern civil society and other stakeholders, for the creation and protection of sustainable societies worldwide. ANPED is the UN officially appointed Organizing Partner (OP) for the Major Group of the NGOs and disseminate information about initiatives, which support preparations for the UN CSD Rio+20.

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

The WBCSD is a CEO-led organization of forward-thinking companies that galvanizes the global business community to create a sustainable future for business, society and the environment. The Council plays the leading advocacy role for business. Leveraging strong relationships with

stakeholders, it helps drive debate and policy change in favor of sustainable development solutions. The Council provides a forum for its 200 member companies - who represent all business sectors, all continents and combined revenue of over $US 7 trillion - to share best practices on sustainable development issues and to develop innovative tools that change the status quo. The Council also benefits from a network of 60 national and regional business councils and partner organizations, a majority of which are based in developing countries.

Pardee Center at the Boston University

The Frederick S. Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future convenes symposia and conducts interdisciplinary, policy-relevant, and future-oriented research that contributes to long-term improvements in the human condition. The Center's focus is defined by its longer-range vision and it seeks to identify, anticipate, and enhance the long-term potential for human progress— with recognition of its complexity and uncertainties.

International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) is a Canadian-based, public policy research institute that has a long history of conducting cutting-edge research into sustainable development. Today, the institute is a non-partisan, charitable organization specializing in policy research, analysis and information exchange. The institute champions global sustainable development through innovation, research and relationships that span the entire world. It is devoted to the ongoing communication of its findings as it engages decision-makers in business, government, non-government organizations and other sectors.

MacArthur Foundation

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, the Foundation works to defend human rights, advance global conservation and security, make cities better places, and understand how technology is affecting children and society. Through the support it provides, the Foundation fosters the development of knowledge, nurtures individual creativity, strengthens institutions, helps improve public policy, and provides information to the public, primarily through support for public interest media.

In addition, international declarations and principles have been established and are still shaping what today is referred as 'global SD governance'. While the most prominent definition of SD – 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 (UNCED, 1992) that offers the most recognised list of principles for global SD governance. Among the 27 principles contained in the Rio Declaration, the following 6 are generally regarded as the most significant ones for SD governance:

- **Inter- and intra-generational equity** (Principle 3)

  "The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations";

- **Environmental Policy Integration (Principle 4)**

  "In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it";

- **Common but differentiated responsibilities (Principle 7)**

  "States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit to sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command";

- **Public participation (Principle 10)**

  "Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided";

- **The precautionary principle (Principle 15)**

  "In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation";

- **Polluter pays principle (Principle 16)**

  "National authorities should endeavour to promote the internalization of environmental costs and the use of economic instruments, taking into account the approach that the polluter should, in principle, bear the cost of pollution, with due regard to the public interest and without distorting international trade and investment".

3 The road to Rio+20: a brief history

3.1 The first 20 years: 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 as 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.

3.2 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**[2], 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 trough 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).

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

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).

3.3 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'.

4 Rio+20 – objectives, negotiations and outcomes

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.

4.1 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)[3]

Commonly known as the Rio+20 Conference, the **United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD)** took place in Rio de Janeiro between the 20-22 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. 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, a[4]). The most important heads-of-state were, as the New York Times put it, "preoccupied by domestic politics and the financial turmoil in Europe" (New York Times, 18 June[5]). 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 would finally 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

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[3]

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

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

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

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 seemed that the Brazilian hosts were eager to provide a final 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, b[6]). 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 at the beginning of the conference regarding the results of Rio+20 seemed 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.)

As these snippets from the media before the conference show, Rio+20 was being branded as a 'disappointment' or 'failure' even before it began. The next chapters and sub-chapters will elaborate if this branding was justified by the outcomes Rio+20 delivered.

4.2 Rio+20 objectives

The main three objectives of the Ri+20 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 SD and poverty eradication;
II.   the **institutional framework** for SD.

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[6] The Guardian, "Rio+20 Earth summit talsk turn into rubber-stamp job", 20 June 2012, b

In addition, **seven critical issues[7]** were recognised during the preparatory work for the conference and were given 'priority attention': jobs, energy, cities, food, water, oceans, and disasters.

Box 5 Rio+20: seven critical issues

Jobs	*Economic action and social policies to create gainful employment are critical for social cohesion and stability. It's also crucial that work is geared to the needs of the natural environment. "Green jobs" are positions in agriculture, industry, services and administration that contribute to preserving or restoring the quality of the environment;*
Energy	*Sustainable energy is needed for strengthening economies, protecting ecosystems and achieving equity. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is leading a Sustainable Energy for All initiative to ensure universal access to modern energy services, improve efficiency and increase use of renewable sources;*
Cities	*At their best, cities have enabled people to advance socially and economically. Many challenges exist to maintaining cities in a way that continues to create jobs and prosperity while not straining land and resources. The challenges cities face can be overcome in ways that allow them to continue to thrive and grow, while improving resource use and reducing pollution and poverty.*
Food	*If done right, agriculture, forestry and fisheries can provide nutritious food for all and generate decent incomes, while supporting people-centred rural development and protecting the environment. (…) soils, freshwater, oceans, forests and biodiversity are being rapidly degraded. Climate change is putting even more pressure on the resources (…). The food and agriculture sector offers key solutions for development, and is central for hunger and poverty eradication.*
Water	*(…) due to bad economics or poor infrastructure, every year millions of people, most of them children, die from diseases associated with inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene. Water scarcity, poor water quality and inadequate sanitation negatively impact food security, livelihood choices and educational opportunities for poor families across the world.*
Oceans	*The world's oceans - their temperature, chemistry, currents and life - drive global systems that make the Earth habitable for humankind. (…) Careful management of this essential global resource is a key feature of a sustainable future.*
Disasters	*Disasters caused by earthquakes, floods, droughts, hurricanes, tsunamis and more can have devastating impacts on people, environments and economies. But resilience -- the ability of people and places to withstand these impacts and recover quickly -- remains possible. (…) With a quickening pace of natural disasters taking a greater toll on lives and property, and a higher degree of concentration of human settlements, a smart future means planning ahead and staying alert.*

Source: http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/7issues.html

4.2.1   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).

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[7] see also http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/7issues.html

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 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)[8]. 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 SD.

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

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[8] 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.

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:

> "*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?"

4.2.2   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)**. Precisely, in paragraph 137 the JPOI affirms:

> "*An effective institutional framework for sustainable development at all levels is key to the full implementation of Agenda 21, the follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and meeting emerging sustainable development challenges.*
>
> *(…) It should be responsive to the needs of all countries, taking into account the specific needs of developing countries including the means of implementation.*
>
> *It should lead to the strengthening of international bodies and organizations dealing with sustainable development, while respecting their existing mandates, as well as to the strengthening of relevant regional, national and local institutions.*"

> (WSSD, 2002)

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.

In addition, the JPOI identifies sustainable development as an overarching goal for institutions at the national, regional and international levels.

In this discussion, the Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome gained great importance. Building on the work of the Belgrade process, and adopted by the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance, the 'outcome' identified five options for broader reform that will be discussed in Rio, namely:

a) Enhancing UNEP;
b) Establishing a new umbrella organization for sustainable development;
c) Creating a specialized agency such as a world environment organization;
d) Introducing possible reforms to ECOSOC and the CSD; and
e) Enhanced institutional reforms and streamlining of present structures.

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".

At the end, these discussions were summarised in the 'Solo Message' by the Chair[9] of the meeting with the aim "to move the discussions on IFSD forward", as it is shown in the box below.

Box 6 The 'Solo Message' towards Rio+20

- First: To achieve our shared goal, we need to renew our political commitment for sustainable development. We also need to translate this commitment into implementation.
- Second: We need to ensure that the economic, social and environmental pillars work together with each pillar integrating the goals of the two other pillars.
- Third: At the international level, we need an organization to enhance the integration of sustainable development. Various options were discussed, ranging from an enhanced mandate for ECOSOC and reviewing the role of CSD, to the establishment of a Sustainable Development Council.
- Fourth: At the national level, there is a need for more integrated support for national strategies. Various options were discussed, including Delivering as One.
- Fifth: There is a need to strengthen UNEP and a number of options were discussed.
- Sixth: More broadly, sustainable development governance at the local, national and regional level needs to be reviewed, supported and strengthened.
- Seventh: Adequate and additional financing is necessary to enable implementation, capacity building and technology transfer.

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

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[9] H.E Prof. Dr. Gusti Muhammad Hatta (Minister for Environment, Government of the Republic of Indonesia)

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.

4.3 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 Deparment of Public Information/NGO Conference (Bonn, Germany, September 2011) and by the UN Secretary General's High level Panel on Global Sustainability[10]. 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 leader[11] 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).

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[10] 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
[11] Henceforth written as „Final draft document"

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)
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, newly formed or added SDGs might benefit from wide political commitment, experience and support through MDGs because of the successes of the MDGs 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.

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 on-going 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 in 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, 30th 2012)	European Commission non-paper Rio+20 (April, 4th 2012)	Governments of Colombia, Peru, and United Arab Emirates (May 2nd 2012)
• 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	• 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	• Water • Oceans and marine environment • Sustainable land management and ecosystems • Sustainable energy • Resource efficiency, in particular waste	• 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

A comprehensive overview of SD objectives that have been developed since 1972 has been undertaken in the ESDN Quarterly Report No. 24 (March 2012). The QR, entitled "Renewing the commitment for SD: Stock-taking of international and European SD objectives and goals pre-Rio+20", can be downloaded from the ESDN homepage.

4.4 The EU position

Many actors, 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 generations[12].
On behalf of the European Commission, the Directorate-General for Environment leaded 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).

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**

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

policies and plans of countries while, at the same time, the Green Economy Roadmap needs also to include actions at global and regional level.

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BOX 7 Specific actions suggested by the European Commission towards Rio+20

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1. **Action on resources, materials and natural capital**
   a. promote sustainable water and establish an international partnerships on water;
   b. increase energy access, energy security and promote renewable energy and energy efficiency;
   c. strengthen protection of the marine environment and oceans;
   d. promote sustainable agriculture, land-use and food security and, to make the consumption and production of food commodities more sustainable, establish international partnerships on food commodities;
   e. promote sustainable forest management and combat deforestation;
   f. establish a more robust and coherent international regime on chemicals and hazardous substances;
   g. put in motion a mechanism for global science and research cooperation on societal challenges of global importance (e.g. resource constraints, climate change, oceans).

2. **Providing economic instruments and financing and investing in human capital**
   a. develop domestic and regional carbon emission trading schemes;
   b. identify and phase out environmentally harmful subsidies, accompanied by targets and deadlines;
   c. consolidate and strengthen existing financing strategies and facilities, or establish new public-private financing schemes;
   d. establish green skills training programmes in priority areas such as energy, agriculture, construction, natural resource management, waste and recycling.

3. **Improving governance**
   a. strengthen sustainable development governance within the UN (i.e. reinforce the role of the UN ECOSOC; upgrade the UNCSD to a permanent body; give more emphasis on SD in all relevant UN bodies; …);
   b. UNEP needs to be reinforced, for example by transforming it into a UN Specialized Agency (such as ILO);
   c. Accelerate the work on streamlining and reinforcing the MEA system, as part of the strengthening of international environmental governance;
   d. Reinforce capacity building for the environment within the UN strengthening environmental expertise and green economy awareness within UN country teams to promote mainstreaming in country programmes;
   e. Strengthen the capacity to monitor the global environment;
   f. strengthen the engagement of the private sector.

<div align="center">

Source: own summary from EC, 2011

</div>

In its meeting on 1-2 March 2012, among other topics, the European Council discussed the Rio+20 conference. TheCouncil 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 9 Match 2012, the Council of the European Union's in its Council conclusions, entitled "Rio+20: Pathways to a Sustainable Future", reiterated its support to the road drawn by the European Commission in June 2011.

Most recently (14-15 June 2012), ministers of the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries agreed on a joint declaration ahead of the Rio+20 Conference where both parties pledged their commitment "to working constructively during the Conference to ensure an ambitious and action oriented outcome". They reaffirmed their "strong belief that the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development is a unique opportunity to ensure a renewed political and international commitment for advancing the sustainable development agenda based on the assessment of progress, in the fulfilment of those commitments made to date as well as on new and emerging challenges". They also "acknowledge that a global transition to an all inclusive green economy could contribute to achieving sustainable development through inter alia, poverty alleviation, increased employment, improved land management, forest conservation, enhanced food security, improved management of water resources, resource efficiency and increased access to sustainable energy, while integrating and building on the value of natural capital and thus sustaining environmental resources and ecological services essential for development"[13].

<div align="center">Box 8 The EU @ the UN</div>

The **EU works with all UN bodies**, agencies and programmes across virtually the entire range of UN activities, from development policy and peace building to humanitarian assistance, environment, human rights, and culture.

As an **observer within the UN**, the EU has no vote as such but is party to more than 50 UN multilateral agreements and conventions as the only non-State participant.

It has obtained a special "full participant" status in a number of important UN conferences, as well as **for example in the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)** and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). In 1991, the European Community was accepted as a full member of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the first time it had been recognised as a full voting member by a UN agency.

On 3 May 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted **Resolution A/65/276** upgrading the status of the European Union's participation in the United Nations. This resolution allows EU representatives to present common positions of the Union to the Assembly. In addition, EU representatives have the right to make interventions during sessions and to be invited to participate in the general debate of the General Assembly. It also permits EU communications relating to the sessions and work of the Assembly to be circulated directly as documents of the Assembly. EU representatives

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[13] see also http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/piebalgs/headlines/news/2012/06/20120615_en.htm

> also have the right to present proposals and amendments agreed by EU Member States and to exercise the right of reply. However, they will not be able to challenge decisions of the Assembly's presiding officer or have the right to vote or put forward candidates.

Source: http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_9389_en.htm

4.5 The preparatory process and the negotiations pre-Rio

On the 24 December 2009, the UN General Assembly (UNGA 64) adopted Resolution 64/236 and agreed to convene the UNCSD in Rio, Brazil.[14] 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 16 and 18 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 7-8 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 13 and 15 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 25-27 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)[15].

A second round of "Informal Informal" consultations was held from 23 April to 4 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.).

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[14] 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).

[15] http://www.iisd.ca/download/pdf/enb2741e.pdf

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.

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

4.6 The Final Outcome Document

The **final 'draft' outcome document**[16] – **The future we want** – was published on 19 June 2012 during a plenary meeting of the Pre-Conference Informal Consultations. During the conference from 20-22 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**"[17] (referred to here 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 10 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, the final outcome documetn consists 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**

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[16] 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

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

Box 8: Final Outcome Document structure (compared to the Zero Draft of Jan 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
      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

In the following part, we provide an overview and reflection on each chapter of the Rio+20 final outcome document:

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).

Especially interesting from the perspective of the last two points just mentioned - and therefore on the role of ecosystems - is paragraph 39 that recognises not only the importance of nature in itself - and "Mother Earth" - but also stressed the recognition by some countries of the "**rights of nature**":

> *"39. We recognize that the **planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home** and that **Mother Earth** is a common expression in a number of countries and regions and we note that some **countries recognize the rights of nature** in the context of the promotion of sustainable development. We are convinced that in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environment needs of present and future generations, it is necessary **to promote harmony with nature**."*

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".

A critical perspective on the relationship between the Green Economy and sustainable development can be found in the background paper of the Rio+20 side-event, the ESDN organised in cooperation with Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

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:

    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 UN operational activities;
    E. Regional, national, sub-national, local.

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:

- be guided by the specific functions required and mandates involved;
- address the shortcomings of the current system;
- take into account all relevant implications;
- promote synergies and coherence;
- seek to avoid duplication and eliminate unnecessary overlaps within the UN system; and
- reduce administrative burdens, and build on existing arrangements.

It was, therefore, decided to strengthen the ECOSOC and to establish a new "**universal intergovernmental High Level Political Forum**", built on the experience of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

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 fulfil its mandate;*
c) *Enhance UNEP's voice and ability to fulfil 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.*

Especially worth noticing is paragraph 90 where it is stressed "the need for the continuation of a regular review of the state of the Earth's changing environment and its impact on human well-being" and the support for those initiatives such as the "Global Environmental Outlook process aimed at bringing

together environmental information and assessments and building national and regional capacity to support informed decision making".

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

4.7 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 2012[18], "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 outcome document 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.

A way to express graphically the contents of a text is the so-called 'Word Cloud' (or tag cloud). This format is useful for "quickly perceiving the most prominent terms and for locating a term alphabetically to determine its relative prominence"[19]. A word cloud shows (maybe too simplistically but in a smart and very rapid way) the *weight* of the words used in a document counting the number of repetitions for each word (excluding the small words like "the", "a", "for", "of", etc.) by using colours and different sizes. The word cloud analysis cannot substitute an in-depth analysis of the content of the final conference documents, but it provides an indication of the important of terms and concepts.

An analysis of the **final outcome document** shows the **fifty most frequently used words** in the text. Logically, 'sustainable development' is the most used expression in the text. Secondly, 'countries' is very much used. Then we can see how prominent the words 'development' and 'developing' are, which refers to a strong focus on the needs of the developing countries. Also very noticeable, one can see the word 'implementation', which seems to be very topical at the Rio+20 Conference and in the sustainable development discourse in general. The national and international dimensions seem to be very much stressed as well as the words 'need', 'support', 'access' and 'poverty'. Strong focus is then on the 'economic' pillar (with 74 repetitions) and even slightly stronger is the 'social' one that is counted 76 times. The word 'environmental' is repeated 55 times, suggesting less importance than the social and economic aspects. Finally, 'sustainable' is very much used in the text counting 93 repetitions.

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[18] The Guardian,"Rio+20 Earth summit talks turn into rubber-stamp job", 20 June 2012
[19] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tag_cloud

Figure 1: Final Outcome Document word cloud

The content of the **zero draft** was slightly different as can be seen in the 'word-cloud' below. In this case, the figure also shows the **fifty most frequently used words** in the text. Again, 'sustainable development' is the most used expression in the text. Mostly the same as for the final outcome document happens for the words 'countries', 'development' and 'developing'. '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', which is present 32 times. Very prominent are also 'support', 'poverty', 'progress', and 'cooperation'.

Figure 2: 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 Outcome 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.

Figure 3: The Rio Declaration 1992 word cloud

A main difference between the **Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002)** and the Rio+20 final outcome document 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 outcome document of 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 outcome document.

Figure 4: The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation 2002 word cloud

5   Conclusions and reflections

This QR provided an overview and reflection on the the Rio+20 Conference - the **United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD)** – that took place in Rio de Janeiro from 20-22 June 2012, twenty years after the UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), also hosted in Rio in 1992.

A number of different *tools for reflections* have been suggested in this report. First, the concept of 'Global Sustainable Governance' has been portrayed. Then, several insights on the UN system and the mega-conferences showed how greatly these have shaped the SD discourse through the years together with a number of agreements, declarations and principles negotiated among all countries.

Secondly, a brief history depicting the major UN mega-conferences on SD has been illustrated with the aim of offering a solid background for understanding and for judging the present and most recent Rio+20 conference. Accordingly, the subsequent chapter presented what happened in the negotiations and how the conference came into form, its objectives and the main two themes taken in consideration, first, a **green economy** in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and, secondly, the **institutional framework** for sustainable development. These two themes were also substantially analysed and described. In addition, a thorough examination of the development process of an international set of **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** has been included. Additionally, a particular focus has been devoted to the European Union and its position toward SD and especially in the context of the Rio+20 conference.

The report then offered a dedicated and meticulous analysis of the text of the final outcome document, entitled "The future we want", where a number of interesting reflections were suggested. Finally, an unusual analysis of the final outcome document of Rio+20 (June 2012) has been proposed; known as *word-cloud analysis*, the final Rio+20 text has been compared with the 'Zero draft' (January 2012), of the Johannesburg Plan Of Implementation (2002) and of the 'Rio declaration (1992).

In these final reflections, we want to suggest a final tool to reflect over and to assess the Rio+20 Conference. In general, this is a very difficult task for many reasons: Firstly, the Rio+20 results are rather 'fresh' and it is thus maybe too early for a fully-fledged assessment. From the discussions and reflections held at the ESDN Conference 2012 on 28-29 June 2012 in Copenhagen, it could be seen that the whole SD community needs to come to terms with the outcomes, reflect on them thoroughly and then decide on concrete steps of implementation of the Rio+20 results. Secondly, the Rio+20 observations are all very different and, so it seems, very polarised, depending on expectations: on the one hand, for some it was a complete disappointment and a missed opportunity; whilst, for others, it was a success as Rio+20 was a reaffirmation of SD and of the broad array of relevant international commitments. For instance, while 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 2012[20]). 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 2012[21]) 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). Among the ESDN community, it seems that the battle between the glass is "half empty" or "half full" is still ongoing. A pragmatic way forward is to **weight and reflect upon the results** because **they are intrinsically multi-faceted**. For this reason, we will not give a general score or a comprehensive mark of the conference; on the contrary, we suggest a way to better comprehend it.

In our understanding, **reflection upon four issues** might help to fully understand and judge the Rio+20 Conference:

1. The process of negotiations and political will;
2. The document "The future we want" and its outcomes/results;
3. The implementation viewpoint;
4. The future work that lies ahead.

1. The process of negotiations and political will

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 Conference, heads-of-state and ministers from more than 190 nations agreed on the final outcome document, <u>"The Future We Want"</u>. Despite the fact that the process of negotiations came to a dead-end when more than 100 paragraphs needed still to be decided, when few hours were left for the high-level politicians to arrive and when mainly the Brazilian hosts pushed very much to an agreement with the preparation of a final outcome document that needed to be agreed, it is maybe possible to find a positive side: the positive point lies in the fact that, at the very end, **192 nations signed a new global agreement on SD while reaffirming all the past ones.**

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, 23 June 2012), let the New York Times to identify "big power shifts around the world" (New York Times, 23 June 2012[22]): "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". Therefore, in terms of political will, we have to register a very poor score, especially caused by the fact that **leadership was needed and leadership was largely absent in Rio.**

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[20] The Guardian, "Rio+20 Earth Summit: campaigners decry final document", 23 June 2012
[21] Politics.co.uk, "Comment: Rio+20 is a missed opportunity", 22 June 2012
[22] New York Times, "Progress on the Sidelines as Rio Conference Ends", 23 June 2012

Indeed**, 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 2012[23])

2. What are the major results achieved at Rio+20?

From the analysis of the outcome document, 'The future we want', in terms of results, it is possible to point out a **few major outcomes** that can be seen as positive steps forward.

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).

In terms of global SD governance, the fact that the **UN Environment Program (UNEP)** will be upgraded is surely a fundamental result, especially toward a strengthened environmental pillar, also in the UN system. UNEP will, therefore, get a more secure budget, a broader membership and strong powers to initiate scientific research and coordinate global environment strategies. Also to be noted is the establishment of a new body – **"a universal intergovernmental high-level political forum"** – that will substitute the Commission of Sustainable Development (CSD). Also prominent is also the need to "strengthen the science-policy interface" in order to "to facilitate informed policy decision-making" on SD issues.

Positively can also be remarked that the **Green Economy** was one of the two themes of the conference and that extensive debate has undergone about this topic. Unfortunately, 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 or new way of "colonisation" of the South. Therefore, the Green Economy was named an "important tool" that countries could use if they wished. Also, it is suggested that real commitments and practical decisions are evaded and, moreover, there seems to be a very visible effort to underplay the option to have similar targets and similar green economy strategies.

Particularly interesting for the ESDN and its members is especially the fact that 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, §98). Also emphasized is the role of regional and sub-regional organisations in promoting a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental

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[23] The Guardian, "Eurozone crisis and US presidential elections race 'damaged Rio+20 prospects'", 22 June 2012

dimensions of sustainable development in their respective regions". Particularly highlighted are indeed 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".

3. The Implementation's viewpoint

Very negatively appears the implementation side of the outcome document and of the conference, which had high expectations that have been probably completely unmet. Unfortunately, the **implementation** point of view has been almost completely left out. **No targets, no timelines, no binding commitments can be found in 'the Future we want'**.

In terms of implementation, the only positive remarks that can be found concern mainly two aspects: one can be framed as 'voluntary' aspects and the second is what happened outside of the conference. Firstly, by the end of the conference, over **700 voluntary commitments** were made by all stakeholders, including governments, UN system & IGOs, the private sector, civil society and NGOs. In addition, a high number of partnerships were agreed and can be found on the conference website. This is very positive because it highlights that there is somewhere the will to actually 'do something' and, most importantly, that there are number of front-runners that together with leadership is one of the things the world needs intensively.

Secondly, actions outside the conference room were extensive: 3000 side events were organised with a large participation of civil society. Also, 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. Femsa, 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. However, 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'".

Nevertheless, **implementation is key**: as many participants of the ESDN Conference 2012 in Copenhagen believed, the Rio+20 final outcome document sets various process in motion and includes numerous important and challenging objectives – it is important now to take concrete steps and practical action to implement all of those in real life.

4. The future work that lies ahead

This last part is, of course, very much linked to the implementation point of view. Although we saw not much movement regarding implementation at Rio+20, it has to be noted that very, importantly, after the conference and in parallel to it, **work already started**. Some 'front-runner countries' already formed working groups and others are on the edge of new work, especially on the green economy, but also for instance on CSR (i.e. 'Friends of Paragraph 47' on CSR). The decision on a new body to operationalize the adoption of the 10-year framework for sustainable consumption and production seems very important. Also some initiatives like 'Sustainable Energy for All' had a positive impact.

Finally, the UN machine also initiated work mainly on **three new processes**: the launch of a process to develop sustainable development goals, the strengthening of UNEP, and the establishment of the new High-level political forum for SD. As very positive remark, the decision to start work by the UN Statistical Commission on a 'beyond GDP' has also been taken, which will allow the inclusion of other important features in order to have "broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product" that will "better inform policy decisions".

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