



The Changes we Need for the Future we Want

CIDSE recommendations for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), 20-22 June 2012

} Towards sustainable development and poverty eradication

} Tackling the structural causes of unsustainability

} Making sustainable development work for all

Introduction

The world stands at a crossroads. The environmental crisis is worsening, with the increasing and yet unsolved threat of climate change already impacting the most vulnerable and least responsible communities. Positive trends regarding poverty eradication are still contradicted by the persistence of severe inequality between and within states. The partial progress that has been made is threatened by the confluence of global crises in food, energy, climate, finance and the economy.

The Rio+20 Conference is a key opportunity to build upon the legacy of the historical 1992 Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 action plan, which paved the way for sustainable development policies, and to give a structural answer to the current challenges. It is also an opportune moment for the international community, twenty years after the first Earth Summit, to push forward a credible and efficient pathway towards sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The outcomes of the Rio+20 conference must guarantee the realisation of human-rights (including those of future generations), sustainability, full and equal citizen participation, as well as respect for transparency, accountability and non-regression on progress made. A rights-based approach implies increased accountability of states and private actors as well as higher standards on participation, which should be reflected in the Outcome Document.

What measures for **sustainable development and poverty eradication?**

While the concept of a green economy has contributed to stimulating debates on the necessary transition away from unsustainable economic models, it also contains fundamental flaws. It fails to address structural problems such as overall levels of resource consumption based on the pursuit of growth and the concentration of power in the markets. Also, it has scarce consideration for social equity, while nature is primarily viewed through an investment lens.

Some aspects of a green economy can certainly make a significant contribution to sustainable development. At the same time, there are profound questions about the compatibility of certain approaches proposed under a green economy with UN frameworks on sustainable development, poverty eradication, and human rights.

The Rio+20 conference cannot endorse a set of vague green economy proposals as the main future strategy to reach sustainable development. For CIDSE, any package of policies and measures to reorient economies towards sustainable development and poverty eradication must explicitly comply with the below principles.

To support sustainable development and poverty eradication, measures must:

- Take into account all three aspects of sustainable development: environmental, economic and social impacts;
- Respect all human rights, including those of communities, workers and citizens affected by the proposed measures;

- Be based upon the principles formulated in the 1992 Rio Declaration (such as the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, or the precautionary principle);
- Give equal attention to the two pillars of efficiency of production and sufficiency of consumption, questioning economic models based on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measured growth that led to the current environmental crises;
- Be fair and equitable for developing countries, prioritising local sustainable technologies, approaches, and enterprises in view of broad social benefits.

Addressing the structural causes of unsustainability

We need to address the structural causes of unequal and unsustainable development patterns, and notably the converging crises of climate change, food insecurity, rising economic inequality and gender inequality.

For CIDSE, the Rio+20 conference should provide the launching ground for international action in the following areas, where so far overarching instruments are lacking:

Food security

Increasing global output will not automatically translate into food security. Such a narrow interpretation of the problem led to the green revolution and its paradoxical results; between 1967 and 2007 crop yields grew by 115% and today we produce 17% more calories per day per person than we did 30 years ago. Yet, such an industrial production model has not been a panacea for hunger eradication and is causing significant irreversible environmental damage, contributing to climate change and putting in peril the planet's future food producing capacity.

Focusing on 'sustainable intensification' trade liberalisation and market solutions is limiting and fails to acknowledge the role of our fragmented food governance, lack of public support for small holder food producers and their systems and lack of secure tenure of land, water and other resources which are vital to farmers. Issues of distribution of, and access to, food should also be considered.

The agricultural sector has been reduced to an industrial function to serve economic purposes and global markets; there is a need to reorient the sector to the service of society. For this we must relocalise our food production systems, scaling up agro-ecological modes of food production, and challenge our production and consumption models.

Climate change

Climate change must receive much stronger treatment in the conference outcomes. The climate crisis is one of the defining indicators of our existing unsustainable models, and the challenges in tackling climate change are illustrative of the stakes involved in changing from this model. So far, actions to limit growing emissions are insufficient to avoid the worst climate change scenarios, and adaptation measures need to receive more attention to reduce the impacts on the most vulnerable people.

The Rio+20 conference must commit to increasing levels of ambition in dealing with climate mitigation and adaptation in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and beyond. It must also launch additional and complementary actions towards low carbon development models in the short, medium and long term.

Equal access for women and men

Women form the majority of those living in poverty and play a central role as agents of change in their families and communities. We therefore need to guarantee the women's participation in decision-making processes and make sure that women have equal access to education, employment and resources, land and ownership, as well as to justice.

The outcome of Rio+20 should promote gender justice and be in line with the content of Agenda 21, the Beijing declaration and the Convention of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Private sector

When adequately regulated, the private sector can be an important actor in relation to transitioning our economies towards sustainable development, poverty eradication and respect for human rights. Small and informal businesses make up a significant part of the private sector and are a source of income and employment for millions of poor people. Their contribution to development should be explicitly recognised in the Rio+20 Outcome Document.

Small and informal businesses should receive the support they deserve to enable them to fully contribute to sustainable development. On the other hand, transnational corporations make up only a small part of the private sector. Yet they command the largest amount of resources and power, including through subsidies and privileged political access. Transnational companies need to be properly regulated to make them change exploitative and unsustainable practices and be more transparent to show how they are contributing to the common good, sustainable development and respect of human rights.

We need adequate regulation and mandatory corporate reporting on social, environmental and human rights impacts of transnational companies at home and abroad, while the role of small and informal businesses should be promoted.

Finance

In order to achieve sustainable development we must end the opacity of the financial system, which reduces countries' financial resources. Tax havens must be eradicated and we must ensure greater transparency and reliability of financial data to prevent tax avoidance.

We must regulate financial markets to end speculation and reorient the financial sector to provide credit for activities that contribute to sustainable development. A new framework for cooperation on international banking supervision and regulating commodity markets are some of the important issues to be addressed in this regard.

We must introduce new and innovative financial mechanisms to trigger structural and systemic changes which will lead to sustainable development. Reform of taxation, removal of fossil fuel subsidies and a global carbon pricing mechanism for the international shipping sector are needed to discourage harmful activity in the real economy and financial sector, reflecting true costs to environment and society while contributing to greater equity. The European Commission has shown leadership in its proposal for a Financial Transactions Tax (FTT) within Europe, as a step towards a global FTT. A substantial portion of the resulting revenues should be secured for the global challenges of poverty eradication and climate change.

Making sustainable development work for all

A sustainable development framework

International institutions should address the complexities and inter-linkages between the three pillars of sustainable development. CIDSE believes that the challenges of implementing the sustainable development agenda go hand-in-hand with the challenges faced in the run up to and after the Millennium Development Goals' 2015 deadline.

We need a sufficiently resourced global development framework by 2015 with commitments to be implemented in a legally binding manner, which upholds international law and respects human rights including those of future generations.

- This framework should address the interlinked challenges of poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, economic inequalities, gender equity, climate change, resilience, equitable distribution of limited natural resources and guarantee human rights and equality. It must ensure policy coherence with human rights and sustainable development in the areas of development, agriculture, trade, finance, investment and the private sector;
- Such a framework should be formulated in an open, transparent and inclusive process, making a special effort to engage women and men living in poverty, particularly those who experience marginalisation, such as disabled people and indigenous people. Lessons must be drawn from the much criticised processes of formulation and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals;
- The framework must include clear commitments which can be translated into national and even community-level goals and indicators, as well as clear operational commitments including gender disaggregated reporting requirements, requirements to undertake human rights impact assessments and public consultations. It must hold public and private actors legally accountable for their actions in fulfilling or undermining the framework's commitments;
- The framework must uphold the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, but is universally binding with obligations for all countries, developed or developing and includes a clear timeframe, which would underline the urgency of implementing sustainable pathways to secure the well-being of present and future generations.

Measuring what matters: Beyond GDP

GDP is currently the key indicator of growth. It only counts the monetary value of all goods and services that were produced for final consumption over the course of a year. It does not include for example unpaid work in the home, care for others, unpaid voluntary work, the entire informal sector in developing countries, social solidarity, leisure and health, education, good governance and freedom to participate. The fundamental function of the economy is to serve the well-being of people and the environment, which is why we should revise the parameters to measure its health.

In order to value a broader set of factors with significant influence on social and ecological well-being, we must revise growth definitions and develop supplementary indicators to GDP.

Conclusion

We must ensure that Rio+20 outcomes are as ambitious as possible. As an international alliance, with 16 member organisations and partners worldwide, CIDSE is stepping up efforts for a more just and sustainable world. Change also begins with us, and we are committed to working with faith communities and civil society, at the People's Summit on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro and beyond, to be actors for a sustainable future.



CIDSE members



Austria



Belgium



Belgium



Canada



England and Wales



France



Germany



Ireland



Italy



Luxembourg



the Netherlands



Portugal



Scotland



Spain



Switzerland



USA

Published in May 2012 by CIDSE, Rue Stévin 16, 1000, Brussels, Belgium

Cover image: © Davide Mazzoran - Contact: Denise Auclair, [auclair\(at\)cidse.org](mailto:auclair(at)cidse.org), +32 (0)2 233 3758
This paper is available at www.cidse.org/resources in English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.