

What happened at Rio+20? – Lessons learned and the way forward

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1. Introduction

Two decades ago in 1992, a historic meeting of governments, business organisations and civil society organisations laid down a commitment to achieve sustainable development, named the Rio Declaration. But it wasn't just any declaration; it heralded a whole new paradigm that embraced integrating economic growth, social equality and environmental sustainability.¹ The world reaffirmed and further refined these precepts in Johannesburg in 2002 where the “overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development” were highlighted as: poverty eradication, sustainable consumption and production, and environmental protection.² Rio+20 was to assess the progress in the past 20 years since the Rio Summit and identify a new and better sustainable development path by renewing the political commitment and creating an effective mechanism to ensure implementation for sustainable development.

The result of Rio+20 is mixed. Some modest achievements were made in terms of Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).³ However, many criticisms also exist about the misleading agenda setting, unclear process, slow negotiations, and lack of leadership both of the Rio+20 Secretariat (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: UNDESA) and a host country, Brazil. Moreover, Rio+20's result mirrors the difference in global power architecture since the Rio Summit in 1992, as many developed countries were busy in handling domestic affairs and financial crisis, but it was remarkable that the BASIC (Brazil, India, China, and South Africa) countries has

¹ United Nations General Assembly. “Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.” *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I)*. 1992.

² United Nations. “Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.” *Resulting plan from the World Summit on Sustainable Development*. 2002.

³ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are proposed by Columbia at the High-Level Dialogue on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development held during 19-21 July, Solo, Indonesia. The proposal later became co-supported by Peru and United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the Rio+20 processes. SDGs is understood as to address all three dimensions of sustainable development to be universally applicable including both developed and developing countries, unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which mainly targets developing countries.

actively participated in international agenda discussed during Rio+20 and all the Heads of the State came. It is also notable that many side events and various voluntary commitments were made behind the Conference, but whether clear messages and new commitments were delivered to the Conference is another question. What happened at Rio+20? What lessons to be learned and what is the way forward?

This paper addresses these questions, first, by briefly outlining the beginning of Rio+20 and its preparatory processes. Second, it explains what came out of Rio+20 in terms of the outcome document and other processes held in parallel with the Conference. Third, the paper examines the strengths and weaknesses of Rio+20. Finally, it provides some implications for a post-Rio+20 world, in particular towards the Asia-Pacific Region.

2. The Roads to Rio+20

Since Rio Summit in 1992

Two decades ago in 1992, a historic meeting of governments, business organisations and civil society organisations laid down a commitment to achieve sustainable development, named the Rio Declaration. But it wasn't just any declaration; it heralded a whole new paradigm that embraced integrating economic growth, social equality and environmental sustainability.⁴ The world reaffirmed and further refined these precepts in Johannesburg in 2002 where the “overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development” were highlighted as: poverty eradication, sustainable consumption and production, and environmental protection.⁵ New approaches continue to offer a better understanding of sustainable development—such as the growing role of scientific knowledge and technologies which have articulated indicators such as planetary boundaries, the ecological footprint, and other measures of human impact on the planet. Despite the progress, however, a chasm still exists between past words and actual deeds. Why is this so?

The chief reasons are a lack, at all levels, of prioritising sustainable development, limited access to financial resources, weak commercial viability of the required investments, inadequate and inappropriate human, financial, technical and institutional capacity dedicated to implementation and evaluation, limited public awareness and a lack of change in lifestyles.⁶ The world is facing broader and ever

⁴ United Nations General Assembly. “Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.” 1992.

⁵ United Nations. “Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.” 2002.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly. “Synthesis report on best practices and lessons learned on the objective and themes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.” *Note by the Secretariat*. A/CONF.216/PC/8.

more urgent issues which may both jeopardise the options available for meeting the basic human needs, and eradicating poverty and threaten efforts to achieve sustainable development. These include climate change, energy security, increasing unemployment and food prices, a growing rich-poor gap at both international and national levels, and an increasing number of natural and man-made disasters. At the operational level, it has become clear that a new gauge of sustainable development other than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and improved institutional governance are necessary to effectively monitor, review, and manage implementation. Further, the modality of international cooperation surrounding sustainable development has dramatically changed—from North-South to a new type of collective action involving all countries and stakeholders, such as South-South and triangular cooperation. Public-private partnerships are also becoming crucial for solving common problems and advancing shared interests.⁷

These changes and challenges within the global architecture have prompted society collectively to prepare a new sustainable development framework based on a new set of measurements. With the objective to address these issues, on 24th December 2009 the UN General Assembly adopted a Resolution (A/RES/64/236) agreeing to hold the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, “Rio+20” hereafter) in 2012.⁸ The Conference seeks three objectives: **securing renewed political commitment to sustainable development, assessing the progress and implementation gaps in meeting already agreed commitments, and addressing new and emerging challenges.** The Member States have agreed on the following two themes for the Conference: **green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and institutional framework for sustainable development.**

Rio+20 Preparatory Processes

The Road to Rio+20 was an evolving process based on the communication between member states, Rio+20 Bureau, and the Secretariat (UNDESA). It took almost one-year and half for member states to form their positions on the objectives and themes of Rio+20, and another half a year to negotiate. Participants in a series of preparatory meetings could not figure out the possible outcome just before the Conference itself. Table 1 shows the summary of Rio+20 preparatory processes

2011.

⁷ United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability (GSP). *Resilience people, resilient planet: A future worth choosing*. New York: United Nations. January 2012.

⁸ United Nations General Assembly. “Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.” *The 64th Session Resolution. A/RES/64/236*. December 2009. p.2.

including meetings and actions taken by all stakeholders as an input to an outcome document.

Resolutions 64/236 and 65/152 have decided to hold three preparatory meetings, one in May 2010 the second one in March 2011 and the third one immediately prior to the Conference itself. Additionally, it has also been decided that three intersessional meetings would take place: one in January 2011, the second one in the second half of 2011 and the third one not later than eight weeks prior to the Conference. The purpose of these preparatory meetings is to discuss substantive and procedural issues in preparation for the Conference. Originally, an inclusive preparatory process was planned to take place involving various stakeholders at different levels, which was geared towards achieving an outcome that would make notable contributions in advancing the goal of sustainable development.⁹ Member States elected at the First Preparatory Committee meeting in May 2010 a 10-member Bureau (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. The UN Secretary General in May 2010 nominated the Under-Secretary-General of Economic and Social Affairs as the Secretary-General of the Conference. To support the Bureau and the Conference Secretary-General in steering the preparatory process, a secretariat has been established within UNDESA.

To begin, the 1st Preparatory Committee Meeting (Prepcom, hereafter) held on 17-18 May 2010 decided to call upon all the stakeholders including member states, international organizations, and civil societies to contribute to the preparatory process by providing technical contributions and inputs, as appropriate, to the Secretary-General's report on the objective and themes of the Conference via the questionnaire prepared by Rio+20 Secretariat. The UN Secretary General's Synthesis report and its summary report were submitted prior to the 2nd PrepCom during 10-11 January 2011 and 7-8 March 2011 respectively for member states to reflect on the views on the implementation gap between achievements and challenges since 1992 and lessons learned from the experiences of each stakeholder. A number of delegations stressed the importance of renewed political commitment both at international and national levels, which can be achieved by strengthening the convergence of the 3 pillars of sustainable development (economy, society, and environment) aiming at poverty eradication. On the other hand, there existed a large amount of skepticism about the concept of green economy, in particular by developing countries represented by G77+China, as well as, uncertainty about options for strengthening IFSD.

⁹ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) website. "Process." <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/rio20process.html> (accessed 28 June 2012)

Many delegates participated in the 2nd PrepCom held during 7-8 March 2011 stressed that the outcome document should be “a focused, concise, and action-oriented political document”, and requested the Bureau to initiate an open, transparent and inclusive process, led by member States, to prepare in a timely manner a draft text, based upon all preparatory inputs, to serve as the basis for an outcome document for the Conference. The 2nd PrepCom invited all member States, relevant United Nations system organizations, and relevant stakeholders to provide inputs and contributions to the Secretariat in writing by 1 November 2011, for inclusion in a compilation text to be presented by the Bureau to member States and other stakeholders for their comments and further guidance at the second Intersessional Meeting on 15-16 December 2011. This compilation document was to serve as basis for the preparation of a zero-draft of the outcome document, to be presented for consideration by Member States and other stakeholders by January 2012.



Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting
Seoul, 19-20 Oct. 2012

Regional Preparatory Meetings in five regions were held in parallel with these processes. This was the first time that member states and other stakeholders were asked to present their official positions on the Rio+20. Overall, 100 member states, 5 political groups, 5 regions, 73 relevant UN system organizations, and 495 major groups made their submission.¹⁰ The analysis of the compilation document revealed an increased support for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and growing attention to priority areas of sustainable development in addition to the two themes of the Conference, including energy, water, oceans, food security, sustainable consumption and production, sustainable cities, as well as disaster preparedness and resilience.¹¹

In addition, the Bureau decided to hold a series of informal negotiations on the outcome document, such as Initial Discussion on the Zero-Draft Outcome Document in December 2011, and four informal and informal negotiations on the outcome document in January, March, and April-May. Another informal informal negotiation were held at the end of May 2012 as decided in the previous negotiation in April-May 2012 based on the request by G77+China due to lack of time for internal coordination within G77+China as well as slow progress in negotiations. In the end, the informal negotiations continued through 3rd preparatory committee meeting on 13-15 June, and following four days until June 19, just before the Conference started on 20 June.

¹⁰ UNCS D website. “Compilation Document.” <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/compdocument.html> (accessed 1 July 2012)

¹¹ Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES). *Summary and analysis of positions of key countries and organizations for Rio+20*. 11 January 2012. p.2-3. Hayama, Japan.

Table 1 A Summary of Rio+20 Preparatory Processes

Time	Preparatory Meetings	Intersessional Meetings	Regional Preparatory Meetings	Rio+20 Outcome Document making process
2010	May	1 st PrepCom 5/17-19 New York		
	Oct.			<i>Response to Questionnaire by all stakeholders</i>
2011	Jan.		1 st Intersessional Meeting 1/10-11 NY	
	Mar.	2 nd PrepCom 3/7-8 New York		
	Jul.			
	Sep.			Northeast Asia Sub-regional Preparatory Meeting 9/1-2 Seoul Regional Preparatory Meeting for Latin American and Caribbean Region 9/7-9 Santiago
	Oct.			Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa Region , ECA and partners 10/16-17 Cairo Regional Preparatory Meeting for Asia Pacific 10/19-20 Seoul Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa Region, ECA and partners 10/20-25 Addis Ababa
	Nov.			<i>Inputs to the Compilation Document by all stakeholders</i>
	Dec.		2 nd Intersessional Meeting 12/15-16 NY	Regional Preparatory Meeting for ECE Region, ECE 12/1-2 Geneva
2012	Jan.			Zero-Draft announced (1/10) Initial discussions on the zero draft of outcome document 1/25-27 New York
	Feb.			Comments on the Zero-Draft by member states
	Mar.		3 rd Intersessional Meeting 3/26-27 NY	1 st Informal Informal Negotiation on the Outcome Document 3/19-23 New York
	Apr.			2 nd Informal Informal Negotiation on the Outcome Document 4/23-5/4 New York
	May			3 rd Informal Informal Negotiation on the Outcome Document 5/29-6/2 New York
	Jun.	3 rd PrepCom 6/13-15 Rio de Janeiro		
Sustainable Development Dialogue Days 6/16-19 Rio de Janeiro			↓	
Rio+20 Conference 6/20-22 Rio de Janeiro				

Outcome document adopted, but “Disagreed”

Due to the slow progress, negotiations had been conducted by so-called “splinter groups” which take over a particular topic, such as green economy, IFSD, SDGs, Means of Implementations, and specific priority issues such as water and energy since the previous meeting in 29 May – 2 June. Negotiations prior to the Conference during 13-19 June took same procedure, but made little progress and many of the same issues were roadblocks, such as the reference to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), description of green economy, options for reforming UNEP, whether to start SDGs with a clear process or clear themes, and funding for capacity development. As typically seen in international negotiations, many delegates disappeared from the official working rooms and negotiated on the sofa at the hall way or café stand. The negotiation “fatigue” were everywhere among not only delegates, but also other stakeholders who observed this process. No one knew where we were heading, and there was a rumor about the extension of the Conference.

As a result Brazil took on an unprecedentedly strong leadership role and provided a non-negotiable text late in the evening of 17 June. Member States were asked to only state the “red line”¹² issues which they absolutely could not accept; after some closed-door discussions and revisions, and with some reservations, the Brazilian’s revised document was adopted



Plenary on 19th June 2012 when the text was adopted.

on 19 June with many disagreed points. Some delegates complained about Brazil’s late leadership saying that they could have taken this sort of action back in March. Others said that this was Brazil’s strategy to exhaust delegates and make them adopt the outcome document even without full agreement. These two theories well describes the difficulty of making consensus during international negotiations.

In the Plenary from 20-22 June, the Heads of State and High-Level Representatives stated position and initiatives regardless of what is written in the outcome document. Most developing countries still expressed their concerns about green economy and strong support of CBDR. On the other hand, developed countries such as US, EU, Japan and others appealed to developing countries by stating their new

¹² International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) Earth Negotiation Bulletin, *SUMMARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 13-22 June 2012*. Vol. 27 No. 51. 25 June 2012. “Red line” issues mean some contentious issues that government representatives in Rio by themselves could not accept as they needed, but have had no time to consult with top officials in their home countries.

and continued commitment for financial contribution and their own initiatives.

In the end, the outcome document, so-called “**The Future We Want,**” became a lowest common denominator with mostly repeating the past commitments without major new and concrete actions stated, rather than ideal set of action-oriented outcomes. What are the key outcomes of Rio+20?

3. What came out of Rio+20?

This paper argues that Rio+20 at least achieved some extent of outcomes, both on the outcome document as well as out of parallel activities, such as side-events, and voluntary commitments etc. First, this section looks at some numbers in Rio+20.

Rio+20 in numbers

First, some numbers about Rio+20 help us capture the overview of the Conference (Table 2).

Table 2 Rio+20 in numbers¹³

Categories	Numbers
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total number of participants: 45,381 Delegations participated from 188 countries and three observers Over 100 Heads of State and Government Delegates: approximately 12,000 NGOs and Major Groups: 9,856 Media: 4,075
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approx. 500 official side events (on-site) Approx. 3,000 unofficial events (outside)
Voluntary Commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almost 692 received US\$513 billion mobilized 52 by governments, 81 by UN/IGOs, rest by Major Groups
Financial commitments of key countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> US: a partnership between the US and African nations, with <i>US\$20 million</i> in funding, to unlock private financing for clean energy projects in Africa and beyond. EC: <i>€400 million</i> to support sustainable energy projects Brazil: <i>US\$6 million</i> to UNEP’s fund targeting developing countries, and <i>US\$10 million</i> towards climate change challenges in Africa, least developed countries, and small island developing states Japan: funding for a three-year programme of disaster risk reduction, and eight multilateral development banks pledged to invest <i>US\$175 billion</i> over the next 10 years to support the creation of sustainable transport systems. Korea: increasing green ODA to <i>US\$50 billion</i> from 2013-2020, and planning to promote global green growth partnership.

¹³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). “Rio+20 in Numbers.” *Factsheet*. 22 June 2012. International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) Earth Negotiation Bulletin, *SUMMARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 13-22 June 2012*. Vol. 27 No. 51. 25 June 2012.

Total number of participants reached more than 45,000, among of which delegates account for 12,000 and the rest includes international organizations, Major Groups, Media, and other relevant stakeholders. In parallel with the pre-negotiations and the Conference, an estimated 500 on-site side events as well as 3,000 unofficial events were held. About 692 voluntary commitments for actions to implement the conference's goals have been received and mobilized US\$513 billion. Key countries including the United States (US), European Commission (EC), Brazil, Japan, and Korea have pledged specific amount of financial contributions to developing countries.

As expected, Rio+20 was the "world's most participatory conference in history" called by Rio+20 President Dilma Rousseff (Brazil). What is remarkable is the increasing presence of major groups and other relevant stakeholders both in terms of substantive input to the Rio+20 processes as well as of the number of participants. As explained in the previous section, the largest number of responses to the UNDESA's call for inputs to the compilation document was major groups and other relevant stakeholders. Many side-events both on-side and outside were organised by NGOs, research institutes, universities, and others, in particular in partner with governments or UN organizations. As for the voluntary commitments, about 560 out of 692 commitments (about 80%) were submitted by Major Groups and other civil societies. 2,400 NGO representatives attended the Rio Summit in 1992, and the number of the participants increased almost four times this time.¹⁴

On the other hand, the presence of member states seemed relatively low as the most of priorities of member states had been dealing with domestic economic affairs and financial crisis, in particular those of developed countries. For instance, the key Heads of State or Government came to Rio+20 includes Korea, China, France, Norway, Russian Federation, India, Brazil, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden while big developed countries such as US, UK, Germany, and Japan did come to G8 held prior to Rio+20 in Mexico, but did not participate in Rio+20. Moreover, governments only accounted for 7% of the total submission of voluntary commitments.¹⁵ Whether these are newly committed or continued initiatives is another question.

The Future We Want or do not care?

Despite the disappointments and criticisms about the outcome document, some achievements were made. The outcome document consists of 6 chapters and 53

14 Pamela S. Chasek and Lynn M. Wagner. *The Roads from Rio: Lessons Learned from Twenty Years of Multilateral Environmental Negotiations*. Routledge. NY. 2012. p.127.

15 UNDESA. "Rio+20 in Numbers." *Factsheet*. 22 June 2012. IISD Earth Negotiation Bulletin. *SUMMARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 13-22 June 2012*. Vol. 27 No. 51. 25 June 2012.

pages. The following table 3 summarises the key outcomes in each Chapter.

Table 3 Summary of the Outcome Document¹⁶

Chapters	Pages	Main points
I Our Common Vision	1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Renew our commitment to sustainable development</u> • <u>Eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge</u>
II Renewing political commitment	2-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaffirming Rio principles and past action plans (CBDR etc.) • Need for broader measures of progress to <u>complement GDP</u> • Engaging major groups and other stakeholders
III Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication	9-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>One of the important tools</u> available for SD • Recognize different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities • Developing countries should be supported through technical and technological assistance.
IV IFSD	13-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen ECOSOC within its Charter mandate • Establish a <u>universal intergovernmental high level political forum</u>, building on Commission on Sustainable Development • Strengthening/upgrading UNEP, establishing <u>universal membership in the Governing Council of UNEP</u> → 67th UNGA
V Framework for action and follow-up	20-47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Agreed at 26 thematic areas and cross-cutting issues.*</u> • Disaster risk reduction and building of resilience to disasters. • Highlights the importance of the conservation of biodiversity, enhancing habitat connectivity and building ecosystem resilience. • Promote a <u>10 Year Framework Programmes (10YFP)</u>.
- SDGs	46-47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed to establish <u>an intergovernmental process on SDGs</u>. • <u>An open working group</u> to be established with 30 representatives. • SDGs process to be coordinated and coherent with the processes considering the post-2015 development agenda.
VI Means of Implementation	47-53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Finance) Agreed to establish <u>an intergovernmental process under the UNGA</u>, and prepare a report on Sustainable Development Financing Strategy. An intergovernmental committee will implement this process by 2014. • (Technology) Request UN to identify options for a facilitation mechanism. • Capacity building, Trade, Registry of Commitments

¹⁶ United Nations. 2012. *The Future We Want*. Outcome of the UNCSO. A/CONF.216/L.1. 20-22 June 2012. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

***List of 26 thematic areas and cross-cutting issues in Chapter V**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty eradication • Food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture • Water and sanitation • Energy • Sustainable tourism • Sustainable transport • Sustainable cities and human settlements • Health and population • Promoting full and productive employment, decent work for all and social protection • Oceans and seas • Small island developing States • Least developed countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landlocked developing countries • Africa • Regional efforts • Disaster risk reduction • Climate change • Forests • Biodiversity • Desertification, land degradation and drought • Mountains • Chemicals and waste • Sustainable consumption and production • Mining • Education • Gender equality and the empowerment of women
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There are different views on the Rio+20 outcome. Some argue that some achievements have been made despite the low expectations as there were no particular reason for Rio+20 to be held except that 20th anniversary of the original Earth Summit was looming.¹⁷ Member states did renew political commitment to the existing international agreements (some are still negotiated), and did agree on many processes for future actions, such as introducing universal membership for UNEP's Governing Council, transforming CSD into a High Level Political Forum, starting SDGs process through a so-called Open Working Group with 30 representatives, agreeing on continuing activities in 26 priority areas such as 10 Year Framework Programmes on SCP, and establishing an intergovernmental process under the UN General Assembly to assess financial needs etc. The Conference could have failed without these achievements.

On the other hand, there are more negative observations about the Conference, arguing that it was a failure without any concrete targets and new actions stated, again highlighting the unclear nature of the purpose and expectations for the Conference. Green economy, which was expected to be a new guiding paradigm for economic development, ended up as only one of the options for achieving sustainable development, failing to waive away developing countries' skepticisms and agree on any numerical targets or the Roadmap EU was pushing. Options for strengthening IFSD were identified, such as High-Level Political Forum based on the current CSD and giving UNEP Governing Council universal membership, but the functions and mandates of the

¹⁷ Mark Halle. *Life After Rio: A Commentary*. IISD. Manitoba, Canada. June 2012.

former are still unclear and only incremental, but not transformative reform of UNEP was realized. The SDGs process was launched, but the functions of an intergovernmental process as well as an opening working group are not explicit and member states could not agree to list some indicative areas.

It is also notable that the coverage of thematic areas and cross-cutting issues in Chapter V are the largest (almost half of the entire document) among the original Rio+20 themes, covered by Chapter III and IV. This means that the focus of the negotiations has shifted from the main themes in due course, allowing member states to insert any agenda based on their priorities other than putting efforts to solve contentious issues regarding green economy and sustainable development governance. This was one of the reasons why “short, focused political document” ended up becoming a 53 page-long document. Some argued, based on the interviews conducted during preparatory processes, that this was the strategy of member states to avoid discussing contentious issues of green economy and IFSD until the last moment, which was more or less successful in the end. Again, this showed the fluidity of the entire process, which contributed to losing ambitions of negotiators for making a more action-oriented outcome.

4. What went well and wrong?

It could be too early to evaluate the outcome of Rio+20 without looking at how these decisions evolve in the next few years. Yet, it is worth examining what was good and bad about the Conference in order to learn lessons and consider the way forward.

Positive factors influenced Rio+20 outcomes

Mainly following three points could be considered as the success of Rio+20. First, the process was more participatory than the 1992 UNCED and 2002 Johannesburg Summits to make the voice of all stakeholders, not only member states, but also international organizations, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders visible to the world. Civil society involvement has been formalized over the last decade by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) This included the structured consultations between governments and civil society known as Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues (MSDs), as well as exchanges of preparatory and summary reporting materials on websites and through email and conventional mail.¹⁸ During

18 Antonio La Viña et al. “Making Participation Work: Lessons from Civil Society Engagement in the WSSD.” World

Rio+20 preparatory processes, in addition to these forms of participation, the Secretariat (UNDESA)'s call for all stakeholders to make inputs to Rio+20 processes via questionnaire or submission of their positions contributed both to make member states' positions visible for all, as well as to finding out the like-minded groups among relevant stakeholders. These inputs were made available on the UNCSD website, in searchable electronic files that can be downloaded. This is helpful for not only forming the inclusive outcome document, but also analyzing the positions of various groups to understand different views as well as to consider the future partnerships. The spaces for improvement are often pointed out throughout the process, such as closed access to the negotiating text via E-room on UNCSD website, which was only for member states and those attending the negotiations.

Second, the growing presence and leadership of emerging countries as well as developing countries in the negotiations contributed "not to fail" the Conference. Rio+20's result mirrors the difference in global power architecture since the Rio Summit in 1992. Among the G8 countries only the French president came to Rio, but the Heads of the State from all the BASIC countries and many developing countries came. During the negotiations, the positions of G77+China were more assertive and have clear agendas –even if, for some, this currently only entails saying 'no'.¹⁹ For instance, G77+China firmly expressed their concerns about potential drawbacks of green economy; the governments of Colombia, the United Arab Emirates and Peru led the consultations on the Sustainable Development Goals; African countries expressed strong interest in upgrading UNEP into a specialized agency. On the other hand, the positions of key developed countries, such as US, Canada, and Japan were often reserved for many contentious issues, such as upgrading UNEP and means of implementation, and it was difficult to understand their clear agenda. EU was a strong proponent of green economy and upgrading UNEP, but their transformative proposals were rarely achieved in the outcome document in the end. This symbolises the power shift and priorities in term of decreasing leadership of developed countries, but increasing global presence of individual emerging and developing country. Brazil as a host country made a significant leadership towards last-minute negotiations, while Columbia has played a key role in developing and convincing member states and other key players to reach an agreement on starting SDGs process.

Third, as mentioned in the previous section, non-governmental stakeholders including NGOs, research communities, private sector and others has played

Resources Institute. *WRI Report*. October 24 2003. p.19.

19 Tom Bigg. "Five things we've learnt from Rio+20." International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). News and Blogs. 3 July 2012. <http://www.iied.org/five-things-we-ve-learnt-rio20> (accessed 10 July 2012).

increasingly key roles in activating global discussion and accelerating collective actions at all levels. A series of informal consultations with member states, side-events, and other relevant events were crucial for not only sending each stakeholder's own messages, but also understanding better the issues some groups face, exposure to the other and new ideas, sharing and exchanging good and bad lessons, and learning each other.²⁰ Side-agreements via voluntary commitments and side-events were of particular importance. For instance, Banks, investors, 57 countries, and companies such as Wal-Mart and Unilever signed to measure wealth in terms of natural resources under a "Natural Capital Declaration" that was primarily the work of a U.K.-based nonprofit called the Global Canopy Programme and the U.N. Environment Programme.²¹ "Future Earth -research for global sustainability," a partnership for global sustainability including researchers, funders and users of knowledge, was officially launched at Rio+20, as a new 10-year international research initiative among that will develop the knowledge for responding effectively to the risks and opportunities of global environmental change and for supporting transformation towards global sustainability in the coming decades.²²

Given these positive factors above, what is worth about events like Rio+20 is to accelerate discussion on a specific topic among relevant stakeholders, in particular among like-minded groups, at all levels regardless of what is achieved in the outcome document. Despite the low expectations on Rio+20, it was valuable at least in promoting exchange of views and experiences, as well as, providing a space for networking and exploring the possibility of collaboration among policy-makers, and other relevant stakeholders.

Negative factors influenced Rio+20 outcomes

Nevertheless, mainly following three factors negatively influenced Rio+20 outcomes in terms of agenda-setting, changing nature of international negotiations, and the role of the Secretariat.

First, it is difficult to support that the Conference achieved its main objective

²⁰ Mark Halle. *Life After Rio: A Commentary*. IISD. Manitoba, Canada. June 2012.

²¹ United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), Global Canopy Programme (GCP), and the Center for Sustainability Studies of the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGVces). "Natural Capital Declaration signatories join governments and corporations with call for accounting natural capital." 20 June 2012. <http://www.naturalcapitaldeclaration.org/2012/06/natural-capital-declaration-backers-join-governments-and-corporations-with-call-for-accounting-natural-capital-at-rio20-side-event/> (accessed 3 July 2012).

A green accounting system was attached to the natural capital creed by the World Bank and signed by 86 private companies, including China Merchants Bank, Puma and Dow Chemical, which all agreed to count clean air, water, forests and ecosystems alongside traditional measures like gross domestic product.

²² International Council for Science. "Future Earth -research for global sustainability." <http://www.icsu.org/future-earth> (accessed 10 July 2012).

to assess the implementation gap and reaffirm the political commitment for sustainable development. All the stakeholders were asked to review their efforts to sustainable development after the Rio+20 themes are decided in fall 2010. This means that the themes are not decided based on the comprehensive review of the past efforts, for instance the renewing political commitment to the outcome of Rio Summit 1992 was often mentioned, but assessing the progress of Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) adopted in Johannesburg Summit 2002 was completely neglected. This caused concern among developing countries towards green economy and generated little interest among the general public in IFSD as the decision seemed to be made more by the top-down, not a bottom-up process. Also, many of the practical matters have been decided in other forums such as United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) etc., so that Rio+20 was not “the” place to tackle key issues in particular policy makers. While a new sustainable development framework has been successfully outlined by this Conference, it could have achieved more only if the review of implementation gap has been conducted more in advance, and the themes are decided based upon its comprehensive analysis.

Second, the geo-political groupings in negotiations seemed not working effectively given the changing nature of roles of national governments beyond the often-mentioned North-South divide. These countries continue to have vastly different foreign policy interests and do not represent a credible negotiating group.²³ For instance, developed countries, such as US, EU, and Japan no longer showed their leadership in leading the negotiations. They were often reserved in many topics, in particular the issues which would impose them additional financial contributions. EU, was the strong supporter of green economy and upgrading UNEP into a specialised agency, however, they had their internal coordination problems and did not necessary come with a collective position. The positions of G77+China were also diverse given the different levels of economic development and foreign policy interests. One of the major examples at Rio+20 was their positioning on IFSD as African Union wanted to upgrade UNEP into a specialized agency and announced its separation from G77+China which had been opposing to such an ambitious proposal in the 2nd informal negotiation held in April-May 2012. Recently, the group of BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) has played a leading role in climate change negotiations. Although they work behind the scene, such as holding informal consultations with non-G77+China

²³ Mark Halle. *Life After Rio: A Commentary*. IISD. Manitoba, Canada. June 2012. p. 4.

countries, to influence different positions among G77+China countries.²⁴ However, this did not seem to happen throughout Rio+20 processes. Rather, Brazil and its like-minded states including Columbia and Peru were “the ones” devoted to making Rio+20 a success. This changing nature of groups could mean the limit of consensus-based UN negotiations, only allowing contentious issues to be compromised, deleted or postponed.

Finally, the Secretariat and the bureau could have facilitated the negotiations in more firm and ambitious manner in giving a sense of urgency for member states although the process is state-driven and they are not mandated to “lead” the negotiations. 20 years ago, Rio Summit held an organizational meeting and four substantive PrepComs from August 1990 to April 1992. During Rio+20 preparatory processes, the Bureau decided to increase the number of meetings as negotiations went on from three preparatory committees (PrepComs) and three intersessional meetings to additional discussion session on the zero-draft and another three informal negotiations. One may question whether these additional sessions are really necessary despite the slow progress in earlier PrepComs. UNCED was in the same situation in the earlier stages, but the bulk of negotiating was done during the five weeks of PrepCom IV, so-called the “New York Marathon.”²⁵ This flexibility in the process permitted member states to be idle in consensus-building, but at the same time exhaust them. Allowing member states to increase the list of thematic areas and cross-cutting issues in Chapter V of the outcome document also shifted the focus from the genuine objectives to review the progress since Rio and discuss green economy and IFSD. In the end, member states got confused, lost attention, focus, and ambition to make a successful outcome. More ambition and firm guidance from the Bureau and the Secretariat could have made negotiations more efficient and effective. Indeed, the take-over of chairmanship from UNDESA to Brazil during the final stage of the negotiations helped set up procedural controls over pulling out “brackets” from the text, but whether this last-minute “red line” tactics was helpful for building trust in consensus-building is another question. Trust was not really built given the “disagreed” nature of the outcome document, but expectations for the chair’s leadership were high enough to conclude the never-ending negotiations.

²⁴ Pamela S. Chasek and Lynn M. Wagner, *The Roads from Rio: Lessons Learned from Twenty Years of Multilateral Environmental Negotiations*, Routledge, NY, 2012. p.99.

²⁵ Peter M. Hass, Marc A Levy, and Edward A. Parson. Appraising the Earth Summit: How should we judge UNCED’s success? *Environment*. Vol.34. No. 8. Oct. 1992. p.8.

5. Conclusion and the way forward

Nevertheless, this paper argues that the Conference was the starting point for change, not the end of history. The important question is not how many treaties were signed or what specific actions were agreed on, rather, how effectively Rio+20 contributed and will contribute to the broader sustainable development process.²⁶ Then, what needs to be follow-up after Rio+20 and how to actually make this happen?

Immediate follow-up actions

In order not to lose the momentum of Rio+20, it is important to properly follow up the decisions of Rio+20 outcome at all levels, including global (UN), regional, national, local, and community levels.

First and foremost, appropriate follow-ups and implementation of Rio+20 outcomes including the outcome document, voluntary commitments, and side-agreements, are necessary to move forward. The details of SDGs and clear functions and mandate of a high-level forum for sustainable development needs to be discussed and identified. The final stage will be an inter-governmental negotiation, but it is more important for scientists and experts to make substantial inputs through the United Nations Secretary General to come up with innovative, fair, and acceptable ideas as well as outreach their messages to global community. How to integrate and mainstream MDGs review and post-2015 UN Development Agenda is a major challenge. Decisions on the means to strengthen UNEP should be properly brought to and adopted at the 67 session of UN General Assembly, including introducing universal membership to its Governing Council, and other financial measures. As the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon highlighted after Rio, "Implementation is imperative if we are to attain the future we want. Now that the summit is over, the real work begins, and we all have our parts to play for ultimate success."²⁷

Second, continuing and accelerating the world's efforts to green, low-carbon, and resilient economy with respect to national capabilities and circumstances is necessary for achieving sustainable development, as each country already has their own initiatives related to green economy. Throughout the negotiations, it was often questioned that why many developing countries were skeptical about the notion of green economy although many countries have already conducted actions related to green economy, such as promoting smart-cities, energy savings, resource efficiency in

²⁶ *Ibid.* p.7

²⁷ UNCSD website. "UN senior officials highlight Rio+20 achievements." UN News. 28 June 2012. <http://www.uncsd2012.org/index.php?page=view&nr=1308&type=230&menu=38> (accessed 10 July 2012).

China, and India.²⁸ Thus, accumulating good practices based on these existing actions and identifying obstacles would facilitate making their own initiatives more effective and developing new actions by information sharing and learning each other. It has become clear from the Rio+20 processes that these voluntary actions by each stakeholder are more promising and effective in terms of implementation rather than trying to agree on the concept of green economy in due course.

Finally, as the international agreements on sustainable development has proven to be slow and difficult, efforts for achieving sustainable development should be strengthened not only global, but also regional, national, local, and community levels.²⁹ Greening Asia-Pacific region is of particular importance as the region is the most rapidly growing economy, but at the same time, it is the most influential region to the planet due to increasing greenhouse gas emission, unsustainable consumption, as well as rapidly growing urbanization and population. Promoting good practices and various activities at regional, national, local, and community levels is also critical for addressing obstacles of sustainable development at global level.

Key elements for future actions

Together with these immediate follow-up actions, it is also important to consider mid- and long-term strategies for ensuring the effective policy making and implementation on sustainable development. Based upon the observations of Rio+20, this paper mainly underlines the following four points which may facilitate the world's future actions towards the future we want.

First, more integrated policy formulation both at international and domestic levels is necessary. Delegates tend to think in terms of short-term benefits rather than long-term vision. Moreover, the strange disconnect between the assessment of Rio+20 by civil society and many of the government delegates exists as there is a deep interest in preserving the integrity of multilateralism on the part of the latter.³⁰ Clear vision and targets are crucial for making a steady, but promising change in the society. To do so, policy-makers need to well understand where we stand and issues we face, based on a fully integrated science-based approach built on partnerships between the public,

²⁸ Chinese Society for Sustainable Development. "Resource Environment and Sustainable Development." Rio+20 Side-event. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 15 June 2012.

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=174&menu=126> (accessed 10 July 2012).

Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). "Green economy and inclusive growth for a sustainable future." Rio+20 side-event. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 19 June 2012.

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=231&menu=126> (accessed July 2012).

²⁹ IGES. *Greening Governance in Asia-Pacific*. IGES White Paper IV 2012. Hayama, Japan. July 2012. p. xi.

³⁰ IISD Earth Negotiation Bulletin. *SUMMARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 13-22 June 2012*. Vol. 27 No. 51. 25 June 2012.

private sectors, and civil society is needed. “Scientific evidence is the power to change,” as Dr. Camilla Toulmin, Director at International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) addressed in their off-side side events called “Fair Ideas” at Rio.

Second, enhancing voluntary actions and initiatives in particular among coalitions among like-minded groups is the key both for promoting global efforts for sustainable development both in terms of policy making and implementation. As Rio+20 has shown the limit of international negotiations, an innovative approach based on science, public-private partnerships, and “coalitions of the willing” could lead particular global initiatives in a specific areas, present good and bad practices, while pressuring other members of global community. At Rio+20, various “coalitions of the willing” were born, in which particular developed countries and international organisations partner with particular developing countries which have similar interests. For instance, Brazil, Denmark, France and South Africa formed “friends of paragraph 27 (of outcome document)” and agreed to adopt UNEP's global reporting initiative to push companies into reporting environmental footprints.³¹ Moreover, in the World Bank’s side event, “Inclusive Green Growth: Challenges and Opportunities on the Pathway to Sustainable Development,” Ministers from Ghana and Costa Rica presented their experiences on green economy as good practices model, together with participation of Ministers from Denmark, China and Korea.³²

Third, investing in resilience helps people adapt to changes in the course of sustainable development. Building resilience means creating the enabling conditions for addressing vulnerability and capacity issues while providing effective financial and political support for emergency responses and recovery.³³ Within social and economic systems, resilience can be enhanced by reducing risk and the underlying factors that contribute to vulnerability – in particular poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, preparing for and mitigating the potential effects of shocks such as natural disasters and financial crisis, and supporting a timely recovery that builds back better.³⁴ Incorporating resilience thinking into sustainable development planning and utilizing local knowledge and communities will better prepare societies to mitigate,

³¹ Global Reporting Initiative. “Brazil, Denmark, France and South Africa governments join in commitment to sustainability reporting.” 20 June 2012.

<https://www.globalreporting.org/information/news-and-press-center/Pages/Brazil,-Denmark,-France-and-South-Africa-governments-join-in-commitment-to-sustainability-reporting.aspx> (accessed 3 July 2012)

³² UNCSO Website. Side Events. “Inclusive Green Growth: Challenges and Opportunities on the Pathway to Sustainable Development.” World Bank. 21 June 2012.

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=240&menu=126> (accessed 3 July 2012)

³³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). 2001. Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Online version. <http://www.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/tar/wg2/index.php?idp=301> (Accessed 29 June 2012).

³⁴ Robert Kipp et al. “Building resilience and reducing risk from natural disasters: Essentials of 21st century sustainable development.” *IGES Issue Brief for Rio+20*. Vol.2. Hayama, Japan. March 2012.

prepare for, and respond to shocks associated with sustainable development, such as resource instability, economic crisis, and natural disasters.

Finally, it is inevitable to outreach the need for sustainable, low-carbon, and resilient society building beyond sustainable development community, together with simple messages using easy-to-understand language, but with a sense of urgency. Perhaps, the increased involvement of civil societies could help mobilize more world population. The role of media should be also increased to raise awareness and make it into action. The participation of media this time was a twice lower than 20 years ago from 8,000 to 4,075 journalists.³⁵ Appropriately following up the official processes and actions adopted at Rio+20, ensuring implementation of voluntary commitments submitted, accelerating each stakeholder's voluntary actions for achieving sustainable development are the crucial steps for creating the genuine "future we want."

Implications for Asia-Pacific region

It is projected that in 2050 greenhouse gas emissions in the Asian region will account for half of the global total. Asia maintains high economic growth rates and continues making new investments. The GDP share of Asia in the world is expected to increase from 19% in 1990 to 52% in 2050.³⁶ Between 1990 and 2008, the countries of the region reduced the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day from 1.5 billion to 947 million, and the region is on track for the poverty goal as well as some other indicators such as reducing gender disparities in primary, secondary and tertiary education enrolment, for example, for preventing a rise in HIV prevalence, for stopping the spread of tuberculosis, for reducing consumption of ozone-depleting substances, and for halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water.³⁷ Despite the region's many successes, it remains home to two-thirds of the world's poor: 1.8 billion people who live on less than \$2 a day, with 947 million struggling on less than \$1.25 a day.³⁸ Primary energy demand in Asia will double from 3.9 billion toe (tonne Oil Equivalent) in 2009 to 7.6 billion toe in 2035, while CO² emission in Asia will increase 11.7 Gt (gigatons) in 2009 to 20.7 Gt in 2035, accounting for about 70% of global CO² emission growth.³⁹

³⁵ Peter M. Hass, Marc A Levy, and Edward A. Parson. Appraising the Earth Summit: How should we judge UNCED's success? *Environment*. Vol.34. No. 8. Oct. 1992. p.31.

³⁶ Asian Development Bank (ADB). *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century*. Executive Summary. Manila, The Philippines. August 2011. p.1.

³⁷ ADB, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). *Path to 2015: MDG priorities in Asia and the Pacific*, Asia-Pacific MDG Report 2010/11. Bangkok, Thailand. 2010. p.1.

³⁸ ADB, UNDP, and UNESCAP. p. 1.

³⁹ The Institute of Energy Economics, Japan (IEEJ). *Asia/World Energy Outlook 2011: Growing Uncertainty over*

Thus, promoting Asia-Pacific's efforts towards sustainable development at regional, national, local, and community levels is key, given the slow progress of international negotiations as seen in Rio+20. Asia is most diverse in the level of economy and other factors, and faced with increasing number of natural disasters requires building a sustainable and resilient society. The pathways to sustainable development, poverty eradication, resilient communities, and environmental quality in the Asia-Pacific region will vary according to national circumstances and the extent of international support, and no "one-size fits all" approach is necessary. IGES White Paper IV recommends the following approaches.⁴⁰

- Least developed, highly vulnerable countries (such as small island states, glacier-dependent and land-locked arid countries, and countries with extensive low-lying deltas and coastlines) should maintain emphasis on adaptation and increasing resilience, while simultaneously addressing poverty reduction.
- Emerging economies should initially emphasise low-carbon economic growth, while paying continued attention to poverty reduction.
- Developed economies should begin to shift economic emphasis to sustainable consumption and production to reduce their global ecological footprint.

Thus, transition to low-carbon, green economy is very important for the region. It is very crucial for promoting further actions of Rio+20 outcome, such as promotion of green economy, strengthening sustainable development governance, and effective development and implementation of SDGs at regional, national, local and community levels, particularly in Asia-Pacific region. As explained above, innovative policies and implementation based on science, partnerships, as well as multi-level and multi-stakeholder participation is the key for accelerating the region's efforts towards sustainable and resilient development.

(End)

International energy Trends and Future of Asia. February 2012. Tokyo, Japan. p.11.

⁴⁰ IGES. *Greening Governance in Asia-Pacific*. IGES White Paper IV 2012. Hayama, Japan. July 2012. p. xi.

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