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a multi-stakeholder magazine on climate change and sustainable development

outreach

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We are all in this together...

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Over the last two days at the UNCSD 2nd Intersessional on Rio+20 at UN Headquarters here in New York negotiations began between member states on the Zero Draft compilation text, and attempts will begin to condense the rather extensive 6,000+ pages of submissions from governments, Major Groups and UN agencies into a coherent document that can deliver a strong outcome at Rio+20.

After a year of engaging in this process, we are pleased to now see a number of specific outcomes gaining traction and hopefully qualifying for a highly prized place in the final Rio+20 zero draft to be discussed by member states next June in Rio de Janeiro. These include Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and green economy roadmaps or action plans, which in our view can focus the broad debate at a practical level, going some way to frame how we can implement a fair and just green economy.

This Intersessional meeting also has the highest NGO participation in the Rio+20 process to date—more than 400 organisations have registered and yesterday the Major Group meeting had standing room only. There is truly a sense of expectation at the start of this second phase of the Rio+20 process, all stakeholders are determinedly seeking a strong and ambitious outcome and want to play their part.

In an informal consultation yesterday with Ambassador Andre Correa do Lago, Head of the Brazilian Delegation, the Ambassador said ‘civil society gave a special weight to the Rio Earth Summit 20 years ago… and at Rio+20, civil society participation is 1000 times more important—governments can’t do it all!’ This idea of strong participation is 1000 times more important—governments can’t do it all! This idea of strong partnership and civil society engagement was also echoed this morning by the Global Sustainability Panel (GSP) Secretariat who acknowledged this partnership as key to any successful outcomes from Rio+20. There really is a strong sense that we are all in this together.

FOLLOW UP EVENT

Bioregional will be hosting a side event on ‘Solutions for Rio+20 Outcomes: Sustainable Development Goals and Principles’, for more information, please refer to the website - www.bioregional.com.
Justice must be reinstated at the centre in the quest for a new green global economy

Chukwumerije Okereke
University of Reading

There is no doubt that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992 was a critical landmark in the history of global environmental governance. It continues to: (i) serve as an inspiration for humane international co-operation and multilateral environmental diplomacy; (ii) provide impetus for the quest for an ecologically secure and sustainable planet; and (iii) remind us of the need for a truly democratic platform for bringing together governments and civil society in the search for solutions to things that threaten our common existence.

The three main agreements that came out of Rio 1992 were the UN Climate Change Convention, the Convention on Biodiversity and the Forest Principles. However, important as these three treaties are, it is probably fair to suggest that the most important outcome of Rio 1992 was the institutionalisation of the concept of sustainable development - the recognition that environmental protection and human welfare are inseparable parts of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation.

As an ethical concept, the intuitive appeal of sustainable development resides in the attention it gives to three key dimensions of justice: (a) justice between and across nations and political jurisdictions; (b) justice between present and future generations; and (c) justice between human and non-human nature.

Today, it remains the case that only careful attention to these three dimensions of justice can ensure the achievement of a lasting balance between economic, environmental and social dimensions of development which the concept of sustainable development envisages. I have no doubt that the lack of attention to justice is the most important barrier against the design of effective policies and institutions for achieving national and global sustainable development. Inequity remains the greatest obstacle to sustainable development.

With COP17 concluded and attention turned towards Rio+20, the question that should be asked is what progress has been made in achieving these three dimensions of justice embodied in the concept of sustainable development. Here, it is important to note that the emphasis on “green economy” - one of the key themes of Rio+20 does nothing to vitiate the centrality of distributive justice in the quest for sustainability. There will certainly be winners and losers in transitions to a greener technology and economy, at least in the short term. Moreover, the move to a green economy would itself entail material costs, and green products and services may generate their own externalities and risks. States, businesses and the civil society gathering in Rio in 2012 must therefore ask how policies and institutions aimed at encouraging a greener economy can better take account of the full range of justice impacts and prospects that such a transition would generate.

My view is that lasting answers to this question can only be achieved in Rio if the three following perspectives are adopted:

1. Distributional justice should not be seen as merely instrumental but at the heart of sustainable development.

2. Questions of environmental justice must be seen as questions about the mode of wealth creation and appropriation itself rather than as an add-on optional extra. Hence, achieving global sustainable development should be seen to require more radical interrogations of the basic structure of the international society and of patterns of social relations between the poor and rich.

3. Given our equal and common dependence on one single natural system, the idea of global environmental/planetary citizenship should not be seen as a mere preachment but one that deserves to be taken as the foundation upon which institutions for environmental governance should be built.

To stand any chance of meeting the aspirations of the majority of the global population that has been clamouring for global sustainable development, international management approaches must strive harder to reflect responsible stewardship and the fact of our common inheritance and ownership of the planetary resources. In short for Rio to succeed, the idea of justice must be reinstated at the centre in the quest for new green global economy.

The lack of attention to justice is the most important barrier against the design of effective policies and institutions for achieving national and global sustainable development. Inequity remains the greatest obstacle to sustainable development.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chukwumerije Okereke is a Reader in Environment and Development, and the Director of Research in African Environment and Development for the School of Human and Environmental Sciences, University of Reading, UK.
Metrics for change

Emily Benson
The Green Economy Coalition

Intrigued by this unanimous call for different metrics we had a quick look at some of the different metrics already in action or in discussion. It is a dizzying landscape. At the ‘beyond GDP’ level alone there are any number of metrics, indicators and dashboards that claim to tackle different aspects of environmental, social and economic growth.

So, how can we navigate our way through all of these different conversations on metrics, goals and indicators?

First, as we consider some of the different metrics and sets of indicators on the table on the road to Rio 2012, we need to keep in mind some core principles. The lessons that we are learning from the series of national dialogues that our coalition member IIED has helped coordinate in Brazil (in partnership with Vida Civilis), India (in partnership with Development Alternatives), Mali (in partnership with Mali Folk-centre) and the Caribbean (in partnership with CANARI), is that the goal of a green economy is sustainable development.

In order to achieve that goal, our idea of progress needs to be underpinned by core principles. These include:

1) Resilience
2) Equity
3) Accountability
4) Inclusiveness
5) Ecological limits.

As our discussions on metrics evolve, then let’s keep these principles at the very forefront of our minds.

Second, let us not lose sight of the big picture. As we start engaging with discussions about metrics at different levels we need to consider how they all connect with one another. How might corporate reporting tie into our national goals? Similarly, how can we ensure that our national objectives align to global priorities in the shape of SDGs?

Third, in order for metrics to bring about change rather than merely measure change, then they need to be accompanied by political weight. The environmental and social performance of a company needs to be reported alongside its economic performance report, not relegated to a footnote or a CSR report. The environmental and social performance of a country needs to be reported by our treasuries and ministers in the same breath as their economic performance. The corporate sector has already gone a long way towards building a persuasive case for how sustainable reporting not only drives investment but ensures that the company is more resilient and competitive. We need to make the same case at the national level.

Here at the Green Economy Coalition we are going to be tackling a different theme each month in the lead up to Rio 2012. As well as the conversations on metrics we will be looking at the following themes:

1) Poverty alleviation in a green economy
2) Economic sector transformation
3) Valuing and managing natural capital
4) Financial market reform.

In each case, we will be connecting different conversations into the big picture, we will be talking to leading thinkers from across different disciplines and we will be sharing the best work from within our coalition and beyond.

If you have been lurking around UN corridors for the last few months you will have been aware of a rising clamour. The din is getting louder. It is coming from all quarters of the world. It is being voiced from a wide range of governments, communities and sectors. The message is clear: for too long our notions of progress have been dominated by economic success alone. The solution: we need different metrics. We need to measure what matters.

Our snapshot analysis of the UNCSD Zero draft texts shows us that the calls for alternative metrics span different levels. At the corporate level, there is a consistent call for companies to measure their societal and environmental impact in addition to their profit margins. Our coalition member, the Global Reporting Initiative, is calling for companies to integrate material sustainability information within the reporting cycle in their Annual Report and Accounts – or explain why if they do not.

At the national level, there is also a widespread call for metrics that go ‘beyond GDP’ in order to measure societal and environmental well-being. A number of Member States, including the EU, Costa Rica, Nepal and Grenada, support the need for national accounting to measure human welfare and ecosystem services.

At the global level there is also a popular call for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a huge array of different Member States including USA, Brazil, Japan, Colombia and Guatemala. There are still a myriad of questions to be asked about what the Goals would entail, and how they might relate to the MDGs, however, the consensus is that our global targets must have a much more integrated approach to the sustainable development agenda.

pic: Kelvin Trautman
It has never been more important to heed the evidence of science that time is running out on our ability to manage successfully our impacts on the Earth’s life-support systems on which human life as we know it depends.” So said Maurice Strong in his statement to the Special UN General Assembly Event on Rio+20 on 25th October 2011. And he should know.

The clarity brought by the planetary boundaries approach can help us make the most of the time we do still have. It points to nine critical Earth-system processes and associated thresholds that we need to respect and keep at a safe distance from, in order to protect against the risk of irreversible environmental change at continental to global scales. Doing so would create a safe operating space for humanity, within which a sustainable and just society would be possible. According to the concept’s authors, boundaries for climate change, biodiversity and the nitrogen cycle have already been crossed.

The concept offers the Rio Conference a basis for framing the challenge of meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. That is why the Planetary Boundaries Initiative has proposed that the Conference should adopt a Declaration on Planetary Boundaries, or at least prominently reflect its principles of recognising that boundaries do exist, committing to respect them, and taking responsibility for doing so.

As well as framing, we need commitments. The Rio Conference should at the very least establish a process for developing, by the time of the review of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, a legal instrument reflecting these principles, and give that task to an over-arching, supra-sectoral international body. This body would also be given the tasks of coordinating global research and development of our understanding of the processes, and of reviewing the adequacy of international legal and governance regimes and structures for safeguarding them. Necessary legal improvements should follow.

Being responsible for safeguarding necessary Earth-system processes means establishing legal principles and duties to recognise and respect them. The UNDP has argued, constitutionally recognising equal rights to a healthy environment promotes equity by no longer limiting access to those who can afford it, and embodying this right in the legal framework can affect government priorities and resource allocations.

This would be in line with Maurice Strong’s call for a system based on Principles 21 and 22 of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration for those who suffer environmental damage in one country, resulting from development in another country, being able to seek legal recourse and compensation for the damages they have suffered.

But planetary boundaries cannot be seen in isolation. Over consumption on a finite planet where millions go without daily places the primary duty on developed countries to take the lead in staying within the boundaries – morally, and legally. Whatever goals emerge from Rio must address these deep inequalities at the same time as reflecting biophysical reality.

As Strong pointed out, some of these ideas might be deemed unrealistic, “but denial cannot change the reality, only increase its dangers. What seems unrealistic today will become inevitable tomorrow, too late to change. The need for such actions is real and urgent. Rio+20 cannot do it all but it can and must set these processes in motion and give them the support and impetus they require”.

The way I see my role is to create as much enthusiasm as possible. My job is to get everyone engaged and to give a role and place to everyone. Additionally, it is to say that we are not only focusing on diplomatic missions with the U.N., but also focusing on all NGOs. Essentially, I’m here to see that in the headquarters we listen and try not to forget anything.

How do you see your role in this process?

I’ve been around for both Stockholm and the first meeting in Rio in 1992 and for me these meetings have been a real pace of history, compared to the slow pace of business and politics. The whole world dove into an incredibly short-term media and technology “forget what has happened yesterday” system. The reality of history and society is on the pace and the reality with our relationship to planet earth. Thus, it is history in the making.

What does RIO+20 mean to humanity and its existence?

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What do you think the priorities for action should be in Rio+20?

I’m very excited by the idea of sustainable development goals and believe that it’s a real global move forward. Additionally, I think it’s important to concentrate all this into view because people want action-orientated outcomes.
Advancing reproductive rights: a win-win for women and sustainability

Sarah Fisher
Population and Sustainability Network

Population dynamics and particularly world population growth were identified at the 1992 Earth Summit as pivotal to environmental sustainability. Agenda 21 responded by setting out the urgent need to increase access to reproductive health programmes to enable women and men to plan the number and spacing of their children. These issues are now more critical than ever, yet since the first Rio conference they have commanded little attention as part of the sustainable development agenda.

A zero draft submission from the Population and Climate Change Alliance (PCCA) seeks to highlight the substantial opportunities that exist to advance a wide-range of sustainable development goals through a focus on population dynamics in ways that advance and respect sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Population dynamics, including growth, urbanisation and migration, interact with the environment to influence consumption of natural resources, biodiversity, climate change and other key Rio+20 priorities. Between now and the end of the century the world population is projected to increase from 7 billion to over 10 billion, with the vast majority of this growth taking place in developing countries. Such growth has considerable implications for issues such as water, energy and food security, and threatens to further undermine progress towards sustainable development, and the necessary transition to a green and fair economy. The challenges developing countries face in feeding and promoting prosperity, for their growing populations, are even more daunting with the onset of climate change. Developing countries themselves are aware that population growth is exacerbating their vulnerability to climate change. Population pressures are heightening climatic effects and making adaptation harder by exacerbating key adaptation issues, including soil erosion, water scarcity, deforestation and migration to environmentally fragile areas.

While the implications of future population growth for resource demand receive some recognition, it is commonly assumed that nothing can be done to change the course of population projections. Or, that any interventions to do so would be intrinsically coercive, necessitating restrictions on women’s and couples’ individual freedom relating to their desired family size.

On the contrary, global population dynamics can and must be addressed in ways that respect and protect human rights. A vast unmet need for contraception exists in developing countries, meaning there are real opportunities to reduce population growth and the related environmental pressures, by reducing unplanned pregnancies. This can be achieved by giving women access to voluntary family planning services, which women want and need in order to plan and space their pregnancies as they choose. An estimated 215 million women in developing countries who say they are at risk of an unwanted pregnancy are not using contraception.

Investment in rights-based sexual and reproductive health services offers a ‘win-win’ approach: achieving universal reproductive health and increasing access to services facilitating reproductive choice, while easing population pressures and contributing to environmental sustainability. A focus on population dynamics and SRHR also offers the opportunity to advance other aspects of the neglected social pillar of sustainable development. As well as offering scope to achieve population stabilisation and contribute to environmental sustainability, addressing the unmet need for family planning contributes to health, poverty alleviation, gender equality and other important factors for sustainable development and a green and fair economy.

Focusing on this approach, the PCCA’s zero draft submission sets out a number of recommendations for Rio+20 outcomes. We call for renewed commitment and greater investment to achieve the goals of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, and for rights-based sexual and reproductive health programmes to be recognized as essential components of new global initiatives to increase resources for sustainable development and adaptation to climate change.

Recognizing the links between population dynamics and sustainable development, governments should ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, empowerment of women, and investment in education, particularly of disadvantaged children and youth, and girls and young women, with programmes that respect and protect human rights.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Population and Climate Change Alliance (PCCA) is a loose umbrella coalition of non-profit organizations that work together to advance SRHR through active awareness raising and advocacy work on the linkages between population and climate change. For further information, visit www.populationandsustainability.org or contact info@populationandsustainability.org
The role of water –
The need for collective thinking for Rio+20

Daniel Hale
Progressio

During World Water Day last year, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon commented “water problems will figure prominently at the forthcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, in 2012 – Rio+20.” Judging by the number of Zero Draft submissions that highlight water, it’s not only Ban Ki-Moon who has ambitions to tackle water issues next year in June at the Rio+20 summit; there are 5,058 occurrences in 408 submissions. With six months to go, it’s vital we get our collective thinking right on water.

Water is an essential part of sustainable development; a fundamental resource that underpins both life and livelihoods. Yet environmental stresses such as water insecurity and scarcity affect a large proportion of the world’s population and are felt most prominently by poor people and communities.

2.8 billion people live in areas facing water scarcity. The poorest are at a particular disadvantage when there is competition over water resources. Balancing the need for water amongst poor populations, including the small-scale farmers who feed a third of the world’s population, must be at the heart of decision-making on the road to Rio+20.

We might look to people like María Yolanda Rojas Ávila for some practical solutions to water problems. María Yolanda is 35 years old. She lives with her husband, German, and their three children, Eduardo, Wilson, and Silvia Rosalina. They live in the district of Antoaóqa, in the watershed of the Lurín River near Lima, Peru.

“To me, water means life. Without water the people, animals and crops cannot live. If we didn’t have water for irrigation, we would depend on the rainy season and only have one harvest per year, which would mean less income for my family. “We pay to access water through the local irrigation committees. However, in this area, farmers use irrigation water very inefficiently and every time we have less water available. Sometimes this causes conflicts between neighbours. “To address the problems we have locally, I participate in activities such as the Concejio de Cuencas (the water users’ organisation at watershed level). This organisation gives small water users an equal voice in the management of our watershed, because until now it is the big companies and the State who make all the decisions, and we are not even told about what they decide.”

At a local level, small-scale water users like María Yolanda are working together to solve their water problems. The work is supported by Aquafondo, an innovative NGO which charges organisations using water downstream in Lima a small fee. The money is used upstream to bring farmers together locally, to train them in water conservation and to reforest the watershed. This work helps water to be released slowly throughout the year, meaning fewer floods and less severe droughts.

María Yolanda also shows that women’s knowledge counts. Women are generally the main water managers at a household level in developing countries, both for consumption and for productive use. Women’s knowledge and participation must be acknowledged, and women must be provided with adequate support according to their needs.

A Green Economy cannot function without water; water is a fundamental part of agriculture and energy production. Consequently it’s essential that Green Economy policies ensure water-related impacts are fully understood and accounted for, including knock-on impacts. Community- and ecosystem-based management, recognising local knowledge and with poor people at the centre of decision-making, will go a long way to ensuring local sustainability. In short, the Green Economy must be truly “waterproof”.

María Yolanda has high hopes for the Rio+20 process and her future. “My hope is for a good future for my children, in a healthy environment; I hope we will have enough water in the future. “World leaders meeting in June should really listen to all the poor people in the world and not ignore us, because I think everybody in the world should have the same chance to have a good and decent life.”

The Global Transition 2012

Kirsty Schneebeger, Stakeholder Forum
Dr Victoria Johnson, nef

The Global Transition 2012 is an international network of organisations and leading thinkers from the Global North and South that is catalysing a ‘Global Transition’ by building a community of civil society organisations across the globe to promote and deliver a rapid transition to the desirable and beneficial economy that we aspire to.

The ultimate vision of the initiative is a global green and fair economy that maximises well-being, operates within environmental limits and is capable of coping and adapting to global environmental change.

Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, nef (the new economics foundation) and New Economics Institute are working in partnership to achieve this. Working with other partners such as the Green Economy Coalition and Bioregional, we are aiming to grow the network of organisations from now, in the lead up to Rio+20 and beyond.

Why do we need a Global Transition?

The path we are currently on is unsustainable. But, putting the brakes on consumption will, in the current economic system, trigger further unemployment, injustice, and a major decline in human wellbeing. Hence, the tremendous appeal of business as usual and the unwillingness to address the huge systemic problems we face.

However, we are convinced that there is an alternative. This alternative is not just necessary, but both desirable and possible. It means moving to a new economy that delivers well-being and social justice for all without stretching the Earth’s resources beyond breaking point. This requires a Global Transition.

The Earth Summit in Rio in June 2012, with its focus on the green economy in the context of poverty eradication, offers a unique opportunity to develop a global roadmap or pathway to achieve this transition and with additional ‘toolkits’ that can support the implementation of these pathways civil society and governments alike can work together to achieve the transition.

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For more information
If you are working in this area and would like to see your project or work put on the map, or if you would like to submit an article or blog post, please email: info@globaltransition2012.org or see the contact form on the Global Transition 2012 website: http://globaltransition2012.org
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Review of the Global Sustainability Panel Briefing

The UN Secretary General’s High-level Global Sustainability Panel (GSP) gave a briefing of its upcoming report in a special side event at the second Rio+20 intersessional yesterday. The panel is comprised of renowned world figures to formulate a new blueprint for a sustainable future on a planet under increasing stress resulting from human activities. It co-chaired by President Tarja Halonen of Finland and President Jacob Zuma of South Africa.

Janos Pasztor (Executive Secretary of the GSP) reported that the meeting of the Panel finished on an upbeat note after resolving difficult, but key, issues. He acknowledged that, for the complexities of sustainable development, more time was needed as the Panel did not feel it had adequately finished its task. An additional meeting is being planned for the New Year, and the publication of the final report is to follow later than expected. In particular, the Panel is seeking to articulate its vision for sustainable development along with key recommendations as drivers of change at Rio+20.

The briefing examined three key areas of the GSP report: empowering people; the economy & markets and institutional governance:

- **Empowering People** – Fortunato Albrinho of Mozambique commented that the world is facing tremendous socioeconomic difficulties and challenges propagated by economic crisis and climate change between and within countries. However, the GSP’s vision of sustainable development is one that puts people at the centre of priorities. The challenge is how to empower people to make sustainable choices. A key, actionable recommendation will be that government and international partners should join forces to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities. The GSP acknowledge that it is crucial to act urgently to improve people’s access to education, health, food, water and energy. Gender equality, coupled with resilience and social safety nets, is fundamental to achieving these aims.

- **Economy and Markets** – Varad Pandey from India stated that the value of the panel comes from the diversity of the panelists; the different geography but diversity – Varad Pande from India stated. This is not just different geography but diversity.

- **Institutional Governance** – Hannu Kyrolainen from Finland commented that the Panel has always attempted to be transparent and recognised the need to strengthen governance. He stated strongly that good governance is a foundation to sustainable development, and what is needed is a whole of government approach. To that end, the Panel is focusing on recommendation to promote horizontally integrated to cut across silos. Governance to bring together all relevant actors, not just government. He went onto highlight four themes for institutional governance:

  1. Coherence and accountability at the national and local level which addresses:
     - i. the role of Prime Ministers and Heads of Government putting into place more proactive coherence with a whole government approach;
     - ii. the use of budgets based on sustainable development criteria; and
     - iii. Role of Parliaments in promoting sustainable development and creating accountability.
  2. Coherence and accountability at the regional and global level which addresses:
     - i. The fragmentation of all three elements in sustainable development in global institutions and systems; and
     - ii. The role of UNEP in the post-2013 world.
  4. A Global Sustainability Outlook as a Secretary General’s report which undertakes a cross-sectorial assessment of sustainable development at all levels.

The briefing did raise some concerns. Firstly, the fact that the Panel has not published yet is not ideal. The delays may mean that given the complexities of sustainable development, more time was needed as the Panel did not feel it had adequately finished its task. An additional meeting is being planned for the New Year, and the publication of the final report is to follow later than expected. In particular, the Panel is seeking to articulate its vision for sustainable development along with key recommendations as drivers of change at Rio+20.

However, this area of the Panel’s report sought to tackle complex issues, such as sustainable consumption patterns. He acknowledged the clear link between the way we live and the security of our livelihoods. An issue for the Panel is the need to price externalities; this includes scaling up of trading schemes based on market-based mechanisms. Another area of action is the need to address harmful subsidies and the importance of disclosure to promote change. The importance of innovative finance and scaling up public finance and Official Development Aid (ODA) must also be addressed. Lastly, measuring progress and what matters has clear links to the Beyond GDP agenda and the need from more inclusive indicators.

- **Solid recommendations.**

- **What prompted your early interest in the environment?**

  My daughter was diagnosed with asthma and the doctor said ‘Don’t worry – it is caused by Oxford's polluted air’. That made me really worry…. and then decide to act.

- **Describe your first attempt to ‘save the planet’:**

  A video I made at the Earth Summit in 1992. It headlined the issues and how business could help. I could play it at Rio and you would think little had changed over the last 20 years.

- **What is your view on the GDP 17 outcomes?**

  Mixed. It was never possible that we would get an agreement equal to the challenge of staying below 2 degrees of global warming. But the outcomes are well above (the admittedly low) expectations and will definitely be helpful in encouraging the unilateral, bilateral and multilateral voluntary actions which are our only hope of avoiding catastrophic temperature rise.

- **What do you believe should be achieved at Rio+20?**

  Should it be achieved at Rio? Given that virtually all environmental and social indicators have progressively worsened over the last 20 years, it is unlikely that we will see any substantive outcomes. We need to take stock and acknowledge that UN processes are a welcome but inadequate response to the multiple urgent challenges we face in achieving remotely sustainable ecological and sociological systems. We need to find new ways of delivering the scale of changes needed.

- **What is your role in this process?**

  Challenging and guiding the corporate sector to play an active role in addressing the massive challenges we face in a globalised and privatised world. This has to shift from lessening negative environmental, social and economic impacts to using corporate economic, innovative skills and global scale to generate positive societal outcomes.

- **How important is the Rio+20 process?**

  Sadly, I suspect not very important. I fear it will be positioned as a celebration of progress when the reality is continuing degradation of the environment and associated social challenges. We should understand that developing potential solutions completely lost.

- **What do you think the priorities for action should be in the run up to Rio+20?**

  Bringing together government, civil society and business to recognize that future solutions need to be fundamental rather than incremental; collaborative rather than competitive; and working to shift systems rather than parts of it.

For more information, visit http://www.sustainability.com/
If Rio+20 ushers in the Green Economy, who will control it?

ETC Group

From the 2nd Intersessional on Rio+20, the ETC Group launched Who Will Control the Green Economy?, a report warning that the world’s largest companies are riding the coattails of the green economy while gearing up for the boldest coup to-date - not just by making strategic acquisitions and tapping new markets, but also by penetrating industrial sectors outside their traditional business.

Corporate concentration – where fewer and fewer companies control more and more of the market – is a trend of the last several decades and it’s still the name of the game. Now the world’s 10 largest seed companies control 73% of the commercial seed market, up from 37% in 1995; the top 10 pesticide companies control a whopping 90% of the market; the top six pesticide companies control almost three-quarters of the market; and five of those six companies are also among the top 10 seed companies. Ten chemical firms account for 40% of the chemical market; and 10 forestry companies control 40% of the forestry market.

But increased corporate concentration is just part of the story. Since the turn of the millennium, the vision of a bio-based economy has been taking shape; with its promise to solve the problems of Peak Oil and climate change and to usher in an era of sustainable development, it quickly acquired a patina of green. Like many others, ETC Group sees technology as the green economy’s driving force, but we are less optimistic than others that the outcome of the “great green technological transformation” will be the one we had in mind.

Forget Windmills, Think Grain Mills: The green economy may evoke iconic images of wind turbines and solar panels, but these aren’t the focus of corporate activity. According to the BP Statistical Review of World Energy, “renewables” (e.g., wind, geothermal, solar) accounted for just 1.8% of global energy consumption in 2010. It is new technologies, including advanced bioinformatics, genomics and synthetic biology, which takes genetic engineering a step further, that are turning out to be the green economy’s real engine (its fuel is plant biomass). In a strategic move, the world’s biggest players in seeds, pesticides, pharmaceuticals and food – including Monsanto, Syngenta, Dow, DuPont, BASF, Novartis and Unilever – are making investments in the field of synthetic biology and forming R&D collaborations in hopes of turning plant biomass into all kinds of high value products – and profit.

While seductive, the new green techno fixes are dangerous because they will spur even greater convergence and concentration of corporate power and unleash proprietary technologies into countries that have not been consulted about – or prepared for – their impacts. If “the green economy” is endorsed without a good look at the corporations who stand to benefit from it and its impacts on the ground, the Earth Summit risks becoming the biggest Earth Grab in more than 500 years. The green economy and the technologies which are expected to deliver it must be properly assessed before they are globally adopted.

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