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Rio+20: The Age of All Humans?

Around 12,000 years ago the climate began to settle down and stabilise, and we entered a new geological period called the Holocene. This stability on Earth, in turn, allowed us to settle down. We turned from hunter-gatherers to farmers, and predictable weather enabled us to stay in one place and cultivate the land. This was the start of human civilisation and everything that followed. The good times had begun.

Today, however, we have become a force of nature on par with major geological processes. It is commonly agreed that the impact humans have on the planet are not only growing in magnitude, but also in consequence. Most dangerously, this is occurring faster than a geological speed. We have moved beyond the Holocene into the Anthropocene: the age of humans. The Anthropocene has been signalled by changes in previously natural processes (e.g. carbon and nitrogen cycles, biodiversity loss and sediment flows) which, as the Economist put it, ‘have been interrupted, refashioned and, most of all, accelerated’.

Globally we are consuming resources faster than the Earth can regenerate them, and producing more waste and pollution than the Earth can absorb. Consequently, our planet is coming under increasing pressure. At the same time, the inequality gap continues to grow – the 1% are holding 99% behind, along with their garbage.

Sadly, it seems, the bad times have begun. And if left unchecked, things will get a lot worse. But hope remains. There have been some worldwide improvements in recent decades – such as a reduction in poverty levels – and now there is clear recognition by many of the need for a major transformation of the way in which we operate.

The Rio+20 preparatory negotiations in New York have been encouraging. Consensus is emerging between developed and developing countries alike, as well as civil society, on the greater urgency, ambition, and detail required to make Rio a success. It is a real chance to re-imagine our socio-economic systems and the way in which they work in harmony with nature, to deliver greater well-being for all, now and into the future. But we must act decisively.

Much remains to be done to turn the output of Rio+20 into a substantial agreement with concrete outcomes. We need to build a programme of commitments, actions and implementation that is worthy of taking forward the work started at the first Earth Summit in Rio, 20 years ago.

Recently, the Global Sustainability Panel launched its report entitled Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing. The report is the result of a 17-month global consultation led by a 22-member High Level Panel of sustainability luminaries, established by the UN Secretary-General. It details the extent of the sustainability challenges we face and outlines a blueprint of what needs to be done nationally, and internationally, to bring about a green and fair transformation to a sustainable future.

The Panel’s vision ‘to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and make growth inclusive, and production and consumption more sustainable, while combating climate change and respecting a range of other planetary boundaries’ is both inspiring and intellectually robust.

Taking the Panel’s vision further, Oxfam, along with partners, have been working to describe a model of the future which is people-centric, which also exists within a safe and just operating space, based on our biophysical reality (see Kate Raworth’s article on page 3). It is defined by an inner foundation for social protection and an upper limit of planetary boundaries. Together these parameters detail the two core elements of sustainable development; that of planetary health and social justice.

It is hoped that this concept will provide a Rio+20 vision for sustainable development which defines new eco-friendly and rights-based pathways for just, inclusive growth and prosperity.

It’s apparent that the changes inspired by these ideas must start with true leadership. The call to action from all quarters is clear, articulate and persuasive. A bottom-up approach must now be met by inspiring action from our political leaders, to create the sustainable future for all that we so desperately need.
Planetary and social boundaries: A starting point for designing Sustainable Development Goals?

Kate Raworth
Senior Researcher, Oxfam GB

In 2009, the Stockholm Resilience Centre brought together a group of leading Earth-system scientists to come up with the concept of planetary boundaries. They identified a set of nine Earth-system processes – like the freshwater cycle, climate regulation, and the nitrogen cycle – which are critical for keeping the planet in the stable state that has been so beneficial to humanity over the past 10,000 years.

Under too much pressure from human activity, any one of these processes could be pushed into abrupt, and even irreversible, change. To avoid this, the scientists drew up a set of boundaries below their danger zones – and they called the area in the middle of the circle ‘a safe operating space for humanity’.

So how about adding the idea of social boundaries to the picture? This is an idea I set out in a recent Oxfam Discussion Paper. Just as there is an environmental ceiling, above which is an oversimplification that nevertheless indicates a major truth, which more cautious approaches fail to communicate. Or, the option I would prefer, we focus our attention on the real boundaries, such as climate and biodiversity loss, and accept economic growth when, and if, it can stay within those boundaries.

However, what is particularly striking for an economist is that we are nowhere near that situation. Even anti-growth position that tends to crumble away once it is probed in any detail.

The latter is closer to representing the real situation, and where those limits are.

There seems to me that there is an enormous ‘gap in the market’ where speaking the truth ought to be. On the one side, we have the language of ‘green growth’ – too often used as a form of ‘greenwash’ in the service of avoiding difficult issues. On the other, a simplistic anti-growth position that tends to crumble away once it is probed in any detail.

The reason for this is clear. There is no inherent problem about high levels of consumption or production, when measured in terms of money (as Gross Domestic Product is) – provided that we keep within the world’s environmental boundaries. That means that for every incremental rise in GDP, there has to be a corresponding improvement in the efficiency of resource use, and the ratio of GDP to environmental impact.

However, we are nowhere near that situation. Even where ‘decoupling’ is claimed to have taken place, it almost always turns out to be ‘relative’ and not ‘absolute’ decoupling – meaning efficiency has improved, but not fast enough to outweigh the impact of growth. This creates a difficult strategic choice. We can adopt a simplistic ‘limits to growth’ position, an oversimplification that nevertheless indicates a

These questions and many more will be discussed in a side-event hosted by Vitae Civicus, SustainableLabour and Oxfam on Friday, 23rd March, 1.15-2.45pm in Conference Room B in the North Lawn Building of the UN in New York, so please come and join the debate.

More info

Figure 1: A safe and just space for humanity.

Between the social foundation and the environmental ceiling lies a space – shaped like a doughnut – which is the safe and just space for humanity.

The Earth-system scientists stuck their necks out and estimated that we have already crossed at least three of the nine planetary boundaries – climate change, nitrogen use, and biodiversity loss. So I stuck my neck out too, and estimated that humanity is falling far below the social foundation on all eight dimensions for which data is available. As shown in Fig 2, for example, 13% of the world’s population is undernourished – represented by the blue gap beneath the line of the social boundary for food.

Fig 2: Falling far below the social foundation.

These four shifts would be a strong start towards defining the economic development needed to bring humanity within social and planetary boundaries. This approach also opens up interesting questions for the design of a potential set of SDGs such as:

• What would SDGs that were derived from the concept of planetary boundaries and social boundaries look like?
• What should be the agreed dimensions of the social foundation – and who should define them?
• If international equity in the distribution of resources, and efficiency in the use of resources, are both essential for enabling humanity to move within the safe and just space, does that imply a need for intermediate SDGs, which focus on improving outcomes in both of these?

Limits to Growth?

Victor Anderson
One Planet Economy Leader, WWF UK

The ‘planetary boundaries’ analysis promoted by Johan Rockstrom and his colleagues, presents a powerful overall picture of the state of the planet and the parameters of humanity.

There is plenty of room for discussion of the detail of specific boundaries, and the competing concepts of ‘thresholds’, ‘limits’, and ‘tipping points’; each of which have significantly different implications. It is also possible there are additional boundaries, and furthermore, it has been proposed that a whole set of ‘social boundaries’, based on human needs, should be added to the picture.

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Population, Reproductive Rights and Planetary Boundaries

Sarah Fisher
Population and Sustainability Network

Population is a critical but neglected link in the debate over potential policies to help ensure we respect the planetary boundaries that offer a safe and just operating space for humanity. Achieving universal reproductive health and rights offers a win-win strategy that would reduce pressure on each of the critical boundaries, while driving progress towards the social boundaries that must be met if sustainable development is to deliver for all.

The UN Global Sustainability Panel’s recent report warns that, “By 2030, the world will need at least 50% more food, 45% more energy and 30% more water – at a time when environmental boundaries are throwing up new limits to supply.” Population impacts on both supply and demand.

According to the UN’s medium term population projection, by 2030 the world population will have increased from 7 billion today, to 8.3 billion; reaching 9.3 billion by 2050. Alongside unsustainable and inequitable consumption patterns, population size is a key factor in determining the scale of humanity’s use of natural resources. Whether it is increasing land use change, freshwater use, climate change or any of the other nine critical thresholds identified by the planetary boundaries approach, population growth is a common denominator.

The resulting human impact on the environment is, of course, not only determined by the number of consumers (population size), but also by per capita consumption and the efficiency with which natural resources are utilised. Yet, given the scale of the challenges we face, we need to move beyond the simplistic belief that the cause and solution lies in either ‘population’ or ‘consumption’. Instead we must embrace the full range of strategies available, and if population is absent from the debate, the effectiveness of other interventions will be significantly compromised.

One of the many complex reasons why population issues are sometimes either dismissed, or deemed irrelevant, is the dire neo-Malthusian warnings of the ‘60s and ‘70s. Thankfully, despite the world population having more than doubled since 1960, humanity hasn’t faced the mass starvation predicted, not least because of the Green Revolution. But on a planet of finite resources, population dynamics – including migration, urbanisation and ageing – have significant implications for sustainable development and deserve consideration.

It is often assumed that the trajectory of future population growth cannot be changed without coercive interventions that necessitate restrictions on individual freedoms relating to desired family size. On the contrary, global population dynamics can, and must, be addressed in ways that respect and protect human rights. In developing countries, an estimated 215 million women are not using contraception and are at risk of unplanned pregnancy. This vast unmet need for contraception offers considerable opportunities to reduce population growth, simply by reducing unplanned pregnancies. This can be achieved by increasing access to the voluntary family planning services that women want and need in order to plan and space their pregnancies as they choose. This is a recommendation made in both the recent UN report Resilient People, Resilient Planet, and Oxfam’s paper A Safe and Just Space for Humanity.

At Rio+20, global leaders must commit to increased investment in voluntary sexual and reproductive health programmes that respect and protect rights. Achieving universal reproductive health and rights would not only ease the pressures on planetary boundaries, but would drive progress towards health, gender equality, poverty alleviation, and other important goals for the social boundaries that are critical to securing sustainable development.

Planetary and Societal boundaries

Leida Rijnbout
Executive Director, ANPED

When sustainable development became an important concept, lots of people started to visualise it in different graphs and drawings. The most known of these conveys of image the three pillars patiently standing next to each other. The rationale behind it is that when those pillars are in balance, we will achieve sustainable development. And when the economic pillar grows, we have to invest more in the social and environmental pillars. It also is necessary to connect those pillars to each other. But as Elton John already informed us in one of his songs, “you can build a bridge between them, but the empty space remains…”

But the pillar approach does not indicate any limitations in the carrying capacity of the planet, nor of society. Consequently, it presents a false solution of unlimited growth. Which is quite dangerous, as too much economic growth often provokes irreversible environmental damage and too much pressure on people too. The pillar approach, however, has the blessing of the Washington Consensus.

A more realistic approach is talking in terms of ‘capitals’. It provides a better understanding of the limits we have to deal with. The environmental capital is our planet. It draws precise boundaries for defining and organising our lifestyles. This is quite clear. Also clear is that we are already going far beyond those boundaries.

But we also have boundaries to our social capital. Social capital includes, among other things, the levels of health, education, and social networking in a society. If the stress on society is too high, we are also depleting our social capital. If we each have to work 60 hours a week in order to maintain our economic growth, and people get sick and exhausted, then we are “eating” into our social capital. We see the same dynamic with the number of young children suffering from with respiratory diseases because of increasing pollution. Equity, well being and happiness are crucial for social capital too.

The way we visualise sustainable development is very important in determining how we implement it. Look at the graphics, and decide “which best represents the planetary and societal boundaries?” Decide which helps emphasise that our (green) economies have to stay within the limits of our social and ecological capital, in order to be sustainable.
Is doughnut economics too Western?
A critique from Latin America

Eduardo Gudynas
Senior researcher, Latin American Center of Social Ecology (CLAES)

The discussion paper recently launched by Oxfam, ‘A Safe and Just Space for Humanity’, has many positive aspects that can be shared with organisations and movements in the Global South. It also contains elements that are in line with Oxfam’s commitment to eradicating poverty and protecting the environment.

The document proposes a doughnut, which adds a pastry to the mix of sustainable development recipes, and we should review it thoroughly.

Let’s begin by pointing out that this approach is ambitious, since it claims to offer a new perspective on sustainable development: the articulation of human rights and environmental limits in a just and safe space.

But just how new is this perspective? The idea of an environmental space was first considered in the 1990s, by both academia (in the early work of the Wuppertal Institute in Germany) and social movements (in this case Friends of the Earth, a point acknowledged in Oxfam’s paper).

Furthermore, the idea of linking human rights and environmental issues is older still. To give you an example, in 1974, amid the hubbub of debate about development and the environment, a group of prominent academics and politicians issued the Cocomaya Declaration. It was a very important contribution at the time, and held that the role of the State, the concept of property, and ways of redistributing wealth. The ‘right to development’ has also been discussed, which would greatly complicate the idea of ‘development’, but rather that our notion of development should be reduced to the components of the doughnut.

But in my view, a discussion about sustainability requires the idea of development to be questioned, especially the Western concept of development. There are undoubtedly many ways of understanding development, and we have seen capitalist programmes with varying emphasis (neoliberal, Keynesian, neo-Keynesian, etc.), as well as socialist programmes (e.g. the Soviet model and all its variants), and even complex hybrids (like that of China).

These tendencies have significant differences in terms of the role of the State, the concept of property, and ways of redistributing wealth. The ‘right to development’ has also been discussed, which would greatly complicate the doughnut. But what is striking is that they all share a set of basic ideas – all of them Western – such as the belief in progress, the appropriation of nature, and the dream of material comfort. ‘Development’ involves common principles for organising society, production, and the relationship with the environment.

The social and environmental crisis is so serious that it is now time to put aside minor adjustments and reforms, and instead address the root causes of resistance to the idea of development. We must adopt an approach whereby the term ‘sustainable development’ no longer requires the suffix ‘development’. The civil society programme in Rio+20 should not focus simply on fixing the superficial problems of development, it is necessary to look for alternatives to the entire body of ideas about development.

In this effort, the ethical dimension is key, and this point appears in the references to the norms of the doughnut. But here also it is necessary to delve a little further into the ingredients of this recipe.

If sustainable development strengthens its demands for change, it must abandon the traditional idea of development and thus break with the anthropocentric ethics that are characteristic of Western cultural tradition. Conventional development needs anthropocentrism, as within this concept, it is man alone who can give value and, as a consequence, man asserts his authority over nature, women, children, etc.

The solution to this position lies, among other things, in recognising the rights of nature. This is an essential ingredient in the environmental components of a critical proposal on sustainable development. We cannot talk seriously about the environment without first acknowledging the rights of nature. In this area, Oxfam’s Discussion Paper must review recent experiences in South America, especially with regard to the recognition of those rights in the new Constitution of Ecuador. Under this new ethic, these kitchens there would not be doughnuts separating environmental components from social ones, but rather some would be contained within others.

These and other examples show that sustainability also requires more multicultural recipes that do not rest so much on Western traditions.

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These different ‘developments’ may diverge in their instrumental management choices, but in the end they all share a common belief with regard to progress and the efficient appropriation of nature. This is plainly evident, in all its drama, with the position of the World Bank’s current chief economist, Justin Yifu Lin, a Chinese native who first trained as a Marxist economist in Beijing and later at the neoliberal Chicago school of economics. Lin advocates a mix of Marxism and Keynesianism, of State communism and corporate capitalism, in which there is no room for sustainability. This he does openly in public, and even more so, from the World Bank. (www.oxfamblogs.org/525p/?p=2982)

This makes it evident that the ideas of development are deeply rooted in contemporary culture. A radical criticism must be aimed at these foundations, like that of sustainability. Without such questioning, there is a risk that the ‘doughnut’ version of sustainability will be branded as a new example of alternative development. It will join the list of other attempts at reform, such as human development, local development, endogenous development, etc., which started off with a certain radicalism, but ended up being co-opted by the conventional position. Would it be a success in the future if the UNDP published a doughnut index, as it does today with human development?
Green (and inclusive) economy, sustainable economy, sustainable development – whatever we call it, sustainable public procurement (SPP) has to be part of it. Public authorities are big consumers. In the European Union (EU) they purchase represent 18% of GDP, in other parts of the world it is over 20%. Their choices can create reliable markets for environmentally and socially sound products, services and works, thereby contributing, in a practical way, to sustainable production and consumption patterns.

If SPP is well designed, it can, for instance, boost sustainable forest management, which can help to put an end to the ongoing deforestation and forest degradation in large parts of the world. Particularly in the tropical regions, deforestation has, overall, hardly slowed down in the past decade. This undermines the livelihoods of the local population, contributes to climate change, and reduces the resilience and diversity of these important ecosystems. Consequently, it both reduces the carrying capacity of our planet, and the social and economic opportunities for these societies.

What first needs to be done in any country is, of course, to fight illegal logging and deal with the social causes of forest degradation. National legislation should cover traditional property and access rights for the local communities, and environmental and social conditions. But authorities at all levels can give a direct push to support sustainable forest management by requiring that anything that they buy, build or maintain – that has a forest origin – comes from sustainably managed forests. The best proof of this is to ask for FSC certification.

SPP has not been given much attention in the current proposals for Rio+20, except through four amendments by the EU. But it is being practiced in more and more countries, often as a result of the initiative of cities, but also through the development of systematic policies by national governments. Usually the environmental dimension is more present than the social one. The EU is currently discussing legislation on public procurement that will allow environmental requirements to be much clearer than social ones.

Representatives from developing countries often express concern that promoting SPP can complicate exports to developed countries, and that it will be difficult for local producers to comply with the criteria. These are fair points, but one should not throw out the baby with the bath water, but instead look at what are the practical constraints and resolve them.

One constraint can be lack of experience with SPP: How to do it, so that it makes a real difference in the environmental and social senses, while promoting economic activities, preferably local. Countries and cities with experience could commit themselves to team up with counterparts and share experience. Furthermore, it could be wise to phase-in SPP: let the market know that after 5 years, public authorities will start giving preference to bids that show evidence of sustainable production, for example with labels or certificates; and that this will become a requirement after 10 years. This would be a clear signal that there will be a market for economic operators that start innovating and reorganising their production. It would also give donors, the clear framework that is needed to make that shift. In this way, developing countries can give a boost to sustainable production patterns domestically, leading to better management of their natural resources, better social conditions, new and better jobs, and increased export opportunities with more added value. And finally, it could give the boost to sustainable management of tropical forests, which is urgently needed.

Let’s use the Rio process to leave prejudice about SPP behind and instead generate a collaborative effort to get it going everywhere in the world and create a powerful signal to private consumers!

MORE INFO
Forest Stewardship Council: developed sustainable forest management standards in balanced multi-stakeholder processes with essential social and environmental criteria.
www.fsc.org

In the run-up to Rio+20, CEEweb for Biodiversity, a Central and Eastern nature conservation network, is advocating for an ambitious global deal to ensure that economic activities stay within the global carrying capacity, that access to resources and land is ensured to all, and that the generated benefits are shared equitably. The hope is that such a global deal will be translated into concrete actions, underpinned by strong political will, and regularly monitored, with an active involvement of the civil society. Transition to a real, and thus sustainable, green economy, requires that total environmental pressures (originating from resource use, land use and from pollution and alien genotypes) are reduced and limited to stay within the carrying capacity of the Earth.

Rio+20: The future we want for biodiversity
Veronika Kiss
Programme Coordinator, CEEweb for Biodiversity

How can limitation be achieved?
Changing the boundary conditions of the economy, and more specifically, reducing resource use globally, is inevitable and it should be realised together with ensuring equal access to resources and equitable sharing of benefits for all. We propose that actions to address production and consumption patterns and limit natural resource use should include an energy quota scheme. This would introduce an incentive system, which can ensure access to resources, reduce disparities in resource use and help realise resource efficiency investments for all. It can also boost research, innovation and employment, in sectors that contribute to the efficient and sustainable use of resources. The four pillars of an energy use quota system, should cover all non-renewable energy sources, and be applied on national and global levels. The four pillars are:

• A resource use quota system introduced at an international level for countries and at a national level for individuals, public and private consumer. The quota system should ensure the yearly reduction of all non-renewable energy resources on global level. Those, who save part of their allocated annual quotas, will be able sell their remaining quotas, through a quota managing organisation, to those who have consumed more than their allocated quotas.

• A market for environmental goods and services. An open market that operates according to environmental and ethical rules, including aspects of sustainability and market considerations. The money received, from selling energy quotas, could be exchanged for products in this ‘eco-labelled’ secondary market.

• A Revolving Fund, which provides the opportunity for everyone, both energy producers and consumers, to be able to achieve savings through energy efficiency and renewable energy investments. The Revolving Fund would provide interest free loans in quota money with a payback period adjusted to the energy savings or income generation realised through the investment.

• A Support Service to provide advice on lifestyle, planning, social and environmental issues, as well as information on the functioning of the scheme to consumers.

A global quota scheme will enable the necessary radical change in developed countries, as well as leapfrogging in developing countries. Application of a quota scheme at the international level has the potential to generate funds for innovations, technology transfer and capacity building in developing countries from the trade of energy quotas. 

ph: Alex Driscoll

Reflections on the right to water: what is at stake as we move towards Rio+20?

Shiney Varghese
Senior Policy Analyst, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

This week, as the world celebrates World Water Day, some countries at the United Nations are trying to remove the reference to ‘right to water’ from the document that will guide the international development path in the coming decade.

It was less than two years ago, in the summer of 2010, that the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution recognising water as a human right. This was followed by the adoption of a resolution on ‘human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation’ by United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC), which made these rights legally binding. The recognition of right to water by these UN bodies, and the developments since – such as the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on right to water and the resolution by the World Health Assembly which recognises right to water – have helped place these rights on the global agenda.

These successes were partly the result of collective efforts of water justice activists over the last 10 years. Our own advocacy on right to water was in direct response to the reference to water as a “need” (instead of a right), in the Ministerial Declaration of the 2nd World Water Forum in 2000.

But these efforts have been met with consistent pushback from some quarters. The efforts to undermine the recognition of the right to water have been most visible at the triennial World Water Forum. Starting with the second World Water Forum in 2000, it has steadfastly refused to recognise the right to water. This was the case at the 3rd World Water Forum in 2003 (which followed the UN General Comment in 2002 on right to water), at the 4th World Water Forum in 2006 (where several governments led by Bolivia asked that the Ministerial recognise water as a human right) and at the 5th World Water Forum (to which the UNGA president sent a letter affirming the need to recognise water as a human right, and at which 24 governments came out with counter-declaration recognising water as a human right).

And yet again, in the lead up to the 6th World Water Forum earlier this month (March 12-17, 2012), the draft ministerial declaration did not clearly affirm the right to water, despite the fact that it has now been recognised by both by the UN General Assembly and by the UN Human Rights Commission. Expressing her surprise, the Special Rapporteur on right to water, warned that “the outcome of the World Water Forum may result in ‘solutions’ built on faulty foundations.” This is surely a pointed reference to the slogan of the 6th Forum that “It’s time for solutions and commitments”.

Instead of unequivocally reaffirming the ‘the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation’, and explicitly committing to the full implementation of the same, the draft ministerial declaration only committed to accelerate the full implementation of ‘human right obligations relating to access to safe drinking water and sanitation’. The issue of whether access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a human right was left open for interpretation.

To many groups in civil society, it was clear that the draft Ministerial Declaration fell short of commitments that virtually all UN Member States had already made in multiple fora. Over 40 international and national networks and organisations issued a joint call to the 6th World Water Forum, asking that ‘human right obligations relating to access to safe drinking water and sanitation’ be replaced by ‘the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation’, or failing that, they abstain from endorsing the declaration.

Unfortunately the Ministerial Declaration of the World Water Forum that came out on 13th March neither took account of these suggestions nor paid attention to the warning by civil society groups that ‘a Ministerial Declaration containing retrogressive language on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation would still set a negative precedent, which a small number of States will use to try to undermine progress on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation at the United Nations level and in other international processes’.

While the Ministerial Declaration of the 6th World Water Forum is neither legally binding, nor does it carry the political and moral authority of a UN resolution adopted in accordance with UN rules and procedures, it appears that the warning by civil society was spot on. This week in New York, a handful of governments have been trying to remove the reference to right to water from the draft outcome statement being prepared for Rio+20, the 20th anniversary of the first earth summit held in Rio in 1992.

The current draft was formulated on the basis of extensive consultation with governments, private sector and civil society. Despite many shortcomings, this draft outcome document affirms a rights based approach to sustainable development, and clearly refers to the right to water.

What is at stake?

To begin with, this language weakens the clear affirmation that governments need to determine how to realise the right to water, and leaves room open for States to individually determine whether their human rights obligations require them to realise the right to water and sanitation for all.

The right to water is also recognised as a useful tool by communities who are impacted by developments that reduce their access to safe water. A clear affirmation of these legally binding rights (as per HRC resolution and/or national constitutions) in national and international rules, regulations and policy documents become extremely important for pursuit of decisions that are advantageous to vulnerable communities.

An important corollary to the recognition of this right, is the attention it draws to the large number of people for whom these rights are not a reality yet. A case in point is the way the Special Rapporteur on right to water has been able to highlight violations of right to water in countries that she visits.

Globally, there is an increasing attempt to promote policies that will treat water primarily as an economic good, at the cost of water as a fundamental right. Several Rio+20 initiatives on the green economy also follow an approach that narrowly focuses on resource use efficiency and economic growth. In the absence of effective regulatory frameworks, safeguards and the clear recognition of water as a fundamental human right, corporate interests will continue to supersede marginalised, low-income communities and smallholder farmers. The stakes are especially high this World Water Day, as we move towards Rio+20.

What is at stake as we move towards Rio+20?
Focus on Oceans and Real Change

Leonard Sonnenschein
President, World Aquarium and Conservation for the Oceans Foundation

Pam J. Ptuntenney
UN CSD Education Caucus Co-Chair, Co-coordinator Climate Change Delegation

There is strong support globally for the protection of marine resources – with the appropriate mechanisms leading to conservation actions. Today, negotiations focused on ocean issues, a theme central to the overall Rio+20 agenda. Specifically, the concrete deliverables for oceans should be: a framework for better establishment of marine protected areas; improved fisheries management; actionable mechanisms of coastal protection, including mangroves and artificial reefs; the ability to create ocean engineering mechanisms that will improve ocean productivity and recognition of the need for ways to manage the nitrogen and other pollutant loads from land sources. It is clear there needs to be a link from what happens on the land and the impacts felt in the oceans.

Since ocean covers 70% of the planet – and very little is understood about its mechanisms – consideration for additional funding for more applied research efforts is needed for our future survival. We as humans need to better understand not only the productivity of the ocean, but also the role climate change is having on it vis-a-vis desalination, rise of temperatures, acidification – and the resultant climatic knock-on-effects felt worldwide. This new blue awareness, coupled with the green economy, can be communicated widely for action at all levels of society.

One outcome of the Rio+20 negotiations should be the creation of an informed and well-prepared society. In recognition of the number of global and environmental challenges, there is a need to improve the knowledge base of all stakeholders – but particularly decision-makers – on the interplay of human and natural systems, with an understanding of new opportunities for investment, new technologies, and innovations, among others. (Agenda 21, Chapter 36.1.)

The Rio+20 themes and objectives reaffirm economic and social development and poverty eradication as global priorities, and affirm that a shared vision needs to be taken into account “social and economic conditions and other relevant factors”. Environmental education, as a policy instrument, enables the governance structures for sustainable development to be used as ‘learning systems’ to increase capacity. This in turn facilitates the translation of knowledge into action-implementation, and practices towards sustainable systems. Knowledge sharing through environmental education effectively promotes action-based priorities in the transition to a blue-green economy and to the implementation of much-needed mechanisms to strengthen institutional frameworks for sustainable development. This knowledge base can also contribute to the creation of better forms of local preparedness for job creation, and thereby actions towards sustainability.

Stakeholder Forum invites you to an everyBoy concert

8pm, Sunday 25th March
At Rockwood Music Hall, 196 Allen St, New York

“everyBoy is giving a concert on Sunday the 25th at Rockwood Music Hall 196 Allen St, New York. It would be great to have Stakeholder Forum and their friends come and join us.”

About everyBoy

everyBoy is a New York-based songwriter crafting catchy folk pop tunes not unlike George Harrison in style and certainly similar in message. Clearly a disciple of the Dylan school and follower of that Harrison way, everyBoy’s debut welcomes you on a spiritual journey addressing life, love and our place in the universe.

www.everyboy.net
On Thursday morning, delegates resumed their conversation on green jobs and social inclusion. The US, Canada, New Zealand and the EU expressed their view that the six pre-paragraphs submitted by the G77+China and Lichtenstein, focused on labor crises and poverty, were largely duplicative and overly focused on developing nations. The US proposed an emphasis on youth in employment, but did not support text on specific strategy, and proposed addressing only extreme poverty, rather than overall poverty, in this section of the text.

In terms of job creation, the EU proposed inserting “green and decent jobs” in place of “green jobs” throughout the text. The US and Canada felt that paragraphs on job sectors were overly detailed, and the EU objected to a G77+China proposal to launch an intergovernmental process on underemployment. Switzerland supported the EU’s proposal to call on business and industry to contribute to creating green jobs through the development and distribution of green products. A reference to implementing a Blue Economy by Montenegro was supported by the EU, the US and New Zealand, but relocation was suggested. The EU supported the idea of a social protection forum rather than the G77+China proposed programme, and the US emphasised the importance of multiple social protection floors rather than only one. Japan opposed this being decided by a General Assembly.

Oceans, Seas and SIDS was read through as a single section, although the EU, Australia, the US, the G77+China and New Zealand were open to dividing it into subsections, potentially giving SIDS its own section. In reference to the importance of oceans, the EU and US called for clearer, established terminology on “equitable sharing” of marine resources and “ecosystem approaches to management”, and the US suggested that the term “coral reef ecosystems” be used rather than listing each type ecosystem specifically. Throughout the text there was disagreement on singling out developed or developing countries when describing poverty, local and indigenous communities, and coastal and marine management. A number of proposals to reference and recommit to previous agreements around marine management were opposed by the US in an effort to streamline the document. Several proposals were made for duplicative additions be consolidated, specifically on litter, pollution, acidification and fishing subsidies. Text on reducing CO2 emissions and addressing climate change was opposed by the US in reference to the UNCCC and processes outside of the UNCSD. The US also flagged language on “domestic and regional action in accordance with international law”. ■