



Editorial



Rio+20: Towards the Green Economy and Better Governance

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The strategy of sustainable development was approved by more than 170 state representatives at the United Nations World Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 1992. The new UN Conference will take place in Brazil on 20-22 June, 2012 to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. It is envisaged as a Conference at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government or other representatives. The Conference will result in a focused political document.

The objective of the Conference is to secure a renewed political commitment to sustainable development, to assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and to address new and emerging challenges. The Conference will focus on two themes: (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development.

The term “green economy” may be understood differently. UNEP’s vision of the Green Economy is “improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risk and ecological scarcity”. This concept does not replace sustainable development; however, by getting the economy right it can be a powerful tool for achieving sustainable development. The Green Economy does not replace sustainable consumption and production either. Greening the global economy means reorienting the way it operates so as to deliver more sustainable outcomes. At present the global economy does not work in a way that will deliver sustainable development. On the environmental side, it encourages over-consumption of natural resources, allows pollution of the environment and fails to prevent climate change; on the social side, it allows pervasive unemployment and wide spread poverty, poor health and lack of education. The European Economic and Social Committee suggest the Rio Conference that six main pillars should be included in a mandate for the further work of the UN bodies on sustainable development:

- measuring progress towards a green economy;
- regulatory measures to encourage the transition to a green economy;
- education about sustainability to promote a green economy;
- fiscal policy instruments to promote a green economy;
- public spending and investment in a green economy;
- setting targets for a green economy.

The key point to the success of green economy is education and investments in research and development. The competent bodies of the United Nations should be mandated to identify which areas of research and

development of technologies and instruments for a green economy would benefit from consolidation of R&D efforts through international cooperation. It will be important that new greener technologies are rapidly taken up all over the world.

It is to be noticed that the results of FP7 project RD4SD (R&D for sustainable development) have largely shown the state of affairs when it comes to the integration of stakeholders into the process of R&D. Whereas, in the countries like Sweden or the Netherlands stakeholders' integration has been realised for at least the last 10 years and success seems to be somewhat stagnating at a comparatively high level, other countries, for instance, in Eastern Europe, have not even started with this process. There is a virtual absence of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity approaches in science, development and innovation. Here lies a major challenge as well as an area for possibly enormous steps forward to be made via cross-continent for RD4SD.

Public involvement has a huge potential as an enabling factor for green economy. Regional and local authorities can use their accessibility to citizens and tailor programmes and public awareness initiatives that are relevant to their constituents:

- education programmes that lead to changes in values and behaviour (as consumers and as politicians) that are conducive to moving towards sustainability;
- access to information that enables and empowers citizens to have an input and to make choices that are consistent with the overall direction of sustainable development;
- training and skill enhancement programmes to prepare the workforce for a green economy transition.

Europe has always been active in promoting education about sustainability, and in spreading information about the practice and new initiatives in a sustainability field. The resulting experience should feed it into the international discussion of instruments for green economy.

There is a strong consideration that the main aim of the conference should be to establish a robust institutional framework within the UN system for implementing the conference decisions, a framework which would have ongoing responsibility for promoting sustainable development throughout the world and for driving an action programme to green the global economy over the coming years. Among the various options for strengthening the institutional structure within the United Nations there is an emerging concept of a new top-level Sustainable Development council that would report directly to the General Assembly. UNEP and UNDP should be strengthened accordingly that they could together provide stronger inputs into the environmental and development dimensions of sustainable development.

National Sustainable Development strategies need to be revived and refreshed with full engagement and support from business and all parts of civil society. Advisory bodies such as Councils for Sustainable Development need to be adequately resourced to play their full part in bringing forward new thinking and maintaining pressure for progress (full text of the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM(2011)363 final:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.nat-opinions.18235>).

On 21st of December, 2011 the European Conference at the European economic and social committee have addressed sustainability leaders, front runners and champions of the green economy to enable more efficient collaboration and to scale up successful partnership initiatives in Europe and in the world to share natural, financial and knowledge-based resources with a view to move towards greater security, prosperity and well-being.