

## **Rio+20 and Beyond: Moving Forward to a Sustainable Future**

Rio+20, one of the largest conferences ever convened by the United Nations, ushers in a new era for implementing sustainable development—development that fully integrates the need to promote prosperity, well-being and protection of the environment. The Conference was a rare opportunity for the world to focus on sustainability issues—to examine ideas and forge solutions.

There were actually several outcomes to the Rio+20 conference. A 53-page political outcome document, agreed to by all 193 countries, charts the way forward for international cooperation on sustainable development. In addition, governments, businesses and other civil society partners registered more than 700 commitments to concrete actions that will deliver results on the ground to address specific needs, such as sustainable energy and transport. The commitments made in Rio include \$50 billion that will help one billion people gain access to sustainable energy. Recommendations reflecting the voices from civil society comprise a third outcome.

“The outcome document provides a firm foundation for social, economic and environmental well-being,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told Conference participants at the closing ceremony. “It is now our responsibility to build on it. Rio+20 has affirmed fundamental principles -- renewed essential commitments – and given us new direction.”

### **THE RIO OUTCOMES**

#### **The Political Document**

Countries renewed their commitment to sustainable development at Rio+20—promising to promote an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations. Countries also reaffirmed the principles enunciated at the 1992 Earth Summit and at many subsequent conferences on sustainable development.

- **The Green Economy:** For the first time, countries elaborated on what is—and isn’t—involved in developing a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. In the outcome document, countries devoted a section to how green economy policies can be a tool to advance sustainable development, noting that all countries are learning how to green their economies and learn from one another through sharing of experience and lessons.
- **Addressing sustainability at the global level:** In Rio, countries agreed to two measures that will strengthen the architecture to support international action for sustainable development. This includes a new body to further decision making at the global level as well as strengthening the UN’s capacity to monitor, assess and address environmental issues.



- Countries agreed to establish a high-level political forum on sustainable development with universal membership that will bring together high-level decision makers from across governments and civil society to discuss how best to integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.
- Countries also agreed to a significant strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme by making it a universal-membership body and strengthening it financially. Specifically, it calls for "secure, stable, adequate and increased financial resources from the regular budget of the UN and voluntary contributions to fulfil its mandate."
- **Sustainable Development Goals:** Recognizing the extraordinary success of the Millennium Development Goals in galvanizing action to address poverty and human development issues, countries, at Rio+20 agreed on the need for developing a few key sustainable development goals that are "action oriented, concise and easy to communicate," and that are global in nature and universally applicable to all countries. The SDGs, as they have become known, will be developed over the next two years with a focus on priority areas for sustainable development, and would help measure progress. The process to develop these goals will be integrated with efforts to review achievement of the existing MDGs and strategize the way forward. There will be a panel appointed by the UN Secretary-General to consider options for after the MDG target year of 2015, as well as a 30-member intergovernmental panel to be established by the General Assembly to develop the SDGs.
- **Resources:** Countries agreed to develop a strategy for sustainable development financing to meet the commitments agreed in Rio, including efforts towards achieving sustainable development goals. Through the General Assembly, an intergovernmental process will assess financing needs, consider the effectiveness of existing financing instruments and frameworks, and evaluate additional initiatives, with a view to preparing a report proposing options on an effective sustainable development financing strategy to facilitate the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objectives. An intergovernmental committee, comprising 30 experts nominated by regional groups, with equitable geographical representation, will implement this process, concluding its work by 2014.
- **Sustainable Consumption and Production:** A 10-Year Framework of Programmes on sustainable consumption and production was adopted to guide countries in making their consumption and production patterns more sustainable. At the General Assembly session that starts in September 2012, a Member State body will be convened to take any necessary steps to spearhead implementation of the framework.

- **Technology:** The Rio+20 **outcome** calls for strengthened international research collaboration on environmentally sound technologies and requests relevant UN agencies to identify options for a facilitation mechanism for technology transfer.
- **Measuring sustainable growth:** Recognizing that present measures, such as Gross Domestic Product, do not reflect progress on the social or environmental dimensions of sustainable development, countries agreed that broader measures of progress were needed to complement GDP. The UN Statistical Commission was requested to launch a programme of work in this area building on existing initiatives.
- **Corporate Sustainability Reporting:** Rio+20 took a major step forward by encouraging companies, especially publicly listed and large companies, to consider integrating sustainability information into their reporting cycle.

### Commitments for Action

Beyond the negotiated document, the biggest legacy of Rio+20 is the voluntary commitments that were announced in Rio to put sustainable development into action. Rio+20 mobilized an estimated \$513 billion, and more than 700 voluntary commitments by civil society groups, businesses, governments, universities and others were listed on the main Rio+20 [website](#).

The UN Secretary-General commented, "If the outcome document is the foundation for the next stage of our journey to sustainable development, the commitments announced at Rio are the bricks and cement. They will be a concrete and lasting legacy of Rio+20."

Commitments worth billions of dollars were made to increase access to clean energy; improve energy efficiency; and increase the use of renewable energies. A major commitment was made to shift financing towards more sustainable modes of transportation over the next decade.

- **UN's [Sustainable Energy for All](#) initiative:** More than 50 Governments from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Small Island Developing States are developing energy plans and programmes aimed at achieving the initiative's three objectives – ensuring energy access, doubling energy efficiency and doubling the share of renewable energy – all by 2030. Businesses and investors have committed more than \$50 billion to achieve the initiative's three objectives. More than one billion people will benefit from Sustainable Energy for All's public and private sector commitments. Some examples:
  - d.Light Design, a social entrepreneur, is committed to providing solar lamps to 30 million people in more than 40 countries by 2015.
  - Ghana, one of the first countries to partner with the initiative, is developing a national energy action plan to support capacity development and innovative financing mechanisms.



- Sinopec, the world's fifth largest company, pledged a \$1 billion commitment towards improving the company's energy and environmental footprint by 2015, which includes reducing water consumption and waste emissions and increasing energy efficiency.
- The United States announced it will provide \$2 billion in grants, loans and loan guarantees for policy and regulatory development, public-private energy technology partnerships, and loans and guarantees to leverage private investment in clean energy technology.
- **Sustainable Transport:** The Sustainable Low-Carbon Transport initiative—SloCaT—brought together eight multilateral development banks, led by the Asian Development Bank, who announced they will provide financing of more than [\\$175 billion](#) through 2020 to support sustainable transport in developing countries. Congestion, air pollution, road accidents and transport-related climate change can cost a country as much as 5-10 per cent of GDP per year. The transportation sector is now the fastest growing source of greenhouse gases, a result of decades of urban planning that focused on improving mobility for automobiles at the expense of public transport users, cyclists and pedestrians. This initiative, accompanied by 16 other commitments made in Rio, marks a major shift towards sustainable transportation.
- **Oceans:** The World Bank announced that more than 80 countries, civil society groups, private companies and international organizations have declared their support for the new [Global Partnership for Oceans](#).
- **Businesses:** More than 200 commitments to sustainable development by businesses were announced at the conclusion of the UN Global Compact's [Corporate Sustainability Forum](#), including:
  - Kingfisher, Europe's largest home improvement retailer, promised to use 100 per cent responsibly-sourced timber and papers in all of its operations by 2020.
  - The Arborem company entered into an agreement with Instituto Genômico de Recursos Florestais, Brazil's leading land reform group, to help small holder farmers raise their productivity and their incomes to lift them above the poverty line.
  - Microsoft says it will achieve carbon neutrality through offsetting actions.
  - Unilever is launching a drive to halve the greenhouse gas impact of their products.
  - Nike's target is zero discharge of hazardous chemicals along its entire supply chain by 2020.
  - 23 companies pledged to transparency and disclosure on their impact on climate change.
- **Sustainable Development and Education:** 260 major business schools and universities around the world endorsed a [Declaration for Higher Education Institutions](#), committing to incorporating sustainability issues into teaching, research, and their own management and organizational activities.



- **Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture:** The UN Secretary-General launched the '[Zero Hunger Challenge](#)' at Rio+20, calling on all nations to be boldly ambitious as they work for a future where everyone enjoys the right to food and all food systems are resilient. The Challenge aims to provide 100 per cent access to adequate food year-round, while increasing small farm productivity, and zero loss or waste of food. Several countries have already taken up the challenge. For example, the United Kingdom pledged £150 million (approx. \$234 million) to help smallholder farmers feed millions.
- **Sustainability and Science:** A new 10-year platform to coordinate scientific research for sustainability on a global level, called "Future Earth," was introduced at Rio+20 to provide early warning signals of environmental risk and change and to find the best scientific solutions to the multi-faceted problems of satisfying human needs for food, water, energy and health. Future Earth also aims to foster and encourage young scientists. The Future Earth alliance is sponsored by the International Council for Science—ICSU, a non-governmental organization based in Paris with a global membership of 121 national scientific bodies and 30 international scientific unions. Also in Rio, the Brazilian Government announced the creation of the Rio+ Centre, the World Centre for Sustainable Development. The Rio+ Centre will facilitate research, knowledge exchange and international debate about sustainable development. Its partners include the State Government of Rio de Janeiro, the Rio Municipality and several UN agencies, as well as academic institutions, businesses and civil society groups.

**The challenges we face:** The outcomes of Rio+20 are an important step in addressing critical problems such as the continued growth of emissions that are causing climate change and the loss of habitat that is driving biodiversity loss. Here are some of the challenges the world is confronting:

- Two thirds of the services that nature provides to humankind are in decline, as most habitats are in decline and the rate of species extinction appears to be accelerating.
- Annual global carbon dioxide emissions from fuel combustion grew by about 38 per cent between 1990 and 2009, with the rate of growth increasing after 2000.
- 20 per cent of the world's population still lacks access to electricity and 2.7 billion people still rely on biomass for their cooking needs.
- 85 per cent of all fish stocks are overexploited, depleted, recovering or fully exploited.
- Globally, poverty still keeps 57 million children out of primary school, and some 16 per cent of the world's adults—793 million, of whom two thirds are women—still lack basic literacy skills.
- The world is still losing forest cover at an alarming rate, about 5.2 million hectares of net forest loss a year, even though the rate of deforestation now shows signs of decreasing.

**Background:** The UN General Assembly called for Rio+20 to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and address new and emerging challenges. It decided that the two themes of the Conference were a green

economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development. The overarching goal of Rio+20 was to stimulate action on sustainable development.

The Conference was convened on the twentieth anniversary of the 1992 Earth Summit, also held in Rio de Janeiro, where the world came together to adopt Agenda 21, the blueprint of sustainable development, perhaps one of the most extensive and complex documents ever negotiated. Two conventions -- on climate change and biodiversity -- were signed at the Earth Summit, and negotiations commenced on a third, to combat desertification.

Yet in the intervening years, implementation of Agenda 21 has proven difficult. There has been progress in reducing the number of people living in poverty—the percentage of the world’s population living in absolute poverty has fallen from 46 per cent in 1992 to 27 per cent in 2005. But changes in the world’s key environmental systems, highlighted by rising temperatures and an increase in the frequency and severity of droughts and floods, are unprecedented, and efforts to slow the rate or extent of change have so far not succeeded.

**Rio+20 by the Numbers:** More than 100 Governments were represented at the Head of State level; participants included 57 Heads of State, 8 Vice-Presidents, 31 Heads of Government and 9 Deputy Prime Ministers. Additionally, 487 Ministers attended. There were 30,000 Conference participants; all told, 45,000 ground passes to the conference site were issued. Over the ten days related to the Conference (13 to 22 June), there were 498 side events at the Riocentro Convention Center, where the conference was held. The Conference used 205 kilometers of fiber optic cable network and had wireless Internet access capacity for up to 32,000 concurrent users.

There were over 4,000 journalists in Rio to cover the Conference, and globally, more than 160,000 articles were published about Rio+20.

Participation in the Conference extended far beyond Rio. Through virtual participation, more than 50 million people shared or viewed ideas and thoughts about sustainable development and the future they want, and over 1 billion impressions were generated by #Rioplus20 on Twitter. Portuguese-language posts were widely viewed, with the Brazilian campaign for Rio+20 reaching more than 1 million people on Facebook.

For more information on Rio+20, visit [www.uncsd2012.org](http://www.uncsd2012.org).

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