



## Is This The Future We Want? The Zero Draft Paper for the Proposed Agenda for Rio+20

### Rio and Rio+20

In June 1992, some 2,400 representatives of non-government organizations (NGOs) participated in what was to be known as the Earth Summit. Moreover, around 40,000 civil society representatives from more than 150 countries and all walks of life gathered in a week-long series of parallel events dubbed as “Tent City”. Held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) followed up on the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972. Participated in by 172 countries, the conference asked governments to rethink traditional models of economic development and find ways to stop pollution and the destruction of natural resources on earth. Rio, as the conference came to be known, was unprecedented in size and scope, and resulted in several official documents: Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Statement of Forest Principles, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) is actively engaged

in food security, agrarian reform, sustainable agriculture, participatory governance, and rural development. With its concern for sustainable development, ANGOC has continually reviewed and assessed the performance of relevant governments with regard to the Rio principles. In 2002, ANGOC conducted the study contained in the document “Sustainable Development in Southeast Asia: *Reviving the Bond of Communities and the Environment for a Sustainable Future*” to assess progress in Southeast Asia ten years after Rio<sup>1</sup>. The study evaluated several parameters including government policies and civil society initiatives impacting on sustainable development.

Twenty years after Rio, the UN will hold the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD). Dubbed as Rio+20, the Conference seeks to renew the political commitment of governments and other stakeholders for sustainable development. The conference will also assess the progress so far achieved and the remaining gaps in the implementation of agreements from major summits on sustainable

<sup>1</sup> The paper was prepared by ANGOC on behalf of Stockholm Environment Institute for the United Nations Environment Programme. It drew inputs from various publications of ANGOC related to sustainable development, and from the proceedings of an electronic consultation facilitated by ANGOC.

development, and address new and emerging concerns. The conference will focus on the major themes of the “green economy” in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development. Rio+20 will be held in Brazil from 20 to 22 June 2012.

### **Purpose of this Briefer**

This briefing paper highlights the main points of “The Future We Want” Zero Draft (downloadable from <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/futurewewant.html>) and reactions to the Draft from various civil society organizations (CSOs). The Draft was prepared by the UNCSD Preparatory Committee to set the discussion agenda for Rio+20. It has five major sections comprising 128 paragraphs.

In sum, the Zero Draft calls for cooperation among countries through the exchange of information, knowledge, and technology. Governments are called upon to improve governance; civil society is encouraged to participate in processes; and the private sector is urged to institute practices that support and exemplify sustainable development. Developing countries are recognized to be at a disadvantage, thus special consideration is given to such countries in every field of endeavor that affects sustainable development. International aid agencies are called upon to change their usual way of doing business so that aid would support sustainable development. Lastly, a mechanism to measure progress regarding sustainable development is urged to be formulated under the auspices of the UN Secretary General. It should also be noted that the Draft places much emphasis on green economy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> There is as yet no official definition of green economy as the concept is still evolving, but the UN Environmental Programme- Green Economy Report (February 2011) states that a green economy is one that (a) produces low greenhouse gas emissions; (b) uses resources more efficiently; (c) continually generates growth, income and jobs; and (d) observes social equity and inclusiveness.

The Zero Draft has been circulated among UN Member States to solicit their comments. These comments will be the basis for further negotiations scheduled in March 2012. By the time the conference is held, the Draft will have been finalized to contain the commitments of governments and other stakeholders.

CSOs are making the most out of this period of review from January to May 2012 by member states to make their own review for the possible consideration of the Conference Secretariat.

### **“The Future We Want”**

#### **Renewing Political Commitment**

The Zero Draft (hereafter referred to as Draft) begins with the countries reaffirming their commitment to end hunger and poverty, and building equitable and inclusive societies. The countries also commit to accelerate progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, enhance cooperation, and address current and emerging issues. Lastly, the countries renew their commitment to sustainable development and the pursuit of green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The Draft cites the legal and policy premises of the above commitments, namely, the United Nations Charter, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation, the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development, the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development: the Political Declaration on Africa’s development needs, and the Istanbul Programme of Action

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for Least Developed Countries. The need to reinforce sustainable development globally through international and national efforts considers the sovereign right of states over their natural resources.

The document recognizes that there has been much progress since the Earth Summit in 1992, spurred mostly by new information technologies that have empowered people. But there were also setbacks due to financial and economic crises, as well as unstable energy and food prices. Least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States, and middle-income countries and African countries were pointed out for the special challenges they face.

### ***Engaging major groups***

In calling for a holistic approach to sustainable development, the Draft recognizes the contribution of the world's different cultures and civilizations in protecting the Earth.

Sustainable development requires broad public participation in decision-making. Thus, the Draft wants civil society to be actively engaged in sustainable development by being involved in making national and local policies and demanding accountability from decision-makers. This is to be done by governments facilitating access to information supported by communications technologies. Thus, the draft also acknowledges the role of lawmakers in furthering sustainable development.

Business and industry are encouraged to lead in advancing a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. The importance of local governments, children and youth, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is also acknowledged.

The Draft's framework for action consists of improving governance and capacity at the global, regional, national and local levels; and reinvigorating the partnership for sustainable development among states. It calls for a global policy framework that requires big corporations to consider sustainability issues.

### ***Framework for Action***

The Draft pushes for a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Its advocacy for a green economy, however, does not presuppose as a rigid set of rules but a decision-making framework that considers sustainable development in public and private decision-making. The Draft asserts that green economy policies can be pursued by all nations regardless of level of development, but recognizes that developing countries need structural changes that may involve additional costs. The help of the international community is thus encouraged, but the Draft cautions against new challenges to sustainable development arising from such assistance, such as trade barriers and conditions on aid and finance.

The Draft proposes guidelines to provide support to developing countries, and recommends parts of the institutional framework for sustainable development. It further recognizes the roles of UN bodies, namely the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development/Sustainable Development Council, and the UN Environmental Programme. International Financial Institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are asked to give "due consideration" to sustainable development. The draft supports the creation of a knowledge-sharing platform to be established by the UN Secretary General where different stakeholders can share their experiences.

A regular review of the state of the planet is urged, with the Secretary General tasked to coordinate efforts to that end. The Draft wants to enhance the interface between science and policy-making so that there is stronger scientific basis for decisions across the UN system. The countries will consider the establishment of an Ombudsperson, or High Commissioner for Future Generations, to promote sustainable development.

### **Priority Areas for Action**

The Draft proposes actions on the following key issues:

#### *Food security:*

Prioritize sustainable intensification of food production through increased investment in local food production, improved access to local and global agri-food markets, and reduced waste; more transparent and open trading systems; improve access to information and enhance interaction among farmers and experts.

#### *Water:*

Set goals for wastewater management; implement integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans as provided in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation; encourage cooperation in the management of water resources through capacity development, exchange of experiences and sharing of appropriate technologies.

#### *Energy:*

Provide universal access to a basic minimum level of modern energy services for both consumption and production uses by 2030; improve energy efficiency at all levels; and double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix by 2030. The Draft calls for adequate financial resources for developing countries. Each country is expected to work for low-carbon development.

#### *Cities:*

An integrated and holistic approach to city planning is needed.

#### *Green jobs:*

Grant workers the skills and protections necessary to participate in and benefit from the transition to a green economy; create job opportunities through investments in public works for the restoration and enhancement of natural capital and other sustainable development efforts; encourage business and industry to contribute to green job creation.

#### *Oceans and Small Island Developing States (SIDS):*

Support the completion of the first global integrated assessment of the state of the marine environment by the Regular Process for the Global Marine Assessment, and consider the assessment findings in the formulation of national, regional and global oceans policy; initiate, as soon as possible, the negotiation of an implementing agreement to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to address the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction; advance the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities; implement an international observing network for ocean acidification and collectively prevent further acidification; maintain or restore depleted fish stocks to sustainable levels and implement science-based management plans to rebuild stocks by 2015; maintaining or restoring depleted fish stocks to sustainable levels and to further commit to implementing science-based management plans to rebuild stocks by 2015; consider SIDS as special cases for sustainable development and assist SIDS to achieve sustainable development.

#### *Natural disasters:*

Continue to address disaster risk reduction even after 2015; increased coordination at the national, regional and international levels for a

robust response to environmental emergencies and improved forecasting and early warning systems; closer coordination between emergency response, early recovery, and development efforts, including adoption of a post “Hyogo Framework” and its integration into development policy.

*Climate change:*

Urgently implement all agreements reached at COP17 at Durban; encourage international initiatives and partnerships to address the interrelationship among water, energy, food and climate change to achieve synergies and minimize conflicts among policy objectives.

*Forests, biodiversity, land degradation, and desertification:*

Support policy frameworks and market instruments that effectively slow, halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation and promote the sustainable use, conservation, restoration, and management of forests; support mainstreaming of biodiversity and ecosystem services in policies and decision-making processes; call for enhanced support by the international community to implement the UN Convention to Combat Desertification; support partnerships and initiatives to safeguard soil resources; encourage scientific studies and initiatives to raise wider awareness of the economic benefits of sustainable land management policies.

*Mountains:*

Explore global, regional, national, and local mechanisms to compensate and reward mountain communities for the services they provide through ecosystem protection.

*Chemicals and waste:*

Strengthen the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management to step up efforts towards a more robust, coherent, effective, and efficient international regime for chemicals throughout their lifecycle; address

emerging challenges of electronic waste and plastics in the marine environment through appropriate programs and environmentally sound technologies for material and energy recovery.

*Sustainable Consumption and Production:*

Establish a 10-Year Framework of Programmes on sustainable consumption and production.

*Education:*

Strengthen the contribution of educational systems to the pursuit of sustainable development; call upon universities to become models of best practice and transformation by setting an example of sustainability in their campus facilities and teaching sustainable development as a module across all disciplines; encourage international education exchange activities on education for sustainable development; promote education for sustainable development beyond the end of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in 2014.

*Gender equality:*

Remove barriers that have prevented women from being full participants in the economy and unlock their potential as drivers of sustainable development; prioritize measures to promote gender equality in all spheres of society; support the work of UN Women in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

***Measuring progress and means of implementation***

To measure progress in sustainable development, the Draft requests the UN Secretary General to coordinate the preparation of a set of global Sustainable Development Goals that reflect an integrated and balanced treatment of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

The Draft calls for the prioritization of sustainable development in the allocation of resources, and increased aid effectiveness. It also recognizes the

limitations of GDP as a measure of well-being, and thus urges the development of indicators integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions to complement GDP.

To enable the implementation of the agreements within it, the Draft calls for the fulfillment of all official development assistance commitments, including those made by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7% of GNP for official development assistance to developing countries by 2015, as well as a target of 0.15% to 0.20% of GNP for official development assistance to least developed countries.

Recognizing the role of the private sector in promoting sustainable development, the Draft suggests that public policy should create an environment conducive to long-term investment and socially and environmentally responsible behavior by business and industry.

With regard to trade, the Draft urges members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to redouble efforts for a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system. It supports the phase out of market distorting and environmentally harmful subsidies that impede the transition to sustainable development.

### **Comments from Stakeholders**

CSOs from Asia and the Pacific region have gathered their views and remarks on the “zero draft” during the initial discussions at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, or Rio+20) held from 25-27 January 2012 at the UN Headquarters in New York and through electronic consultation. For many of them the draft lacks urgency, ambition, and detail (UN NGLS Newsletter, February 2012).

The Draft is praised for recognizing failures in efforts to attain targets identified at the Rio

Summit, but some organizations find fault in the Draft’s attribution of such failures to economic and financial crises, effectively absolving governments from their failure to respond to the needs of their constituents. Also, while the Draft identifies a number of issues that have arisen or worsened since Rio, it appears silent on the growing disparity between rich and poor people as well as rich and poor countries.

There is also a prevalent view that the Draft is phrased in general terms to produce a document that can be widely accepted by conference participants, to avoid difficult intergovernmental negotiations. By doing so, the implementation aspect of the Draft becomes weak.

Some organizations see inconsistencies between some of the Draft’s provisions and current trends in governance. An example is the Draft’s call for governments to create a regulatory framework conducive to long-term investment and socially and environmentally responsible behavior, which some organizations say runs counter to demands in many countries for their government to take on more responsibility in protecting the public interest.

This brings to focus the Draft’s call for increased private sector participation. This, too, is not entirely welcomed by stakeholders, given the profit motive of private entities. The Draft is silent on the flawed financial system that creates global instabilities. The Draft also fails to note that private entities, especially transnational corporations, have unduly influenced domestic and international policies.

There is also irony in the Draft’s encouragement to address the three pillars of sustainable development, but the Draft focuses heavily on the environment and does not address the human rights and socio-economic aspects of sustainable development. Thus, the Draft itself is wanting with

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regard to the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

It is also notable that the Draft has minimal discussion on indigenous peoples (IP), both as a sector that needs attention and as a key to attaining sustainable development. The only significant mention of IPs, and cryptically at that, is as mountain communities responsible for protecting the ecosystem.

The Draft’s endorsement of *green economy* is not entirely embraced by CSOs. Reactions range from caution to rejection. Part of the critique may be due to the still ongoing evolution of green economy. Additionally, it is unclear if green economy discourages the intensifying cross-border practices of some States such as land-grabbing and patenting of indigenous genetic resources of other nations. The consensus is that the Green Economy should not justify investments that will alter the use and management of natural resources, and compromise food security and access of small holders to land and other productive resources. Green economy should also not confuse or obscure commitments to sustainable development; instead, sustainable development should be the overarching goal.

In this light, it is worth noting the role that the Draft attributes to trade. The Draft calls for the removal of “harmful” subsidies and the institution of non-discriminatory policies. As applied to struggling economies, this formula may not necessarily lead to sustainable development since stronger economies may dominate the weaker ones. Some organizations note that other factors must be considered such as the effective transfer of technology from developed to developing countries, which can better realize a level playing field.

Stakeholders likewise lament that while the Draft recognizes the shortcomings of the Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of national wellness, it is not abandoned as such. Instead, the Draft calls for the integration of other factors into the GDP. Some organizations prefer replacing GDP with measures more attuned to sustainable development, and suggest building on such examples as the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, the Gross National Happiness Index of Bhutan and the current revision of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts (SEEA) under the Statistics Division of the UN Secretariat.

ANGOC echoes many of the sentiments other CSOs have expressed, especially those concerning the “Green Economy”. The model aspires for a more sustainable way of using and managing natural resources while achieving poverty eradication and inclusive growth. Although sustainable land and natural resource use planning was mentioned by some governments as a critical element in achieving sustainable development, ultimately, the states’ priorities will define their land use plans. Furthermore, the issues around equity for small holders in the region should be addressed equally alongside the economic and environmental goals of sustainable development.

Meanwhile, resources are still seen as factors of production and growth. But if considered as essential elements for the survival of humankind, they must be conserved and protected. In the end, fertile land and waters, safe seeds and farming methods, and the nurturing hands of small food producers will spell the sustainability of global food security and not enhanced global or greener trade.

Critical action at this point is for CSOs and community organizations to continue monitoring and influencing the implementation of each country’s sustainable development commitments and programs for the Millennium Development Goals and inconsistencies with national policies.

Both government and the private sector must be enjoined to make sincere efforts at sustaining this planet's natural resources sans the economic motive or incentives to go green.

The UN CSD is currently gathering the comments to the Zero Draft from various stakeholders worldwide. Another round of regional meetings will be done in May 2012 before the RIO + 20 Conference in June at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Surely, much debate will still take place on contentious provisions of the Draft at the Summit itself. But given the volume of comments, one can pause to ask, what is the future do we really want? □

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