

# The Rio+20 Momentum. Implementing by Involving

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## DBCA, differentiation of actors, but common action.

1/ Neither did the first Rio Conference in 1992 solve the persistent problems the world has generated and still does continue to increase, nor did Rio+20. The Rio+20 Agreement „The Future We Want“ displays a rather weak language and comes in no way near to the aspiration of a visionary, ambitious and forward-looking „Rio-20-plus“. That is disappointing, in particular when it seems that more results would have been possible to achieve because of the fundamental changes in terms of geopolitics and the distribution of power in the last two decades.



2/ Rio '92 and Rio+20 mark a change in geopolitics, and in the mindset of people. Emerging economies, global supply chains, and digital communication led to a significant – and still growing – differentiation amongst actors and stakeholders. Speaking of „the“ South, „the“ NGO, „the“ developing countries, „the“ business, or “the economy” and “the consumption” does not any more appear adequate. Each group or sector features laggards and backwards bound forces as well as proactive actors and ambitious moves. Oversimplified language often stands in the way of finding next steps and options to proceed. While it remains true that responsibility is common, but differentiated (CBDR, the Rio 1992 formula for an uneven burden sharing), we today have to admit that differentiation is becoming a good reason for common action, if not the paradigm of working together. Literally, this reasoning does not turn up in Rio+20. Nevertheless it is the underlying notion of the agreed final document that, quite often, refers to national circumstances and the specific capacity needed to tailorise roadmaps and strategies according to what is seen as possibility, starting points and actions already taken.

### **Not sufficient, but still more action than perceived.**

3/ Rio+20 displays a momentum for action. It justifies and requires broad attention. For those who want to use it, the Rio Agreement delivers options and opportunities, for those who do not want to advance the pursuit of sustainability the document does not give a leverage to turn backwards. The positive momentum is clearly insufficient against the benchmark of deliverables that seemed possible, and it is definitely so when judged against what appears to be necessary in order to face global issues. Nevertheless, the momentum is greater than publicly perceived at this moment. Translated into action, it may even turn out as more challenging than major parts of civil society are prepared to cope with.

### **The launched governance processes will have to run on advanced involvement features.**

4/ For implementing the upgrading and strengthening of the environmental pillar and for designing the format and functionality of the new SD (sustainable development) forum within the overall UN system quite a few new tasks and functionalities will have to be fleshed out and to be made operational. Deadlines are dense. However, Rio+20 calls for these processes to be open, transparent und inclusive. And even more, the final document repeatedly underscores how important the science-policy interface has become, and will be for future SD governance. These requirements are the minimum of what can be seen as *transformation governance* features.

5/ It is yet unclear how governments and the UN system design those processes. What is not unclear is that the organized part of civil society should play its role, and may start doing so right away. In the absence of a European Council for Sustainable Development, it seems an obvious suggestion for the EESC to take a leading role for Europe.

### **Nothing less than defining sustainability.**

6/ All stakeholders engaged in the pursuit of sustainable development may feel challenged by the decision of Rio+20 to launch Sustainable Development Goals, SDG, including the respective metrics and SD benchmarks. By design, those SDG are requested to be both universal and action-oriented plus both coherent and sensitive to national circumstances as diverse as they may be. This is a huge task. It must find ways to elaborate on ambivalent norms and to bring in advanced metrics for reporting and verification. Launching SDG means nothing less than defining sustainability.

7/ Again, the time frame is short and work has to jumpstart in order to meet timetables given by Rio+20. It seems reasonable to broaden up the debate and to bring in the view and ideas of the major groups, in particular foundations, science-policy interface organizations, think tanks, strategy groups of private sector, the trade unions, the churches and the environmental and the development communities. The debate should not be allowed to stay in the negotiating mode. Implementing by involving is key. Organizations that per se imply a multi stakeholder view could play a useful role both by acting as public platform and creator of input.

8/ This process will presumably been strengthened by a UN Secretary-General report about the needs of future generations and by his decision to mandate some kind of a special envoy for the needs of future generations.

## **Reliable capacity building for green economy solutions need getting actors involved.**

9/ For Rio+29 green economy is not an end in itself, but a process designed to help making the enterprises and the markets work in the pursuit of the sustainable development, in a metaphoric sense: for a green society. Rio+20 underscores the importance of sustainability reporting, and transparent sustainability performance in the private sector. I therefore think that we need more and more stringent approaches and efforts compiling good corporate SD performance, the demand for green investment, and consumer decisions. An example is the sustainability code the national council for SD in Germany recently launched. It delivers an globally applicable benchmark for green economy.

10/ In the context of green economy Rio+20 decided to launch two rather concrete operations: a capacity building scheme and a facilitation mechanism. Details are given in the agreed document, but surely have to be further laid out. It is remarkable that the capacity building schemes implies and facilitates new alliances of actors, including the actors of green economy sectors. Transforming the corporate business case towards for sustainable solutions asks for reliability and accountability. Those features imply a broad and credible involvement of stakeholders and the civil society. This challenge is a lesson learned (for frontrunners a no-brainer, for laggards quite some hurdle), and it is specifically true for green economy capacity building efforts in developing countries. The Rio+20 quarrels around the notion of green economy must not be overheard or underestimated.

## **Other Rio conclusions establishing new action**

11/ An intergovernmental process shall assess financing needs. Again, consultation is expected to be open and broad, with relevant international and regional financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

12/ This is also true for another long standing issue. In order to, finally, achieving progress regarding sustainable production and consumption patterns the General Assembly is „invited“ to take steps for the framework program to become fully operational. This is helpful for those actors that over the past years have been successfully building the case for new alliances and eco-social standards along vast and complex supply chains.

13/ Last but not least, there is some (weak) news concerning the measuring of wellbeing and growth. Rio+20 recognize the need for broader measures of progress (buzzword: beyond GDP) and therefore requests the UN Statistical Commission to launch a program of work in this area. Reasonably used and enforced by all stakeholders this may be fostering already existing efforts to internalize environmental and social profits and losses into entrepreneurial calculations and to accept the economic value of ecosystem services.

## **Participatory capacity improves with access to information and to meaningful decision making.**

14/ Rio+20 underscores the meaningful involvement and active participation of all actors including the major groups. Rio+20 commits States to work more closely with the major groups and the other stakeholders. Meaningful active participation is being encouraged. However, there is not yet a level playing field for all stakeholders. The conference logistics in Rio+20 have impressively proved this observation. Rio+20 has been three conferences, not

one. The locations of the negotiating community, the business community, and the People’s Summit were separated through very practical traffic constraints. Overlapping participation has not been encouraged, and for most of the participant it has actually not been feasible.

15/ On the national and subnational implementation of sustainable development pathways the establishment of multistakeholder bodies and involvement groups has proven useful. National councils for SD are multistakeholder non-governmental organizations mandated by governments and reporting back to top ministers. Their political experience, evidence-based expertise, and public calling power can deliver valuable contributions, together with national SD strategies and administrative decision making bodies. However, there might be also other multistakeholder bodies or advisory committees that can deliver according to national circumstances, including social and economic committees when they are taking appropriate action.

16/ In the margins of Rio+20 the UK based Stakeholder Forum sounded the usefulness of having a global network that would increase options for sharing experiences and keeping interested parties informed about progress made. In the light of upcoming challenges in designing SDG, building capacities and finding new formats for public involvement the Stakeholder Forum’s effort is most welcome.

**EU must develop its SD capacity**

17/ The EU SD Strategy is not up to date. Sidelined by other policies, and almost forgotten the EU SDS played no role in Rio+20. Europe can and need to do better. Guiding power should be increased. An ambitious EU SDS should pick up on the Rio+20 processes. It should address Europe’s financial and social instability by laying out roadmaps for green economy solutions, long term investments, and social inclusion. Member States should be encouraged to establish and strengthen national SD councils or other appropriate schemes while on European level we need more leadership for SD. Europe needs to get its act together in order to avoid getting marginalized in what Rio 2012 showed as a changed geopolitical lineup.



Reference: UN 2012, The Future We Want. Outcome of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20, A/CONF.216/L.1, dated 19 June, 20123e