

Rio Revisited: getting on track to the Future We Want¹

Twenty years ago in Rio the international community agreed to a new vision for development. Balancing social equity, economic development and protection of the environment were the three inextricable lynchpins for what was referred to as 'sustainable development', a concept based on the betterment of society today as well as safeguarding the future for the generations to come.

As world leaders again prepare to meet in Rio, the results of a flagrant failure to realise this vision are all too clear. In our work, Trócaire is witnessing how people across the world are experiencing the negative impacts of an unsustainable model of development. Converging crises of food insecurity, rising economic inequality, resource depletion and climate change pose serious challenges to global sustainable development and overall stability. The global community needs to chart a pathway to a more equitable and greener world for all, especially the most vulnerable.

Trócaire's vision of sustainability is founded on the principle that human beings are stewards of creation, called to care for the environment in a responsible way so as to pass it on to future generations. Human rights, based on recognition of the fundamental dignity of every human being and the need for particular attention to the poorest and most vulnerable, is central to our vision of sustainability.

Trócaire believes that the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) provides an opportunity to inject much needed momentum into developing credible and efficient pathways towards sustainable development and poverty eradication.

This briefing assesses the key issues at stake in Rio, and recommends actions that Ireland can take in order to contribute to a meaningful outcome following the Conference.

Principles

It is essential that any measures adopted at the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development:

- Respect all three aspects of sustainable development: environmental, economic and social impacts, including coherence between them

- Respect and promote human rights, in particular those of people affected by specific proposed measures
- Are based upon the principles formulated in the 1992 Rio Declaration (including the principle of common but differentiated responsibility and the precautionary principle)
- Give equal attention to both the efficiency of production and the sufficiency of consumption, prioritising local sustainable technologies, approaches and enterprises

Addressing the structural causes of inequity and unsustainability: beyond 'greening' the economy

"Greening" the economy without deeply changing it, is not sustainability."

Luiz Gonzalez from Trócaire partner agency Unidad Ecologica Salvadoreña (UNES), El Salvador, 2011.

One of the central themes of the Conference is the 'Green Economy'. While the concept of a 'Green Economy' has contributed to stimulating debates on the necessary transition away from unsustainable models of development, it cannot serve as the main strategy to achieve sustainable development.

Rather, what is required is a focus on addressing the structural causes of unequal and unsustainable development patterns that have led to the converging crises of climate change, food insecurity rising economic inequality and gender inequality.

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¹ Trócaire is a member of CIDSE, an international alliance of 16 Catholic development agencies working together for global justice working in over 120 countries and territories. This paper draws on the CIDSE 2012 Brief 'The Changes we Need for the Future we Want - CIDSE recommendations for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), 20-22 June 2012.

The Rio+20 Summit should launch international action in the following areas:

1) Food Security

Increasing global agricultural output will not translate automatically into increased global food security, nor to ensuring the right to food of the most vulnerable people. Such a narrow interpretation of food security led to the green revolution and its paradoxical results. Between 1967 and 2007 crop yields grew by 115% and today we produce 17% more calories per day per person than we did 30 years ago, yet in 2012, one in seven people still suffer from hunger. The industrial production model has not been a panacea for hunger eradication, is causing significant irreversible environmental damage and contributing significantly to climate change. In short it is putting in peril the planet's future food producing capacity.

"Today we produce 17% more calories per day per person than we did 30 years ago, yet in 2012, one in seven people still suffer from hunger"

The agricultural sector has been reduced to an industrial function to serve economic purposes and global markets; there is a need to reorient the sector to the service of society. For this we must scale up agro-ecological modes of food production, and challenge our production and consumption models.

The current focus on 'sustainable intensification' and trade liberalization as the solutions to food, energy and environmental challenges indicates a business as usual approach, while increasing evidence points out the need for fundamental changes in the global food system. Policy change is needed to address the current fragmented food governance, lack of public support for small scale food producers and local sustainable systems and lack of secure tenure of land, water and other resources which are vital to farmers. Tackling global food security and securing the right to food for all requires that access to and distribution of food is at the heart of policy development.

In some examples, policies aiming for sustainability have in practice resulted in the exacerbation of poverty and food insecurity, as in the case of increasing bio-fuel production to meet renewable energy targets. Policies incentivizing bio-fuel production have been linked to indirect land use change (and land grabbing), the displacement of food production, and increases in food prices. **Policy responses to sustainability challenges which are agreed upon at the Rio+20 UNCS D must support rather than undermine social equity and human rights.**

2) Climate Change

The climate crisis is one of the defining indicators of existing unsustainable development models². The Rio+20 Conference must acknowledge the inadequacy of the current global response and the urgent imperative to increase climate action ambition. Following the recent Durban climate conference the international community has committed to agreeing a new legally binding global climate deal by 2015, to be in effect by 2020. However, without a significant increase in emission reductions over the next few years the likelihood of remaining below agreed limits and avoiding devastating and irreversible impacts will rapidly diminish. Governments must increase both their emission reduction commitments and actions whilst the negotiations proceed.

Tackling climate change and other environmental challenges requires a shift in investment to establish new development paths. Scaling up predictable, new and additional finance for adaptation and low carbon development is critical to enable developing countries to opt for alternatives to the highly damaging paths followed by developed countries. Adequate public finance is critical to ensure sufficient investment in adaptation and in the most vulnerable places and people.

"In addressing the challenge of climate change, everyone has a part to play. Every action taken in favour of a just and more sustainable environment... has an intrinsic value. Action taken at a global level, as well as every individual action... helps to construct a more sustainable environment, and therefore, a better world."

Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference, 2009

At the Rio+20 UNCS D governments must commit to increasing their emission reduction ambitions without further delay, and to progress agreement on the means and mechanisms to scale up public finance for adaptation and low carbon development in developing countries.

3) Equal access for women and men

Women form the majority of those living in poverty and play a central role as agents of change in their families and communities. We therefore need to guarantee women's participation in decision making processes and make sure that women have equal access to education, employment and resources, land and ownership, as well as to justice.

The outcome of Rio+20 UNCS D should promote gender justice and be in line with the content of Agenda 21, the Beijing declaration and the Convention of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

² See Trócaire (2008) *Tackling Climate Injustice: Towards an Equitable Response to a Global Crisis* and Trócaire (2011) *Climate Change, Climate Action, Climate Justice: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally*

4) Private Sector regulation

When adequately regulated, the private sector can be an important actor in relation to transitioning our economies towards sustainable development, poverty eradication and respect for human rights.

Small and informal businesses make up a significant part of the private sector and are a source of income and employment for millions of poor people. Their contribution to development should be explicitly recognized in the Rio+20 Outcome Document. Small and informal businesses should receive the support they deserve to enable them to fully contribute to sustainable development.

“... considerable numbers of individuals whose human rights are impacted by corporations, lack access to any functioning mechanism that could provide remedy.”

Professor John Ruggie, Special Representative to the UN Secretary General on Business and Human Rights

On the other hand, transnational corporations make up only a small part of the private sector. Yet they command the largest amount of resources and power, including through subsidies and privileged political access. Transnational companies need to be properly regulated to make them change exploitative and unsustainable practices and be more transparent to show how they are contributing to the common good, sustainable development and respect of human rights.

We need adequate regulation and mandatory corporate reporting on social, environmental and human rights impacts of transnational companies at home and abroad, while the role of small and informal businesses should be promoted.

5) Finance and tax

In order to achieve sustainable development we must end the opacity of the financial system, which reduces countries' financial resources. Tax havens must be eradicated and we must ensure greater transparency and reliability of financial data to prevent tax avoidance³.

We must regulate financial markets to end speculation and reorient the financial sector to provide credit for activities that contribute to sustainable development. A new framework for cooperation on international banking supervision and regulating commodity markets are some of the important issues to be addressed in this regard.

We must introduce new and innovative financial mechanisms to trigger structural and systemic changes which will lead to sustainable development. Reform of taxation, removal of fossil fuel subsidies and a global carbon pricing mechanism for the international shipping sector are needed to discourage harmful activity in the real economy and financial sector, reflecting true costs to environment and society while contributing to greater equity. The European Commission has shown leadership in its proposal for a Financial Transactions Tax (FTT) within Europe, as a step towards a global FTT. A substantial portion of the resulting revenues should be secured for the global challenges of poverty eradication and climate change.

The road from Rio – a milestone towards a Global Sustainable Development Framework

Trocaire believes that the challenges of implementing the sustainable development agenda go hand-in-hand with the challenges faced in the run up to and after the 2015 deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We need a sufficiently resourced global development framework by 2015 with commitments to be implemented in a legally binding manner, which upholds international law and respects human rights including those of future generations⁴.

Rio should kick start this process, with the outcomes of Rio feeding into a single unified, transparent and inclusive process leading to the definition of the post-2015 framework, building upon government consultations as well as inputs from stakeholders and expert and scientific advice.

This framework should address the interlinked challenges of poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, economic inequalities, gender equity, climate change, resilience, equitable distribution of limited natural resources and guarantee human rights and equality. It must ensure policy coherence with human rights and sustainable development in the areas of development, agriculture, trade, finance, investment and the private sector.

This process would lead to fully elaborated measures that encompass the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development, with targets and support and monitoring structure. In Rio therefore, there should be no attempt to rush a set of goals to secure a political success from Rio +20, which would undermine existing attempts to fully develop a robust, holistic and equitable post-2015 development framework and would be counterproductive for the process going forward after the Rio+20 conference.

³ See Killian, S., (2011), *Driving the Getaway Car? Ireland, Tax and Development*

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the post-2015 development framework issue, refer to Trocaire (2012) *Where next for the Millennium Development Goals?*

Sustainability is the ability to sustain. The question is to sustain what? The answer is we have to sustain the country or the society, because this is where people, as well as plants and animals, live. Development is just a tool'.

Dr Ricardo Navarro, Director, CESTA, El Salvador, 2011.

What Ireland should do

In Ireland, as elsewhere, more and more households, communities, organisations and companies are opting for a more sustainable society. This must be met with political commitment and public policy if we are to do enough, quickly enough to ensure we come back within ecological limits as we chart a path for a more sustainable and equitable future.

The publication of a new Sustainable Development Strategy for Ireland planned in advance of the Rio+20 UNCSA will lay the foundations for Ireland's international commitment to sustainability.

The introduction of a Climate Change Bill, as committed to in the Programme for Government will be an important contribution towards sustainable development. The Department of the Environment has also recently held a public consultation on climate change policy, which will feed into their proposals for a climate law as well as the development of other areas of climate policy.

Ahead of the Rio +20 UNCSA Ireland should

- Hold a debate in the Dáil on Ireland's contribution to sustainable development and strive for an all party commitment to implementing a Sustainable Development Framework for Ireland.
- Ensure a Sustainable Development Framework for Ireland provides for legally binding timetables and targets related to biodiversity enhancement, sustainable land use, sustainable resource consumption, sustainable trade and international development.
- Ensure the Department of the Taoiseach is responsible for implementation of the Sustainable Development Framework for Ireland. When the Framework is agreed upon its implementation must be regularly scrutinized by the relevant committees, and feature annually in a Dáil Debate led by the Taoiseach.

At the Rio+20 UNCSA Ireland should

- Be represented at the highest political level in order to demonstrate Ireland's commitment to sustainable development. A high level of political engagement with the UNCSA also puts Ireland in a better position to engage in action at national and international levels to promote sustainable development following the Conference.

- Ensure the structural causes of unsustainable and inequitable development outlined throughout this briefing are considered and addressed in the negotiation of the outcomes document for Rio+20 UNCSA.
- Champion the core Rio principles of 'common but differentiated responsibility' and 'the precautionary principle'.
- Continue to champion the urgent need for agreement on a single inclusive process with clear timeline within the UN that engages men and women living in poverty in the development of a holistic, inclusive, equitable and universally applicable development framework post 2015.
- Promote clear acknowledgement in the outcome document of the inadequacy of the current global response to climate change and a commitment to urgently increase climate action ambition.
- Affirm Ireland's commitment to meeting its climate change responsibilities and actively promoting climate justice by enacting an effective climate law to facilitate national emission reductions, and supporting agreement on the means and mechanisms for scaling up resources for climate action in developing countries.

After the Rio+20 UNCSA Ireland should

- Propose, enact and implement strong and effective climate legislation.
- Use the opportunity of Ireland's Presidency of the EU Council in 2013 to actively promote and support the development of a strong and clear EU position on a post 2015 development framework by hosting an informal ministerial on the issue ahead of the UN MDG Summit later that year.
- Ensure that Ireland holds consultations with its citizens on how our responsibilities for the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development should be addressed in the post-2015 framework. This is important given that the post 2015 framework should be universally applicable.
- Support Irish Aid partner/programme countries to hold consultations with their citizens ensuring a post-2015 framework is truly responsive to the voices of those most affected by poverty and injustice⁵.
- Ensure policy coherence for development in its policies, in particular in the areas of climate policy, trade and agricultural policy, finance, investment and the private sector to deliver sustainable development.

⁵ Trócaire is a founding member of Beyond 2015, a global campaign to initiate discussions on a post-2015 development framework.