

2012

THE Road from Rio+20

2014

Towards Sustainable Development Goals

Special contributions by
Yann Arthus-Bertrand,
Günter Fischer and
Tom Reese



UNITED NATIONS

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The Road from Rio+20

Towards Sustainable Development Goals
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From Rio to SDGs



P R E F A C E

Mukhisa Kituyi

III

Over 20 years after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, advancing sustainable development from the local level to the global level remains a major challenge and responsibility. In fact the development challenges, especially of poverty eradication, have become even more intractable. The 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) discussed these global imperatives and agreed, inter alia, to define sustainable development goals (SDGs) to serve as a guide for the international community in implementing actions to better advance sustainable development.

The agreement to develop SDGs came at a time when the UN community is also engaged in elaborating a new global governance framework to guide development discourse and efforts in the post-2015 period when the current UN Millennium Development Goals will expire. While distinctly separate, the two processes are more than likely to give rise to one set of post-2015 sustainable development goals. Such goals, as provided in the outcome document of the Rio+20 summit, should be action-oriented, addressing all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental) and their inter-linkages in a balanced way; they must be concise, easy to communicate and relatively few in numbers; and they must be relevant to all countries.

The emphasis that the new goals must reflect fully the three dimensions of sustainable development and ensure their balanced treatment is very important. It addresses some of the lacunae in the current MDGs framework, namely lack of integration among the different goals and weak emphasis on economic drivers of development with the result also that trade enablers received limited attention. Yet development experiences over many years and recently in many countries have shown that economic growth is critical to inclusive development and this can be sustained by an enhanced and qualitative participation in international trade, accompanied by financial including investment and technology flows and supportive institutional, regulatory and human capacities. Building competitive productive capacities to increase participation in trade in turn requires enabling policies and measures at national, regional and international levels.

UNCTAD, as part of the United Nations system, is contributing to the discourse among Governments with analysis and advice. Our efforts are squarely focused on fostering a process of trade-led development that is socially, economically and environmentally inclusive and also builds up culture and creativity.

This fourth issue of our Rio+20 Journal, which we termed the *“The Road from Rio: Towards Sustainable Development Goals”* articulates some perspectives on such goals and the contribution of international trade. We have invited several leading personalities to share their views on aspects of the development framework in the post-2015 period. We hope this contribution will help Governments and other stakeholders navigate the multitude of global issues facing the international community today and define a sustainable development framework that can have a major impact on poverty eradication across the globe in the years ahead.



Secretary-General of UNCTAD



From the editor

Rio+20 saw United Nations Member States renew their commitment to sustainable development, ensuring promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future and “freeing humanity from poverty and hunger as a matter of urgency”.

One term that comes up again and again in the Rio+20 Conference Declaration, entitled ‘The Future We Want’ is an ‘enabling environment’, considered essential for sustainable development. Here, all key actors have an important role to play: government through positive legislation, business through public-private strategic partnerships, or civil society through its active engagement.

This edition covers various aspects of this ‘enabling environment’. It takes the reader beyond the watershed moment of Rio+20 to investigate what critical issues would have an impact on sustainable development and related policies and strategies – and how all social and economic actors, in particular environmentalists, can contribute.

From Guillermo Valles Galmés comes an article underlining the significant role of international trade in sustainable development, arguing that a successful post-2015 development agenda should fully leverage trade to stimulate sustainable development globally. Strengthening this point further is an article by Ransford Smith on trade’s potential as driver of growth and poverty eradication through realization of the productive employment of people, and the exchange of essential goods and services.

Focusing on culture and creativity, Irina Bokova, stresses that, to put people first, education, culture and the sciences must be integrated firmly into the post-2015 agenda. Sustainability, she says, has deeper roots than financial and economic assets.

Other essays directly address specific issues raised in ‘The Future We Want’. There, for example, Member States reiterate the importance of integrating water usage into sustainable development, and underline the critical importance of access to clean water and sanitation within its social, economic and environmental dimensions. Taking this as their cue, Graziella Magalhães Candido de Castro and Rudinei Toneto Jr. analyze why other infrastructure projects in Brazil such as telecommunications and electricity have proved more successful than water infrastructure. They call for access to clean water and sanitation to be integrated into the future Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For his part, Nestlé Chairman Peter Brabeck-Letmathe demonstrates how a public-private partnership can provide a model of best practice for water strategy.

‘The Future We Want’ underlines how an enabling environment will contribute to the development, adaptation, dissemination and transfer of environmentally sound technologies. It highlights the role of foreign direct investment, international trade and international cooperation in the transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

In his essay, Simon Cleasby proposes biofuels as a way to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and describes, with an example from Sierra Leone, how Africa, with its abundance of underused land and excellent climate is well adapted for sugarcane cultivation and ethanol production.

Nuclear energy in the past seemed to provide a solution in the move away from fossil fuels. However, accidents from the more distant and recent past have alerted governments to its possible downsides. Jürgen Korff explains how already, back in 1986, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster provided a wake up call and gave rise to the accelerated development

of solar energy, a rapidly growing resource with positive impacts on the environment.

A sustainable future that balances the economic, social and environmental dimension requires catalysts. In this regard, three articles provide some novel ideas. Katie Beckett draws inspiration from a case study in Namibia to illustrate how building capacity for the production and trade in natural products from sustainable and ethical supply chains can contribute to the post-2015 development agenda.

On the level of practical implementation, voluntary international standards and certification have, since the early 20th century, played a key role in the development and inter-operability of traditional energy resources; they will certainly continue to play a key role in the development of alternatives. Here Sébastien Haye describes the form and function of a new global standard for sustainable production of biomass and biofuels, implemented through a voluntary certification system.

In the final essay, the mining company Vale illustrates the point made in ‘The Future We Want’ that “mining offers the opportunity to catalyse broad-based economic development, reduce poverty and assist countries in meeting internationally agreed development goals”. It outlines its actions, working with communities, civil society, governments and investors, in providing benefits at local level and “transforming natural resources into sustainable development.”

It is hoped that the examples and case studies contained in this and other volumes in the ‘Road from Rio’ series will provide inspiration to UN Member States and stakeholders in their reflections on what the future SDGs should look like and how they might be implemented ◀

Eugenia E. Nuñez

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Schoolchildren in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso (11°10'N, 4°18'W)
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