

Rights at risk at the United Nations

Mountain knowledge solutions to strengthen the water, energy, and food security nexus

> a multi-stakeholder magazine on climate change and sustainable development

# outr

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for critical analysis on key thematic topics in

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### pic: Clara and James

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### About Stakeholder Forum

Stakeholder Forum is an international organisation working to advance sustainable development and promote democracy at a global level. Our work aims to enhance open, accountable and participatory international decision-making on sustainable development through enhancing the involvement of stakeholders in intergovernmental processes. For more information, visit: www.stakeholderforum.org

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# **Rights at risk at the United Nations**

Open Letter to the Secretary General for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD). Co-Chairs of the Bureau for Rio+20 and Member-States of the United Nations

over the fulfillment of human needs and the respect We - the civil society of planetary boundaries. Therefore strong institutional organizations and social frameworks and regulation are needed. Weakly regulated markets have already proven to be a threat, not only to movements who have responded to people and nature, but to economies and nation states the call of the United Nations themselves. Markets must work for people, people should not work for markets. General Assembly to participate in the Rio+20 process - feel From the ashes of World War II, humanity gathered to build that is our duty to call institutions aiming to build peace and prosperity for all, avoiding further suffering and destruction. The Universal the attention of relevant Declaration of Human Rights spells out this collective authorities and citizens of will, and the United Nations organization was created to make it a reality. Alarmingly, this very institution is now the world to a situation that being used as a platform to attack the very rights it should severely threatens the rights safeguard, leaving people without defense and putting the very relevance of the UN at stake. of all people and undermines the relevance of the United Nations. We urge member states to bring the Rio+20 negotiations

Remarkably, we are witnessing an attempt by certain countries to weaken, or "bracket" or outright eliminate nearly all references to human rights obligations and equity principles in the text, "The Future We Want", for the outcome of Rio+20.

This includes references to the right to food and proper nutrition, the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation, the right to development, and others. The right to a clean and healthy environment, which is essential to the realization of fundamental human rights, remains weak in the text. Even principles previously agreed upon in Rio in 1992 are being bracketed - the Polluter Pays Principle, Precautionary Principle, Common But Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR).

Many member states are opposing prescriptive language that commits governments to actually do what they claim to support in principle and act as duty bearers of human rights, including the provision of finance, technology and other means of implementation to support sustainable development effort in developing countries. On the other hand, there is a strong push for private sector investments and initiatives to fill in the gap left by the public sector. This risks privatizing and commoditizing common goods - such as water - which in turn endangers access and affordability, which are fundamental to such rights.

Although economic tools are essential to implement the decisions aiming for sustainability, social justice and peace, a private economy rationale should not prevail back on track to deliver the people's legitimate agenda and the realization of rights, democracy and sustainability, as well as respect for transparency, accountability and non-regression on progress made.

We call on the UN Secretary General to stand up for the legacy of the United Nations by ensuring that Rio+20 builds on the multi-generational effort to strengthen rights as the foundation of peace and prosperity.

We urge our fellow citizens of the world to stand up for the future we want, and let their voices be heard. To that end the Rio+20 process should be improved by adopting the proposals we submit below.

### On Greater participation for MGs

We are concerned by the continuing exclusion of Major Groups from the formal negotiating process of the Rio+20 zero draft. Unlike in the Preparatory Committee Meetings and the Intersessional Meetings, Major Groups and other Stakeholders have not been allowed to present revisions or make statements on the floor of the meeting. Nor, we suspect, will we be allowed to make submissions or participate fully in the working negotiation group meetings that are likely to follow. Despite the UN DESA having compiled a text that shows all the revisions suggested by Major Groups, these revisions to the zero draft have so far not been included in the official negotiating text.

(Continued Page 2)

We request that the Major Groups be given the opportunity to submit suggestions and wording which would then be added to the official text for consideration, indication of support or deletion, and potential inclusion by governments.

We appeal to the UNCSD Secretary General to urgently reverse this state of affairs and to ensure that Major Groups have a seat at the table and a voice in the room where the negotiations are taking place. Please ensure that at the very least, Major Groups are allowed a formal statement at the commencement of the next negotiating session and at every session where a new draft text is introduced.

### MORE INFO

If you wish to add your organisation to the list of signatories, please sign and share the online petition at www.ipetitions.com/petition/rightsatrisk

# Book Review: The Roads from Rio, Lessons Learned from twenty years of Multilateral Environmental Negotiations

### Review by Derek Osborn

President, Stakeholder Forum

This wonderful book was published and launched in the UN on 23rd March. It is a must-read for everyone involved in multilateral negotiations about the environment and sustainable development.

The editors, Pamela S. Chasek and Lynn M. Wagner, have been closely associated with the Earth Negotiations Bulletin that has followed and reported in detail on all the main multilateral negotiations of the past 20 years. Their ringside view, and the incomparable archive that the Bulletin has assembled, give this book a unique depth of insight and understanding of all that has happened over those years.

As one who has himself attended a number of the key meetings, I feel as though the book reveals to me explanations for many of the twists and turns of negotiations, and their successes and failures, in a way that I could not fully grasp at the time. Like the best works of modern history it begins to makes sense out of the apparent disorder and arbitrariness of negotiations as we have lived through them day by day.

It brings out the changing alliances and relative strength of different country groupings. It charts the gradually growing influence and contribution of the many civil society actors and shows how the scientific community has evolved its ability to build awareness and understanding of the global environment and the key drivers of change. It explores how the role of the official secretariats of the different processes has evolved and how best they can support complex and difficult negotiations. And, it gives a fascinating account of the various different methods that chairpersons and bureaus have developed to try to break negotiating deadlocks and forge new consensus.

The book also shows in some detail, how different issues and challenges have impacts on each other. The links between biodiversity, habitat protection, climate change, the ozone layer, and several other issues are explored,



along with the way in which separate negotiations on these different subjects have sometimes interacted positively, and sometimes less helpfully.

In a final section, the authors draw out some lessons about the whole history of multilateral environmental governance and some valuable pointers for the future.

Overall, of course, the history of the last 20 years is not good. The world as a whole is pressing ever closer against planetary boundaries or limits, and the transition to a more sustainable economy for the future is still only at the starting point. We urgently need to create mechanisms for stronger analysis, decision, action and implementation in order to make a better go of the next 20 years. Let us hope that all involved in Rio+20, and its follow up, will read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the messages of this essential book, and apply them to their current task. There needs to be a better story to tell by the time the authors come to write Volume 2, in time for Rio+40.

# Integrating across sectors: the climate, energy and water nexus

### Dr Jamie Pittock

The Australian National University and US Studies Centre

While the Rio+20 negotiations continue in New York, a major international conference, titled Planet Under **Pressure**, is being held in London. Focusing on solutions to the global sustainability challenge, it will provide scientific advice to the world's governments, on reforms required for sustainability. The intersection of climate change, energy and water policies provides insights into the cross-sectoral challenges that we face, and the opportunities to integrate out planetary stewardship for a sustainable future.

Many people regard climate change as the most pressing environmental problem on Earth. Consequently, policies are being adopted to promote low carbon energy technologies and carbon capture and storage, but many will greatly increase water consumption and impact on freshwater biodiversity. Under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), for instance, around a guarter of the accredited projects are for ecologically damaging hydropower dams. Water consumption is greatly increased - often in water scarce regions - by technologies like biofuels, hot rock geothermal and solar thermal power stations, pumped-storage back up to wind and solar photovoltaic generators, carbon capture and storage, and sequestration plantations.

Over a billion people lack access to safe drinking water, and nearly three billion lack access to adequate sanitation services. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment identified aquatic biodiversity as particularly imperilled, and freshwater and wild fish as over exploited. Clearly there is a need to conserve the Earth's atmosphere, but should it be at the expense of freshwater ecosystems and services?

Conversely, measures being adopted to adapt water supplies to more variable and changing climates are greatly increasing energy consumption and exacerbating climate change. Water desalination and pumping water long distances to increase supply, are examples.

How then can our governments, businesses and societies make smarter, cross-sectoral decisions that avoid perverse impacts and favour positive synergies? We think there are five complementary solutions:

1. Integrating data. Too often decisions are based on monetary cost per increased unit of a sectoral service rather than considering, for example, the water consumed per unit of energy supplied. Better monitoring,

### Planet Under Pressure, 26-29 March

Held in London, the Planet Under Pressure conference will wider world's attention on climate, ecological degradation, provide a comprehensive update of our knowledge of the human well-being, planetary thresholds, food security, Earth system and the pressure our planet is now under. In energy, governance across scales and poverty alleviation. the lead up to Rio+20, the conference will offer scientific leadership, and focus the scientific community's and the MORE INFO www.planetunderpressure2012.net/index.asp

linking sectoral data bases and more comprehensive assessments can better inform decisions.

- 2. Choosing better technologies. All technologies have costs and benefits, and usually the cheapest is chosen without thought to impacts on other sectors. Choosing different technologies may sustain the supply of a desired service and greatly minimise perverse impacts. For instance, dry cooling is more capital intensive but can reduce water consumption of thermal power stations by 90%, compared to wet cooling (and at a cost of 8% of the energy produced).
- 3. Integrating markets. Poorly designed markets can create new externalities, for instance, the impacts on water consumption are rarely considered, in the establishment of carbon markets such as the CDM. Markets in natural resources need to be harmonised to eliminate externalities. In South Africa for example, designation under their Water Act of forest plantations as stream flow reduction activities, reduces perverse impacts by requiring forest growers to secure water entitlements and pay fees.
- 4. Improving governance. Around the world, a great many mechanisms for better cross-sectoral decisionmaking have been tested, we now need to apply them systematically. These include, providing legal mandates to organisations to consider links to other sectors in their work. Government institutions for cross-scale and cross-sector policy implementation can harness broader expertise. Earlier and broader strategic environmental assessments of new policies and technologies can identify and respond to perverse impacts. Third party accountability mechanisms may identify or prevent unanticipated problems. Adaptive management of policies can identify and apply lessons.
- 5. Fostering leadership. Policy entrepreneurs play key roles in catalysing reform, and we must consider how to identify, support and promote them.

Sectoral institutions and decision-making are dominant in government, business, academia and civil society. Through the use of these five solutions, our societies will make better cross-sectoral decisions and enable us to exercise sustainable stewardship of this planet.

# Greening the Human Development Index: Accounting for all pillars of sustainability

### Chuluun Togtokh

Science Secretary of Sustainable Development Institute at National University of Mongolia, Science Director of Green Development Policy Institute and Vice-Chair of Mongolia's Global Change National Committee

Economic growth is an engine for development. However, there are two key issues from sustainability point of view that need to be addressed; that of the equal distribution of wealth among populations within countries, and whether economic growth itself can be green. In order to address these issues, I am proposing a new sustainability index composed of wealth, equity and environment.

In 1992, the first Earth Summit defined sustainable development as having three pillars: economic, social and environmental. As a global species we have had remarkable success with the first two pillars. But, ultimately, our failure to address global sustainability lies in our inability to tackle all three dimensions simultaneously. Reductionism, fragmentation, division, and self-interest to keep one's 'own territory', are reasons for such failure. The UN Human Development Index (HDI) is indicative of this fragmented approach, as it does not account for the environmental dimension.

The HDI has set straightforward targets for countries and international organisations for more than twenty years. Its success and influence owe much to its simplicity. It brilliantly summarises quality of life in a given country using health, education, and income levels. Yet it fails to cover an increasingly vital question for humankind: how sustainable is that development? In the current HDI, developed nations and oil-rich countries are placed highly without regard to how much their development paths are costing the planet and humankind's future development. There is little regard for the resulting fundamental changes to the Earth System.

As the UN prepares for Rio+20, it must lead by example. It should include an environmental indicator and so change the HDI to a Human Sustainable Development Index. Nations'  $CO_2$  emissions per capita provide a simple,

available and measurable indicator of environmental impact. They also reveal a somewhat unsurprising dynamic – that countries with faster HDI improvements also experience a more rapid increase in  $CO_2$  emissions per capita. The bottom line: recent progress in the HDI has come at the cost of global warming.

I am also proposing the inclusion of a social index, which accounts societal equality, instead of health and education as in the HDI. Societal equity can provide a good indication of wellbeing, for example, in societies where the income differences between rich and poor are smaller, health trends and life expectancy are better, and numeracy and literacy scores tend to be higher. Community life is also stronger, with more trust between citizens, and smaller prison populations. In summary, societal equality is critical for social resilience, and better captures social sustainability.

To find out how the inclusion of environmental and social indices affects the HDI, I included per capita carbon emissions and equity levels, and recalculated the sustainability index, using the UN's published methodology. My resulting Human Sustainable Development Index shows very interesting results, when compared with the HDI:

Australia, the US and Canada fall straight out of the top ten

- US drops from 4th to 64th;
- Australia slides by 52 places from 2nd to 54th;
- Canada falls from 6th to 38th; and

More equal societies such as Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Japan received the highest rankings

- Sweden rises from 10th to 1st;
- Denmark moves from 16st to 2nd;
- Japan from 12th to 4th position;

The implications of the Sustainability Index go beyond the symbolic. The HDI has shifted the target of development beyond the almighty dollar, but the new Human *Sustainable* Development Index, or Sustainability Index completely shifts development targets into social and environmental resilience building, addressing challenges such as climate change and societal equality. It brings new insights into governance for sustainability because better societal equality and green development pathways depend on policy decisions made by the government and institutions.

### MORE INFO

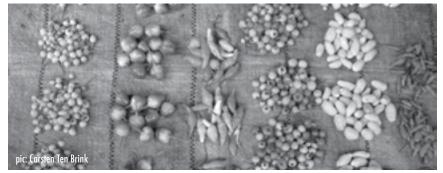
www.nature.com/news/time-to-stop-celebrating-the-polluters-1.9370

# Sustainability: Reassessing what we count and measure

## Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta

Chair of the Scientific Committee, IHDP

There is much to like about the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel report, 'Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing'. The Panel acknowledges past successes, while recognising the failure, and indeed inability, of the current global political-economic order to implement the drastic changes necessary to bring about what could truly be deemed sustainability.



It presents a vision for a 'sustainable planet, just society and growing economy', as well as 56 policy recommendations for realising that vision and is arguably the most prominent international call for a radical re-design of the global economy ever issued. Yet, for all its rich content, the Panel's report is less clear on concrete, practical solutions. Its most valuable shortterm recommendation - the replacement of current development indicators with more comprehensive and inclusive metrics for wealth - seems tacked on, almost as an afterthought. Without quick, decisive international movement to prioritise sustainability at the expense of the status quo, the report risks suffering the fate of its 1987 predecessor, the pioneering Brundtland Report, which introduced the concept of sustainability at the international level – and similarly called for a paradigm shift - but which was not followed with action.

The world today is 'experiencing the best of times, and the worst of times', begins the Panel, setting the contrasting tone for the full report: as a whole, the globe is experiencing unparalleled prosperity; great strides are being made to reduce global poverty; technological advancements are revolutionising untold corners of life across the world, stamping out diseases and transforming communication. At the same time, inequality remains stubbornly high and, in many areas, is increasing; and short-term political and economic strategies are driving consumerism and debt, while putting ever-greater stress Professor Anantha Duraiappah

**Executive Director, IHDP** 

on the natural environment. Despite our advancements, humanity has not used the past 25 years to conserve resources, safeguard natural ecosystems, or otherwise ensure its own long-term viability.

While the planet is undoubtedly facing a number of perilous crises, it may be out of crisis itself that real action is born. As the Panel points out, it is clearer than ever that a paradigm shift is necessary to achieve truly sustainable global development, within planetary boundaries.

The 2010 Report on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, commissioned by French President Sarkozy, echoed the current consensus among social scientists that we are mis-measuring wellbeing by using per capita GDP as our yardstick for progress. We need new indicators that tell us if we are destroying the productive base that supports our wellbeing. An immediate move could be to mobilise, and support, those organisations that are creating new development indicators, which internalise the social and environmental costs of economic growth.

The United Nations University's International Human Dimensions Programme (UNU-IHDP), with support from UNEP, is aims to address these issues in its first Inclusive Wealth Report (IWR). The report provides a capital approach to sustainability – based on a portfolio of stocks of assets or 'wealth', including natural, produced, and human and social capital – an aims to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the different components of wealth, by country, together with their link to economic development and human wellbeing. The IWR pays particular attention to natural and human capital, and shows how to formulate policies that are based on the social management of asset portfolios.

The first IWR, which focuses on a selection of 20 countries worldwide, will be officially launched at a joint UNEP and IHDP side event at Rio+20. Preliminary findings will be presented during the **Planet Under Pressure** Conference in London this week. The IWR represents a crucial first step in changing the global economic paradigm, by forcing us to reassess our needs and goals as a society, and ensuring we have the correct information with which to implement and assess our economic development and improved wellbeing. It is not intended as the universal indicator for sustainability; but it does offer a rigorous framework for dialogue, with multiple constituencies representing the environmental, social and economic fields.

Our situation is critical, and, as the Panel aptly put it, 'tinkering around the margins' will no longer suffice. The call for a radical paradigm shift in the global economic system has been made once again. Our challenge now will be to follow up words and recommendations with action.

# Mountain knowledge solutions to strengthen the water, energy, and food security nexus

### David Molden

Director General, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu

Sustainability at every level. from an individual household to the global community, depends on secure supplies of, and equitable access to, water, food, and energy. Mountains play a vital role in this nexus, particularly in the provision of water.

Because of the rapid changes taking place as a result of global warming, the mountain agenda is much more significant today than it was in 1992. The Rio+20 outcome document needs to recognise this new reality and take action.

Progressive warming at higher altitudes has been three to five times the global average. In the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region, this rapid warming is evident in our observations of increased snow and glacial melt and the frequency of extreme events - such as devastating floods and droughts - which have exacerbated problems of poverty and hunger. Climate and other global changes are creating tremendous uncertainties in the world's mountain ecosystems.

Glaciated and snow-clad mountains are the world's water towers. They supply enough water to meet more than 50% of the fresh water needs of the world's population. High mountains store an immense volume of water in the form of ice, snow, and sub-surface water, which is gradually released to support food, energy, and biomass production, and to provide water for drinking, sanitation, domestic needs, and industry. The diverse microclimates found in mountain ecosystems generate huge biological diversity including agro-biodiversity, which is critical to



energy from hydropower development. Enhancing food and energy security will require long-term planning, enabling policies, and an institutional framework that offers incentives to the private and public sectors to accelerate the production and distribution of renewable energy, in a sustainable manner and under rapidly changing conditions. This will not be an easy task given the present state of knowledge.

The contribution of mountain ecosystems to global food security is not limited to water and energy supply. Mountain communities have long been silent custodians of agrobiodiversity. Mountains are reservoirs of the wild relatives of domesticated crop species - the genetic resources we need to supply the world's future food and fibre needs. Maize, potatoes, barley, sorghum, tomatoes, and apples all have their genetic origins in mountain ecosystems. So do sheep, goats, domestic yaks, llamas, and alpacas.

Genetic diversity in mountains is particularly high, in part due to their geographic isolation, but also because many diverse mountain cultures have long traditions in the cultivation and husbandry of certain plants and animals. This vast store of indigenous and traditional knowledge is poorly documented - or if it is recorded - seldom analysed or applied. The intellectual property rights of indigenous people have not yet received adequate recognition.

The Future We Want document from Rio+20 should therefore recognise the critical role of mountains as alobal nublic anode that supply water for life food

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# How to measure progress after Rio+20? Sustainable Development Goals for all.

### Derek Osborn

President, Stakeholder Forum

Current discussions about measuring progress after Rio+20 and the establishment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are in danger of focusing mainly on the developing world. There needs to be equal emphasis on establishing goals for the sustainability transition in the developed world and the emerging economies.

The MDGs are rightly valued in the development world for the focus and drive they have given to the international development process, and the eradication of poverty, in many developing countries over the past decade. It is therefore natural that many people want to retain that focus and drive. At the same time, it will be important to ensure that at their next iteration, such goals are integrated more effectively with sustainability and environmental principles. Thus, the elimination of hunger should be coupled with the promotion of more sustainable agriculture. Providing access to electricity should be coupled with spreading renewable and locally produced electricity. Provision of water and sanitation should be coupled with protection of water resources and the water environment.

These issues are now gaining traction at the negotiations, in the discussions about the emerging concept of SDGs. However, this laudable objective is in danger of distracting attention from the equally important and complementary issue of tackling the heavy 'footprint' of the developed





world on the developing one, and on the globe in general. It is the excessive carbon emissions of the developed world and emerging economies that are driving climate change and the burden that it already places on the world, especially on the more vulnerable countries of the developing world. Furthermore, the excessive consumption of other resources is driving loss of forests and fish stocks, land degradation and other environmental crises.

Any worthwhile set of SDGs emerging from Rio must place as much weight on the need to reduce these damaging impacts from the developed world as on the goals for the developing world. The developed world and the emerging economies need to urgently promote resource efficiency, move to a low carbon economy and develop renewable sources of electricity. The SDGs should establish indicators, targets and milestones for this transition.

This suggests some kind of twin-track method, but care should be given to ensuring that the tracks work together in a complementary fashion. The overarching objectives of sustainable development, as defined by the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, can be the glue here, emphasising the complementary objectives of poverty eradication and protection of the natural resource base. 'Poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and protecting and man aging the natural resource base of economic and social development are overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for sustainable development."

Thus, while there should be a focus on improving basic health and wellbeing in developing countries, it is also important to track their own growing global footprint. Likewise, while it is imperative that the developed world's footprint be monitored and reduced, this must be done whilst maintaining and improving health and wellbeing, not at the expense of it. Realising that pockets of the developing world can be found in developed countries, and vice versa, is also worth recognising in order to bind these two overarching and driving objectives together.

This approach has the potential to form the basis of a common and coherent course for measuring the progress of developing, developed and middle-income countries, while contributing to the common goal of sustainable development.