

## Rio + 20, the Outcome and Ways Forward

*An analysis and comments by Gunnar Boye Olesen, INFORSE. June 26, 2012*

In INFORSE, we share the view of many NGOs that Rio+20, June 2012, was a **large missed opportunity** to set the world on course to sustainable development. Instead, the more than 100 heads of states and governments made a **number of small decisions that need substantial follow-up** on many levels to make the necessary difference for sustainable development.

***Hereby, an overview of the most important decisions for sustainable energy with comments.***

### Access to Sustainable Energy

Rio+20 set access to sustainable energy more firmly on the Global Agenda. The Heads of States decided to commit to facilitate support for access to sustainable, modern energy services by 1.4 billion people worldwide who are currently without them. They also committed to promoting sustainable modern energy services for all through national and sub-national efforts, inter alia, on electrification and dissemination of sustainable cooking and heating solutions.

- Comment: It is **now crucial** that these commitments **are followed by actions**, nationally as well as internationally; this is not clear from the text.

### Support for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency

The Heads of States **reaffirmed their support for increased use of renewable energy sources and more efficient use of energy, but** they combined this support with support for **“other low-emission technologies** and greater reliance on advanced energy technologies, including cleaner fossil fuel technologies, and the sustainable use of traditional energy resources”.

- Comment: Beside that a reaffirmation of **support does not bring much news**, the support includes (as before) **“other low-emission technologies** and advanced energy technologies including cleaner fossil fuel technologies”, which **can include nuclear power and all kinds of fossil fuel use** that is less polluting than the current use. Each country can then define what to include.

### Phase Out of Fossil Fuel Subsidies

The countries that have already committed to phase out fossil fuel subsidies reaffirmed their commitments. In addition the heads of states invited each other to rationalizing inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by (among others) phasing out harmful subsidies to reflect their environmental impacts.

- Comment: Many see this text as being *slightly stronger* than the 10 years old text from the “Rio+10” summit at Johannesburg *regarding fossil fuel* subsidies. On the other hand, **in Johannesburg** the countries **included phasing out harmful subsidies for all types of energy**, which includes for instance the widespread *nuclear energy subsidies*. This is **not** covered in the Rio+20 text. Moreover

### Climate Change

The heads of states reaffirmed that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and noted with grave concern the significant gap between the mitigation pledges of countries for 2020 and emissions consistent with a likely chance of holding global average temperature below 2° C, or 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels.

- Comment: In this way, the countries **recognised the problem** in a text copied from the agreement at the climate COP17 in Durban, December 2011. They **did not agree any action** to improve the situation. Instead, they recalled that the climate convention (UNFCCC) provides that the countries should protect the climate system, and they welcomed the Green Climate Fund.

## Sustainable Consumption and Production

The countries adopted a 10-year framework for programmes on sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns. The framework was developed in 2011 by the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), and is now also included as a Rio+20 document (document A/CONF.216/5). To have all agree to this, the countries had to highlight that the SCP programmes are voluntary. The countries then asked UN General Assembly, at its 67<sup>th</sup> session in September 2012 to designate a body with countries as members to operationalize the framework.

- Comment: This decision was **included already** in the conclusion from Rio+10, but without a specific text for how to operationalize the framework, which some countries used to stall implementation for a decade.

Now, **with 10 years delay, we can start** the framework and hopefully it will lead to some useful programmes for sustainable development.

## Sustainable Development Goals

The process to make sustainable development goals (SDGs) was started with the agreement on a process, where UN experts make a report that is then discussed by the countries. The SDGs are then expected to be adopted in 2015. The SDGs will be planned together with an update of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

## Green Economy

Green Economy has a long text in the outcome in Rio+20, but the content is not very strong. The countries just invite the UN system to provide information on best practices and models of policies on green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

- Comment: This **gives the UN a green light to build capacity** on green economy, but it does not mandate any organisation in particular to be responsible.

The countries also recognised the need for broader measures of progress than the GDP and requested the UN Statistical Office to launch a work programme on this.

- Comment: This **can lead to global agreement** on a greener and more social alternatives to GDP.

## Institutions for Sustainable Development

The countries agreed to replace the CSD with a high-level forum with all countries (the CSD had only some countries as members), and with same modalities as CSD (this includes that the level of inclusion of civil society participation remains).

- Comment: The forum's mandate **seems a bit wider than CSD's, but** future will show how efficient the new forum will be to bring sustainable development on the global agenda (which CSD was not).

The countries also decided to strengthen the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

- Comment: The countries **did not agree on an "ombudsman for future generations"**, but they agreed to ask the UN Secretary General to make a report on intergenerational solidarity.

## Health, Mining

- Comment: The text **is not recognising** the harmful environmental and health effects of **nuclear energy and mining**. This was **not even discussed** as it **was not included** in the draft text, even though several NGOs proposed to include it.

## Partnerships etc.

There were many proposals and activities of individual countries and groups. For sustainable energy probably the most important were:

- The "**Sustainable Energy for All**" Initiative, started by the UN General Secretary and with several international organisations and companies as partners. It presented at the Rio+20 that now it has support from 50 countries, including Denmark that pledged 15 mill. US\$ in support.

- The "**Energy+**" initiative was launched with Norway as leader with the aim of providing sustainable energy access in concentrated efforts. The first concentrated activities will be in Ethiopia, Liberia, and Kenya.