



Development: Sustainable for whom?



Reflections to understand contemporary challenges

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Foreword

For global development policies to be effective, they must take into account the specific needs and interests of marginalised and vulnerable populations in the world's developed, developing, and least developed countries, and particularly those living in poverty. While sustainable development is generally seen as responsible and just, it is a concept that gives rise to much debate and is more complex than it may at first seem. In taking a holistic look at development policies, the following questions arise: what are the concrete realities behind so-called development? Who truly reaps the benefits of development projects? And what are their real costs?

Without getting bogged down in specialised terms, this leaflet will help you to understand what is meant by sustainable development. It will provide you with keys to decipher current debates (including the Rio +20 Conference and its follow-up) that will lead to important decisions on a global level and, eventually, practical change in local communities.

Understanding and becoming interested in current policies that affect societies in both developing and developed countries is the starting point to giving oneself the means to influence such policies, as an empowered citizen.

Enjoy the reading, think, and take action!

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Development can be understood as a process that triggers economic, social and cultural changes which in turn enable people to move forward, allowing them greater opportunity to achieve their potential. It is a multifaceted notion that can be regarded from many perspectives, each reflecting a variety of different contexts, factors, and priorities. Since it combines a series of different meanings ranging from “economic growth” to “cultural and intellectual development” up to “social justice” and “poverty alleviation” processes, the term development may create confusion and contradictions.

If we understand development as a process that enables people to move forward and increase opportunities to achieve their potential (including the alleviation of poverty), we should ask ourselves: why are so many people around the world still trapped in poverty without any opportunity to improve their lifestyle? In other words, we need to reflect on the role of development and the promotion of economic growth in poverty-eradicating strategies and their impact on social transformation. Promoting equal distribution of resources, and ensuring inclusion and participation in decision-making processes, as well as respect for human rights, should be at the forefront of development strategies.

In addition, development is not only a matter of interaction between individuals. It also involves the interaction between humans and nature insofar as it involves the exploitation of natural resources for the benefit of humans. Development cannot be understood without taking into account its consequences on the environment. Both dimensions are interconnected: the natural environment lies behind and beyond development.

Historical background of sustainable development

The term sustainable development in its modern acceptance dates from the 1970s. At that time, the concept's formulation came mostly from developed countries which started to express concerns about environmental implications of worldwide development. During the UN Stockholm Meeting in 1972, "the idea of sustainable development was born out of an effort to find an understanding between the development requirements of the countries in the Southern Hemisphere and the conservation demands of the developed states in the North".¹ In 1987, the UN released the Brundtland report that gave a definition of sustainable development that is now one of the most widely recognised, i.e. "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The report also stressed two significant elements contained in the concept: the "needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor" and "limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability".

Paradigm shift

The complexity inherent to the notion of development is necessarily reflected in the more elaborate notion of sustainable development. Sustainable development has three dimensions: namely economic, social and environmental². The social or human dimension means that it should be socially just and equitable for all peoples irrespective of the level of development of their country. The environmental dimension implies that it should be environmentally viable as well as respectful of the environment. To make sure the three dimensions are achieved, we should de-emphasise economic growth as a key condition of

development and demystify the misconception of measuring development just as increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Particularly worrying are policies and projects that are implemented in the name of sustainable development but that actually breach human rights, intensify inequalities, and exacerbate poverty. Therefore, instead of economic development, we should place strong emphasis on the human determinants of development and fully integrate factors related to peace, good governance, human rights, equality, protection and empowerment of the vulnerable and marginalised, and access to justice for those negatively affected. We should go beyond focusing strictly on economic development and look for a common understanding of sustainable development, for developed and developing countries, based on shared social, economic and environmental perspectives. Such a common vision should uphold all human rights for every individual.

What is the “The Future We Want”? Understanding the outcome of Rio +20 Conference

Twenty years after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the UN once again brought together governments, international institutions, the private sector, NGOs, scientists, local authorities and representatives of specific groups including children, women, workers, and farmers. According to the organisers, the Rio +20 Conference on Sustainable Development aimed “to define pathways to a safer, more equitable, cleaner, greener and more prosperous world for all”² and “to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development”³. The two themes of the Conference were 1) green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and 2) the institutional framework for sustainable development. After several months of negotiations the debate culminated in the Conference from 20 to 22 June 2012 in Rio. The Conference as well as the Rio +20 People’s Summit for Social and Environmental Justice enabled many stakeholders from various backgrounds at different levels to meet and share experiences. Bringing together 50,000 people representing

governments, civil society, media, academia, and enterprises, Rio +20 was the largest UN conference ever.

The Conference resulted in the adoption of an Outcome Document - a non-binding political agreement - entitled "The Future We Want". Civil society largely evaluates it as an unassertive text without concrete commitment, a simple statement of principles and good intentions.

However, one can mention at least two significant areas of progress brought by Rio +20 into the global agenda on sustainable development. Firstly, the Conference began a process that should lead to the adoption of new Sustainable Development Goals. These Goals are expected to be designed and adopted as part of the "post-2015 Agenda" (replacing the Millennium Development Goals whose target date is 2015).⁴ The conference did not elaborate on specific goals but stated that they should be action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable.⁵ Secondly, in response to technical experts and civil society at large who asserted that the GDP does not give an adequate picture of a country's development, the outcome document acknowledges the need for new indicators and invites the UN Statistical Commission to launch a working group on that topic.⁶

However, the disappointment of a large part of civil society culminates in the fact that the outcome document not only fails to question current consumption and production patterns but also promotes an economy based on the commodification of natural resources and ecological services. For many, the perspective reflected in the outcome document is largely favourable to the business sector and developed countries, without truly considering the needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable.

To develop, not to develop or... How to develop? A thought-provoking presentation of selected issues

Sustainable development goals should be applicable to all countries: environmentally sustainable irrespective of the degree of

environmental protection in the given country, and socially just even in countries with poor social justice systems. We should promote changes in the global system that will yield truly transformative change and promote alternatives to current production and consumption patterns. Developed countries must evaluate whether their own business agendas are really sustainable and identify challenges and best practices in order to reorient business behaviour – within and outside its own territories – in the light of a more human, ethical and integrative paradigm.

In explaining sustainable development-related issues below, our approach is based on the human rights and environment perspective. FI intends to voice the concerns of vulnerable local populations towards a radical change of the current production and consumption patterns. Just as summarised in the process of the Rio+20 Peoples' Summit, the goal is to identify and promote alternative models that are: "based on the multiple realities and experiences of the people, genuinely democratic, respecting human rights and collective rights, in harmony with nature and with social and environmental justice".⁷

Sustainable Development: Real change or business as usual?



“Poverty is slavery” (African proverb). Extreme poverty has been defined as “the combination of income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusion” in the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights. Persons living in extreme poverty experience regular denials of their dignity and their human rights. Indeed, poverty is not only an economic issue but rather a multifaceted phenomenon that affects the basic capabilities to live in dignity. It represents both the cause and the consequence of interconnected human rights violations. For this reason, it should be addressed from a holistic perspective that looks into its root causes. In addition, in order to effectively reduce poverty we also need to take into account human, social and environmental development in order to achieve a multifaceted response based, first and foremost, on human rights.

Stock-taking

Thanks to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) the international community has been more decisive in addressing poverty as a key element of development. Estimates also claim that globally, the MDG target on the eradication of extreme poverty has been met through a decrease in the proportion of the world population living below the poverty line (1.25 USD per day) from 47% in 1990 to less than half of this figure in 2010. Now we must ask ourselves: is this 1.25 USD per day an adequate indicator for gauging poverty reduction? The

multifaceted nature of poverty suggests that we need to move beyond pure figures. We should demystify thresholds and indexes and look more into the human face of poverty. Many actors agreed that one of the weaknesses of the MDGs, for example, was to have overlooked the issues of inequality and marginalisation.

Extreme poverty can be avoided and the means are within reach. Today we know that extreme poverty is, at least in part, created, exacerbated, and enabled by the acts and omissions of States and other economic actors. We are also aware that mere economic growth is not sufficient for the eradication of poverty, but that it can be addressed with the commitment of States to put in place relevant legislation and effective policies based on human rights. This would enable the empowerment and participation of people living in poverty.

So why, despite the MDGs, the human rights commitments of the governments, business sector involvement in development projects, and poverty eradication strategies, do a disproportionately large number of people continue to live in extremely poor conditions? Something must have gone wrong.

We should consider the multiple dimensions of poverty to help frame better poverty reduction strategies that take a holistic approach to the issue.

Human Rights Perspective: inclusion, empowerment and participation for real change

Poverty is not only a question of lack of income, but also includes dimensions such as exclusion, marginalisation and inequality in accessing services and opportunities. Human rights law and standards can provide concrete guidance on how development policies should be framed stemming from the existing human rights commitments of governments, made in numerous international treaties. A human rights-based approach provides a framework for a long-term solution to extreme poverty. This approach is based on the recognition of persons living in extreme poverty as rights-holders and active agents of

their own change. The other side of the coin is that States are therefore duty-bearers, responsible for their acts and failures. Under international human rights legislation signed by States, it is the legal responsibility of all States to provide the basic conditions for the realisation of human rights for all, including the eradication of extreme poverty. States should ensure that poverty reduction strategies are based on human rights and on the principles of dignity, non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, and should empower individuals to become the principle actors for the change that they wish to achieve. The lack of power to alter one's own situation has been considered one of the main characteristics of poverty that encompasses the "inability to participate in or influence decisions that profoundly affect one's life. To be in line with human rights obligations, participation should challenge existing power relations [and] enable free, informed and meaningful input, with real influence over the final decision or outcome."⁸ Policies based on participation, inclusion and empowerment, and projects conceived and implemented to meaningfully enable those living in poverty to become the actors of their own change, can make a real difference in reducing poverty and creating opportunities.

The business sector through a human lens

With regard to possible contributions to sustainable development and poverty eradication, it is essential to recognize that potential economic benefits from development projects carried out by the business sector do not automatically translate into sustainable development for communities. On the contrary, these communities directly bear negative costs of these projects in terms of human-rights and the environment.

Poor development strategies have frequently been counterproductive in terms of eradication of poverty and have led to further deprivation, marginalisation and exclusion. This is due to many factors, *in primis*, to the lack of participatory approach, inclusion, and genuine integration of stakeholders in all stages of the development strategy. This has necessarily led to inequality, marginalisation and exclusion. Research

has shown that those States that designed effective laws and policies that include participatory processes and strategies to empower people living in poverty are greatly benefited by contributions from all strata of societies.

Non-state actors such as business enterprises have responsibilities vis-à-vis the rights of those living in poverty. Business and transnational enterprises must genuinely assess the impact of their operations on both human and environmental levels. In this respect, States are responsible for promoting an environment that ensures that the business sector fulfils the conditions required to respect the human rights of the most vulnerable, including the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, women, and persons with disabilities. States should also ensure accountability measures for human rights violations carried out by business enterprises, as well as redress for victims through effective access to justice.

The international community should rethink economic growth in the light of a new model that encompasses all different dimensions of poverty, including the human and environmental one, to recognise inequality as one of the core components of poverty. This also means that we should identify key elements of inequality, not only based on income, but also on participation, decision-making, and power, as well as the enjoyment of social protection services, education and health coverage.

Within their strategy to reduce poverty, States must remove barriers that prevent individuals from claiming their rights, including the right to oppose development projects and to participate at all stages of the life-cycle of these projects, from the design up to the implementation. States should also protect activists that oppose projects and policies that adversely affect the livelihoods of local populations.

The duty of States to respect, protect and fulfil the right to participation constitutes a positive obligation that States must effectively implement in their national policies. Participatory processes

should place special emphasis on the most vulnerable groups including women, children, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples. Participation is particularly important in ensuring that the voices of the poorest and most marginalised people can be heard and to empower individuals to seize opportunities. This ultimately implies real political will, good governance and strong national commitment.

The **UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights** suggested, regarding current negotiations on sustainable development under the post-2015 agenda, that: "The coming discussions must go beyond rhetorical references to human rights and incorporate human rights and accountability more meaningfully in the vision and content of the post-2015 agenda. It must underline the duty of States to guarantee at least minimum essential floors of rights enjoyment and to use the maximum of their available resources to realize rights progressively for all [...] The final post-2015 agenda should include a detailed vision for accountability processes. It must also outline a stronger approach to corporate accountability, emphasizing States' duty to regulate business and protect against potentially harmful human rights impacts, particularly of extractive industries."

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Statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights at the 23rd session of the Human Rights Council;

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These resources can all be accessed through the website www.ohchr.org

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“Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication” was one of the two themes of the Rio +20 Conference.⁹ On paper, by seeking to “improv[e] human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities”¹⁰, green economy appears to offer a positive pattern. So why is it so far from gaining unanimous support? What comes out in the green wash? And who actually receives the benefits promised by green economy?

The issue of the definition

Green economy is a concept that focuses on the intersection between economy and environment. There is however no consensus among stakeholders regarding the meaning - even less the definition - of green economy. The term is ambiguous and has diverse connotations according to the different approaches and agendas of stakeholders. This definition gap makes international negotiations on the issue challenging¹¹ and often unsatisfactory for many, including civil society representing local communities.

Front side of green economy

The concept of green economy as it is promoted by the UN (piloted by its Environment Program - UNEP, and supported by governments of the world's biggest economies, and multinationals) purports to respond to recent prolonged global energy, food and financial crises and warnings from scientists about the limits of our planet's capacities. Its primary – and clearly stated – objective is to contribute to “sustained economic growth”²². For its promoters, green economy offers a more rational management of natural resources, lower carbon emissions, and a reduction of waste production²³, and constitutes a solution to revitalise economic growth and create opportunities for employment.

The term **green economy** was first coined in a report by a group of environmental economists entitled “Blueprint for a Green Economy” commissioned by the United Kingdom in 1989. Apart from in the title, the term green economy did not appear in the text of the report. It is only from 2007 that the term green economy was referred to more often, in the context of discussions on the response to multiple global crises. In that context, the UN Environment Program (UNEP) launched its Green Economy Initiative to provide policy support for investments in so-called green sectors and for “greening” environmentally unfriendly sectors.

Flip side of green economy

In lieu of this so-called rational management of natural resources and polluting sectors, green economy actually consists in the commodification and privatisation of nature. When green economy refers to the environment it is mostly with the pragmatic view to exploit it and acquire wealth from all its components (water, forests, soil and subsoil, etc). The whole of nature is reduced to a marketable asset. Unique ecosystems, species, etc. lose their value per se to become tradable commodities.

Of particular concern is the fact that unequal power relations (for instance between the richest and poorest countries, between multinational companies and local communities, etc.) are largely

reflected in current green economy policies. Consequently, money-centred green economy is in total contradiction with the life-centred view of many local communities, including indigenous peoples. Furthermore, low-income groups are more affected by environmental risks and damages as well as economic and social inequalities, including concentration of power in the appropriation of natural resources. 'Greening' the economy is not enough and green economy in its present form will not stop wealth concentration and social inequality. Not only the current capitalism-driven production and consumption system that exploits nature and people should be called into question but the remedy to crises cannot be anything else but a fundamental and structural change of economic model. A new paradigm based on solidarity should be found.

While the UN, governments, companies and mass media are devoting considerable efforts to show green economy as the solution to all crises, much social and ecological **nonsense results** from green economy's logic:

- "Replacing" a native forest destroyed in one place by replanting trees elsewhere;
- Producing more and more agrofuel for cars – mostly cars in developed countries – at the expense of local farmers who can no longer feed their community;
- Promoting monoculture tree plantations;
- Small-scale peasants cannot produce their own seeds and have to buy new ones every year from agro-chemical industry;
- Trade in CO₂ pollution credits;
- Considering forests as carbon sinks instead of food baskets.

In the same vein, many companies use the concept of green economy to compensate activities that are actually detrimental to environment or people by projects allegedly in favour of the environment or local populations.

Finding alternatives

We should unite our efforts and promote a change of paradigm that is people-centred. In this context, the principle of environmental justice helps us move forward, as it links the concepts of ecology and social justice and promotes the dignity of both humankind and nature. In

parallel, States should encourage, promote and support economic solidarity initiatives such as the Fair Trade movement, the Grameen banks for microcredit, and organic farming. States are also accountable for guaranteeing the rights of future generations and promoting changes to the governance system. We are all part of the struggle for environmental justice, which is essential to the eradication of poverty and promoting the common good of humanity and nature.

In an attempt of reconciliation, some propose to include a series of measures that will give the poor and the excluded access to greater opportunities in society. At the forefront of this proposal, the Brazilian government promotes an **“inclusive” green economy**. However, “attempts to “include” the poor without changing [...] structures like the economic and financial systems, the model of development, and cultural paradigms, will not bring about the desired results. Such a green economy, at most, will offer compensatory policies”.

Source: *Rodrigo de Castro Amédée Péret, Green Economy: What is the value of nature?*

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www.cupuladospovos.org.br



A global warning!

“Climate change” denotes the phenomenon of a persistent change in climate generally as a direct or indirect consequence of human activities, particularly those aimed at supporting economic growth and development. This definition shows the dual relationship between development and climate change: poor development policies bear the original blame for greenhouse gas emissions, a root cause of climate change, the effects of which, in turn, negatively impact social and economic development.

Definitions of climate change

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), climate change “refers to a change in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g. using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. It refers to any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity.” The definition by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) differs in identifying the source of climate change as it refers to the phenomenon as “a change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and that is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.”

Source: *IPCC website*

To address both components of this dual relation, we need to comprehensively change our approach to economic growth to one built on the notion of environmentally and socially sustainable development, respectful of the natural environment and of humans.

Brief overview of challenges caused by climate change

Over the past few decades, scientists have obtained solid evidence that the earth’s climate is warming and that this is largely due to human activity (for instance industrial emissions). Such change is expected to produce various damaging effects in the years ahead. Some of these effects have already begun to make their mark. Beyond the environmental consequences, including extreme weather events, rising sea levels, more frequent droughts and floods, and increasing water shortages, the lives of millions of people around the world are endangered. Developing countries are likely to be the most seriously affected. Climate change has a negative impact on a country’s social and economic foundation: increasing droughts and floods affect food security, spread diseases, and de-structure human habitat, ultimately leading to the breakdown of family and social strata.

Effects of climate change	Examples of rights affected
Extreme weather events	Right to life
Increased food insecurity and risk of hunger	Right to adequate food and right to be free from hunger
Increased water stress	Right to safe drinking water
Stress on health status	Right to highest standard of health
Sea-level rise and flooding	Right to adequate housing

In addition, climate change has consequences on the enjoyment of human rights by all, from the rights to food, water, health and housing, up to the individual’s right to life. Threats caused by climate change are affecting or will affect deeply vulnerable peoples, in particular those with a strong and direct link to nature, such as indigenous peoples and populations living on small islands. Those living in poverty, especially women and children, will also be severely affected. These victims will form a new category of environmental refugees.

At present, under international human rights law, it remains a challenge to consider the physical impacts of climate change as human rights violations, legally speaking. It is not so much because connection cannot be proven scientifically but rather due to the difficulties of attributing climate change-related harm to specific States' behaviour.

Climate change in the current international community agenda

The debate on climate change during the Rio+20 Conference unsurprisingly focused on scientific, environmental and economic business as usual. Negative impacts of climate change on the living conditions of peoples were hardly mentioned in the outcome document "The Future We Want". Much further attention should be given to the human and social dimensions of climate change, in particular to human rights. This is of utmost importance because the impact of climate change is distributed unfairly, in particular the poorest are often the most affected. Moreover, climate change seems to have little space in the current post-2015 agenda where sustainable development goals are being defined. They should include climate policies that positively influence the ability of countries to achieve sustainable development goals. In turn, the pursuit of those goals could serve climate-related policies.

Moreover, human rights concerns are barely addressed by climate-related mechanisms and conventions. Current post-2015 negotiations should reverse that trend. In this regard, existing human rights standards should inform and strengthen measures in the area of climate change.

Common but Differentiated Responsibilities?

The rule of 'Common but Differentiated Responsibility' (CBDR) came out of the Declaration following the first Rio Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted the same year¹⁴. CBDR is a manifestation of the international legal principle of equity. According to CBDR, all States have the common responsibility to protect the environment at national, regional and global levels. At the same time, it recognises different circumstances where each State's contribution to both the problem and the solutions should be taken into account. Indeed, not only historical differences in contributions of developed

and developing States to global climate change, but also differences in their respective economic and technical capacity to tackle these problems and contribute to solutions are recognised. For example, industrialised countries should be taking on more responsibility in their commitment to reduce gas emissions. As a matter of consequence, responsibilities of States are stated equitably, in accordance with their respective responsibility and capacities.

With regard to the impact of climate change on human rights, the UN speaks of “unequal burden of the effects of climate change”⁴⁵ because those whose rights are more affected by climate change are those who have not or hardly contributed to it. This is particularly accurate for children, women and indigenous peoples.

Climate change and greenhouse gas emissions

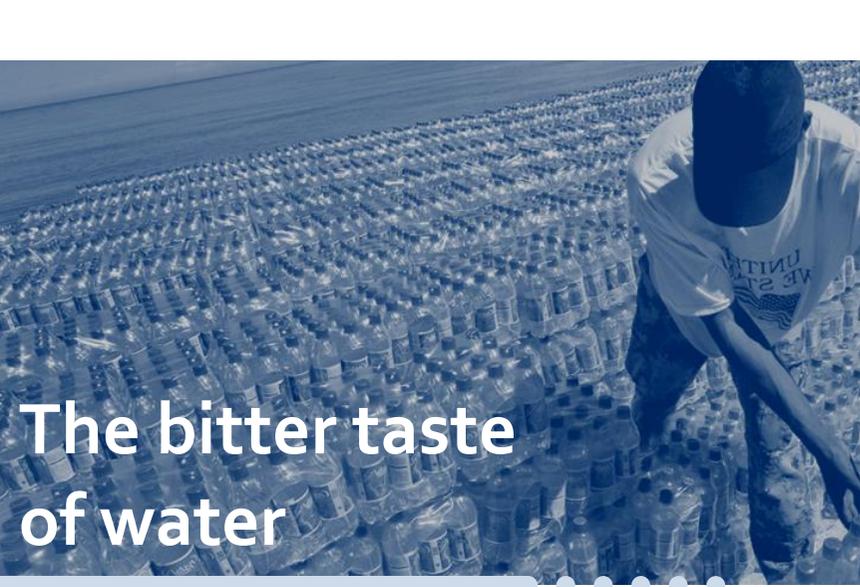
Climate change is largely attributed to emissions of Greenhouse Gas (GHG). Consequently, so-called “post-Kyoto” negotiations are discussing mechanisms for reducing GHG concentrations. However, some of those mechanisms may negatively impact the rights of vulnerable groups. For example, competition for land between food products and biofuels is creating pressure on food prices and availability that impacts the right to food of many local communities in developing countries as well as on land availability, to the detriment of indigenous peoples. Without careful consideration of adverse effects of response measures, in particular how they might affect the rights and livelihood of vulnerable populations, those measures could jeopardise the enjoyment of human rights.

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The bitter taste of water



Access
to Water

On 28 July 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted an historic resolution recognising the human right to safe and clean water and sanitation. Above all, this raises the question of resource-management: the main intention is to challenge governments to do their part to respect, protect, fulfil and promote the right of all people to water and sanitation. Water should be considered as a common good, not a commodity. The UN urged governments to ensure that each person has at least 20 litres of clean water per day. However, figures show that worldwide, 2 million children die every year because of water-borne diseases (diseases related to unsafe water or lack of water), 800 million people lack clean water, and 2.6 billion people have no access to basic sanitation.

Finding sustainable solutions to ensure the provision of water and sanitation in poor rural and urban communities will also help reduce poverty and give hope for a better life. The lack of safe water affects daily livelihoods and this, in turn, has a negative impact on household income.

More concretely, the lack of safe water and basic sanitation leads to sickness, prevents children from attending school, and keeps parents from going to work. Conversely, improving access to water and sanitation represents a first step to ensure security of livelihoods,

education, and better health. In addition, improving access to water also implies that time spent in obtaining water can be used more productively, such as in activities aimed at ensuring new opportunities and livelihoods for the family. Furthermore, access to water improves food harvests and increases agricultural household income.

Mismanagement and misconception: Water as a common good not as a commodity

One major misconception about water supply is that it is principally a question of resources and of infrastructures. We should expose this misconception and acknowledge that lack of access to water is primarily due to mismanagement, and more broadly poor governance. In other words, it is mainly due to a lack of transparency and community participation in decision-making, and a lack of accountability for decision makers. Of course, greater demand and growing scarcity have prompted an increase in value, and these have in turn led to attempts to privatise supply. In many cases it is this privatisation that has led to rising prices and deterioration of water quality.

Water must be considered as a “public good”, based on the fact that water is essential for life and individuals cannot abstain from its consumption.¹⁶ Therefore, the principle provider of water should be the public sector.

Safe water for a safer development

The Rio +20 Outcome Document “The Future We Want” states that “water is at the core of sustainable development” and its three dimensions, social, economical and environmental. Water is the lifeblood of the planet and of critical importance for all socio-economic development.

The main challenges in addressing the issues of water, sanitation and hygiene in the post 2015 agenda are questions of inequality. UN Member States have recognised the critical importance of this issue and are committed to the progressive realisation of access to safe and

affordable drinking water and basic sanitation for all, as essential to the wider goals of poverty eradication, women's empowerment and the protection of human health.

Water and Sanitation – A Practical Guide by Franciscans International

Given growing levels of pollution and the related need for purification, only in rare circumstances is access to safe drinking water free of charge. Whether financed by indirect taxation or directly by the water point user, the maintenance of the infrastructure has a cost. In some urban areas, slum dwellers living in areas not covered by piped-water infrastructure, are forced to buy water in buckets from private water sellers. This 'private water' is sold to the poor at a cost that is up to 10 times the normal price paid for piped municipal water. So, paying too much for water can prevent poor households from purchasing medications, providing education or other fundamental needs for children. In other words, ensuring adequate access to financially affordable water will help alleviate extreme poverty.

The challenge that now faces us is the implementation of these commitments. In designing policy and programmes to promote universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene, States take on the obligation to ensure the progressive realisation of this right. To do so, they must engage with the matter of inequality: setting up structures to identify the varieties and manifestations of discrimination regarding the right to water will address the root causes of this issue.

Discrimination and inequalities in access to water are manifold and attributable to a wide range of factors. Inequalities exist between countries; urban and rural areas; slums and formal urban settlements; men and women; and disadvantaged groups and the general population.

In addition, the full realisation of access to water depends also on other areas of economic development, since many of these require high water consumption, such as agribusiness and the extractive sectors. Many projects carried out in the name of development and economic growth, result unfortunately in rises in water scarcity and inequality in access to water. For this reason, the commitments made by

governments can be realised, at least in part, by significant improvements in monitoring and accountability on the implementation of water resource management at all levels.

In particular Governments should:

- Respect access to water by ensuring that no government activities jeopardise access to water. This is particularly important in times of armed conflict;
- Protect their citizens' access to water and sanitation, by protecting access to water from abuse and overuse by other actors (such as agribusiness or mining companies);
- Fulfil the right to water, by contributing to improving access to water and sanitation for everyone, and ensuring the right to participate in decisions that affect the right to water of local communities.
- Government should also ensure that available financial resources are effectively spent, that resources are spent in a transparent manner; and that adequate and efficient remedies against mismanagement are instituted.

Reconfirming previous commitments made in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Declaration, as well as the human right to safe drinking-water and sanitation, **Member States committed at Rio+20** to:

- Significantly improve the implementation of integrated water resources management at all levels as appropriate;
- Protect and sustainably manage ecosystems, as they play a key role in maintaining water quantity and quality;
- Address water-related disasters, such as floods and droughts, as well as water scarcity;
- Significantly reduce water pollution, increase water quality and significantly improve wastewater treatment;
- Improve water efficiency and reduce water losses.

References and further readings

TST Issues Brief: Water and sanitation. Available at <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1801tstissuewater.pdf>

Franciscans International and WaterLex: *The Right to Water and Sanitation: a Practical Guide*, available at http://www.franciscansinternational.org/fileadmin/docs/Water_manual/FI_WL_The_Right_to_Water_and_Sanitation_-_a_practical_guide.pdf

Website of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/SRWaterIndex.aspx>

Sustainable development solutions network, *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development*, available at <http://unsdsn.org/files/2013/06/130613-SDSN-An-Action-Agenda-for-Sustainable-Development-FINAL.pdf>



Hunger & Outrage

As it refers to the availability of and access to food, food security is essential to human survival and development. It is also an important aspect of sustainable development. In that context, we should find a means of achieving food security without being detrimental to either the environment or producers, especially small-scale farmers, and without having to forego nutrition. What would a sustainable solution to hunger look like? What should the role of the agricultural sector be?

Angry small-holders and hungry nothing-holders

It is a paradox that “most of the world’s hungry still live in rural areas, where most food is produced. Hunger affects peasants more than other groups”.¹⁷ Besides smallholder farmers, there are also landless and waged agricultural workers who work under precarious conditions for limited income. Incomes for agricultural households and decent rural employment opportunities should be increased.

A significant challenge for peasants is to be found in their increasing dependency vis-à-vis chemical products distributed by companies. Globalisation and market integration result in the ever-increasing pressure on farmers to buy seeds from commercial seed producers instead of using seeds from previous harvests. Besides dependency, this vicious evolution is leading to more costs for peasants and to loss of biodiversity.

The agricultural sector is also under pressure from population growth. Global demand for food, including more resource-intensive food (e.g. animal protein), as well as non-food agricultural products (e.g. biofuels) is increasing and represent a greater part of this demand. Over the last decade, agrofuel production was massively expanded. This has direct negative consequence on food availability, especially for local populations, since agrofuel production diverts land and food crops for non-food use. Less-polluting cars are considered as positive for the environment, but what about 'collateral damage'?

Smallholder peasants, especially in developing countries, are also exposed to land grabbing. A process "whereby powerful foreign private and public investors conclude agreements with states to take possession or control of large surfaces of land".¹⁸ This phenomenon is a direct cause of insufficiencies in adequate and secure access to land for peasants, aggravates unequal distribution of land property, and has a negative influence on food sovereignty in host countries.

The Human Right to Food: international legal provisions and obligations

Access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food for all is a human right and not 'a gift of charity'. The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 first recognized the right to food as part of an adequate standard of living (article 25). Further, article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 provides that States who have ratified this Covenant have the obligation to realize the "fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger" through the adoption of measures either "individually and through international co-operation". Consequently, states have the legal obligation to ensure access to food for their population, including the most vulnerable. It also means that states are accountable for violations of the right to food.

Food security + Biodiversity = Agroecology

Poverty and access to quality food are closely linked. Food security policies should not only ensure the physical availability of food but also ensure that young children in particular have access to adequate nutrition. In the last fifty years, global food production has increased

significantly, alongside population growth. High-yield crop varieties and the application of modern agricultural techniques have been used in response to the ever-growing rate of food consumption. This situation has been accompanied by the development and use of high-yielding varieties of cereal grains, expanded irrigation infrastructures, modern management techniques, hybridized seeds, genetically modified organisms (GMO), synthetic fertilizers, and pesticides. However, such methods are drivers of environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity. For instance, hybridization has resulted in significant decreases in populations of several indigenous species (sometimes called genetic pollution or erosion). At the same time, chemical pesticides and intensive farming impoverish soils, pollute water sources, and deeply affect local wildlife.

From food scarcity towards food sovereignty

There is a need for a universal agenda, but also for country and context-specific strategies. People-centred approaches are of the utmost importance and should be underpinned by principles of human rights, participation and empowerment, national ownership, and accountability. Not all solutions proposed to solve hunger are sustainable. To truly be environmentally viable and socially equitable, sustainable solutions need to take into account the 500 million smallholder farmers, and organizations representing their interests.

Specific support to peasants should target smallholder farmers and landless agricultural workers. This necessarily includes intensification of eco-farming or an agro-ecological model based on advances made by the most recent technologies and on recognising and following local and indigenous knowledge, skills, and practices, especially when in matters concerning the conservation of natural resources, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems (including banning GMOs), climate resilient agriculture, regeneration of soil, as well as yield raising. At the same time, support to peasants should include capacity building, secure access to land, and financial support (including low-cost credit) to facilitate transition towards sustainable practices.

States should also promote the concept of 'food sovereignty'. Where there is 'food sovereignty', small-scale farmers have the right to define their own food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries systems, in contrast to having food largely subject to international market forces. As a response to fluctuating world food prices, developing countries can build national food reserves as a way to contribute to reduction of poverty and hunger.

Any sustainable solution for food security should also pay primary and specific attention to population groups that do not have proper access to adequate food. In this regard, policies should focus on the nutrition of children during the first 1000 days of a child's life, when under-nutrition is most likely to have long-lasting negative consequences. Rural communities should also benefit from specific programmes. The empowerment of families, especially women, who are the main child care providers and are responsible for the food preparation and infant and young child feeding, is also critical. Regarding women, it is proven that progress in women's empowerment and gender equality is strongly correlated with improved nutrition. There are multiple facets and causal linkages, so it is essential to invest in different contexts such as women's education, health, equal access and rights to resources, services and social protection together with effective anti-discrimination measures.

In parallel, final consumers should also be made aware of the different issues at stake with a view to making an informed choice when buying food. By choosing products from small-scale and/or local farming, privileging environment-friendly production that uses less soil, water, energy, fertilizer, GMOs and chemicals, and reducing food waste, we can contribute to a future in which peasants and their families no longer have to be hungry and outraged.

References and further readings

TST Issues Brief: Food Security and Nutrition

<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1804tstissuesfood.pdf>

TST Issues Brief: Sustainable Agriculture

<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1802tstissuesagriculture.pdf>

Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN) www.fian.org



Subsoil above soil

Until the final moments of the Rio+20 process, the extractive industry was not even included as a topic in the negotiating document. In the end, the governments at Rio+20 agreed to include two paragraphs on mining in the Outcome Document. The opening sentences of the section on mining assert that “minerals and metals make a major contribution to the world economy and modern societies” and “mining industries are important to all countries with mineral resources, in particularly developing countries”. Both paragraphs focus primarily on the wealth-creation potential of the sector. Unfortunately, the many dimensions of the critical debate regarding mining were downplayed or ignored completely, including the need for good governance and effective regulation, transparency and access to information, the systematic negative human and environmental impacts, the phenomenon of the “resource curse” and exacerbated social inequality, as well as the inherent unsustainability of the sector.

Unsustainability of extraction

A useful and commonly adopted definition for extractive industries is “those which remove a natural resource from its natural surroundings for industrial purposes without provision for their renewal in a socially, economically or environmentally viable timeframe.” This definition includes the extraction of non-renewables such as minerals, oil and natural gas and also extends to industries that exploit biological

resources and water under these conditions. For its non-renewable nature, the extractive sector must be held up to heightened scrutiny in the context of sustainable development. Governments have the responsibility to ensure that these finite economic activities make measurable contributions to the objectives of sustainable development and only move forward in contexts and conditions that do not undermine the rights of present or future generations.

Extraction “boom”

By all accounts the world is on the verge of a natural-resource extraction “boom.” For many countries and also at the international level, increasing the extraction and export of finite natural resources is promoted as a way for countries to raise GDP and generate the revenue necessary to fund development initiatives. In the wake of the global financial crisis these considerations have gained even more weight than previous decades. Natural resources found in a given territory are understood to be subject to the sovereignty of that government to manage according to their national priorities.

To begin to understand the manifold problems arising around the mining sectors in practice we must examine them from three inter-related perspectives: human rights, the environment, and development.

Who bears the costs? Human and environmental implications of extractive industry

We can evaluate the application of international human-rights obligations in two different but connected approaches, which we will call “impact” and “process.”

By impact, we refer to the consequences on peoples’ full enjoyment of their human rights by any stage of the extractive activity – exploration, extraction, waste disposal, transportation, site restoration etc. The violations that have been widely documented in this category include infringements on the right to life and physical integrity, health, water,

food, housing, livelihood, cultural life, and non-discrimination. States and companies have legal and ethical responsibilities to ensure that these activities are only carried out if it is possible to do so without infringing on the rights of individuals and communities. Where violations occur, governments and companies have the obligations to ensure effective reparation to the victims.

Impact violations also occur in a systematic way parallel to natural-resource extraction in several contexts. There may be armed conflict over those resources and land access. As projects are installed, there can be practices of forced labour in the operations or black markets of sex-trade – with child victims in both. The disruption of the social fabric of communities that host mega-extraction projects is one of the most frequently cited negative impacts.

First, consideration of sustainable development policies must admit that there may be “no-go” zones, where there are valuable resources to be found but no environmentally or ecologically sound way to get them out. Second, if there are techniques that can be applied to extractive activity to reduce the environmental damage and to ensure full reparation of the site, there must be strong governance and regulation to ensure full compliance and remedial measures if activity is not carried out as projected.

The “process” lens looks at all human rights related to the ability of people to safely and effectively participate in all development and natural-resource management decisions. Problems we see in this category include a lack of access to information or to decision-making spaces. Information might be made confidential. Decisions can tend to be passed through administrative means or fast-track procedures that do not allow for public debate. Indigenous communities based around a collective identity have sovereign rights over resources found on shared lands and their “free, prior, and informed consent” must be obtained before any extraction. In addition to the specific rights of potentially affected communities, all concerned citizens, activists, and civil society organisations have the right to work to defend human-rights. Activists and community leaders that are carrying out human-rights activities related to mining activity are often especially

vulnerable to violence or intimidation because they tend to act in places that are geographically far-removed from capitals and international oversight.

Experience gathered through FI's work at the United Nations and with local and national partners throughout North and South America, Africa, and Asia-Pacific confirms the need to examine real-life examples from current practices in the sector to determine exactly what kind of development is being generated, for whom, for how long, and at what and whose expense.

A second lens we must adopt when evaluating the role of natural-resource extraction in sustainable development policies is whether any proposed economic benefit of a given strategy or project can be obtained without permanent or irreparable damage to the local or expanded environment. Water, for example, is the resource that is most intensely impacted by extractive activity in terms of both quantity and quality. A variety of extractive techniques put fresh water resources in the vicinity and beyond under serious stress – rivers may be diverted, lakes drained, underground freshwater pumped. Hazardous substances used in the process or contained in the waste produce may leak back into the system. With water systems, a critical and technical evaluation on short and long-term effects must be carried out to determine what ecological limits are. These environmental impacts must be assessed not simply for isolated projects, but also with regard to the cumulative impact of multiple extractive activities in different sectors such as mining, agriculture, energy, etc.

In addition to looking at the costs and who bears them, we must also examine through a critical lens what the benefits are and what development is served. Companies may invest in direct payments or investments in infrastructure, education, or health services in directly affected communities in order to secure a “social license” for their projects. The sustainability of these kinds of development benefits must be realistically assessed.

To consider possible tax-revenue benefits for a host country, we can inquire into factors such as the level of corruption, the quality of democratic governance, regulation for promoting transparency and accountability in reporting, and the relative strength of the State vis-à-vis multinational conglomerates.

References

Mining Working Group at the UN: <http://miningwg.wordpress.com>

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and waste, Calin Georgescu, UN Doc. A/HRC/21/48 (Sept. 7, 2012)



Environmental & Social Justice

By now, one thing should be clear: sustainable development cannot be reduced to a static, single definition. It is a term that may be employed by the President of Brazil, the CEO of Monsanto, or by an indigenous community leader, and in each case will mean something entirely different. The use, misuse, or abuse of this term is determined by the speaker's agenda, their interests, and the contexts in which and about which they are speaking. We hope that through this booklet, you are now better equipped to understand the concerns that lie behind sustainable development talk.

We have mentioned the three core dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. It is our firm belief that these dimensions should necessarily integrate **public participation**. This is the only way of ensuring that the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development become an actual priority for decision-makers. Adopting a true human rights-based approach to sustainable development will also mean the promotion of effective accountability measures for all development actors and meaningful access to justice for those affected by development projects. We should benefit from the existing protection mechanisms, such as national judiciary, parliamentary, and human rights institutions, as well as regional and international mechanisms, whose role should be better promoted and reinforced.

“We need to defend the interests of those whom we’ve never met and never will.”¹⁹ More than any other issue in the world today, sustainable development is a truly global concern. The planet earth is our shared environment, and the unsustainable consumption of one nation may have a devastating impact on its neighbour. To ensure a future where **environmental and social justice** is a reality, we must all take part in its creation. By advocating for an alternative approach to development we will shape a better world not just for ourselves and our neighbours, but for generations to come.

Endnotes

- ¹ To which can be added the fourth, underlying dimension of governance and security (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, A Framework for Sustainable Development: <http://unsdsn.org/files/2012/12/121220-Draft-Framework-of-Sustainable-Development.pdf>)
- ² Rio +20 website: www.uncsd2012.org/about.html
- ³ “The Future We Want”: The Outcome Document adopted at Rio +20, paragraph 104, available at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>
- ⁴ Op. cit., paragraphs 245 to 251.
- ⁵ Op. cit., paragraph 247.
- ⁶ Op. cit., paragraph 38.
- ⁷ International Coordination Group of the People’s Summit for social and environmental justice statement entitled “For Unity and Mobilization of peoples, For Life and Commons, social and environmental Justice Against Commodification of Nature and ‘Green economy’”, Rio de Janeiro, May 2012, available at <http://cupuladospovos.org.br/en/2012/05/what-is-at-stake-at-rio20/>
- ⁸ Statement by the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights at the 23rd session of the Human Rights Council: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13407&LangID=E>
- ⁹ “The Future We Want” details the UN approach to green economy from paragraphs 56 to 74.
- ¹⁰ UNEP, Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication, 2011, p. 16; available at http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/ger/ger_final_dec_2011/Green%20EconomyReport_Final_Dec2011.pdf
- ¹¹ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1224>
- ¹² “The Future we want”, paragraph 56.
- ¹³ “The Future we want”, paragraph 60.
- ¹⁴ See Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>. See also article 3(1) of the Framework Convention on Climate Change at http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf
- ¹⁵ Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the relationship between climate change and human rights, UN Doc A/HRC/10/61, 15 January 2009, paragraph 11.
- ¹⁶ Bannock, Graham, RE Baxter and Evan Davis, 1987, The Penguin Dictionary of Economics, Penguin Books, New York.
- ¹⁷ Quotation taken from <http://www.fian.org/who-we-are/our-vision/>
- ¹⁸ Quotation taken from <http://www.fian.org/what-we-do/issues/land-grabbing/>
- ¹⁹ Jeffrey Sachs, Director, Millennium Development Goals, 2002-2008.

About Franciscans International

Franciscans International (FI) is an international non-governmental organisation operating for the promotion, protection and respect of human and environmental rights. FI relies on a large network of Franciscans working with the most vulnerable strata of society in approximately 160 countries throughout the world. Franciscans bring human rights abuses to the attention of FI, which, in turn, raises these concerns at an international level. Advocacy and capacity building are used as tools to combat and curb human rights abuses on the long-term. FI has General Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council and a shared ministry of the global Franciscan Family.

FI's vision is of a global community in which the dignity of every person is respected, resources are shared equitably, the environment is sustained, and nations and peoples live in peace. FI is the Franciscan voice at the UN protecting the vulnerable, the forgotten, and the wounded earth.

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“A new model based on solidarity should be found.”

It is the conviction of Franciscans International that instead of economic growth, a strong emphasis should be placed on the human determinants of development. Our understanding of sustainable development should be one that promotes alternatives to current production and consumption patterns. This booklet is intended to help in understanding the concerns that lie behind sustainable development talk.

**“Start by doing what is necessary,
then what is possible, and suddenly
you are doing the impossible.”**

- St. Francis of Assisi