



IEAGHG Information Paper; 2012-IP6: Rio+20 Agreement

Background: 'Rio+20: The Future We Want' Conference, Rio de Janeiro, 20th-22nd June, 2012.

The main points determined in the recent Rio+20 Agreement are summarised in this IEAGHG IP.

The conference saw the heads of state and government officials from almost 100 countries meet at a UN Development Summit to make efforts to establish 'Sustainable Development Goals.'

The agreement proposes the development and implementation of a process that will in turn lead to broad agreement of Sustainable Development Goals, which will build on a set of objectives known as the Millennium Development Goals. These Millennium Development Goals are set to be pursued until at least 2015 by UN members.

It is proposed to phase out fossil fuel subsidies by 2020 which would reduce annual global energy demand by 5% and carbon dioxide emissions by nearly 6% (according to IEA data). In 2009, G20 leaders agreed to do this in principle but no timelines have currently been set. The Rio+20 text reaffirmed previous commitments by countries to "*phase out harmful and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption*" but it stopped short of firming up the voluntary commitment with definitive timetables and further details, news that disappointed some business and environmental groups.

The agreement called for the establishment of an entirely new intergovernmental process, the process is tasked to produce a report evaluating how much money would be required for sustainable development and whether there would be a requirement for new funding instruments as opposed to the utilisation of existing funding instruments. This process will be led by a group of 30 experts, with the task scheduled to be concluded by 2014. It should be noted that despite the call from several developing countries for the creation of a \$30 billion sustainable development fund, this element of the proposal did not make it into the final text. The final agreement also urged more wealthy countries to make "concrete efforts" toward delivering a previously agreed target of 0.7% of GDP of aid to developing countries by 2015.

Another outcome of the summit concerned the proposed strengthening of UNEP (currently UNEP operates as an international institution that coordinates U.N. environmental activities) to a U.N. agency with power equal to other U.N. bodies such as the World Health Organization. The agreement proposed that a U.N. general meeting scheduled in September should be asked to adopt a resolution to strengthen and upgrade UNEP. It should be noted here that some countries, such as the United States, are opposed to strengthening UNEP's role.

A major theme of the conference was the concept of the development of a Green Economy or improving human well-being and social equity while reducing environmental risks, which could act as a common roadmap for countries working towards sustainable development.

The agreement affirmed that each country could have its own path toward achieving a Green Economy. The text stated that it could provide options for policy making but should not be a 'rigid set of rules' that must be adhered to.



Climate Change

The conference acknowledged the threat of climate, change, asserting that those present would work to combat the threat posed by changing global climates. Climate change was specifically addressed in points 190-192 of the summary outcomes document (The Future We Want). It recognises climate change as one of the greatest challenges facing the planet today, and noted alarm that emissions of greenhouse gasses are still rising on the global scale. *“We note with grave concern the significant gap between the aggregate effect of mitigation pledges by parties in terms of global annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 and aggregate emission pathways consistent with having a likely chance of holding the increase in global average temperature below 2° C, or 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels.”*

Concerns were also expressed about the vulnerability of developing nations to the adverse weather patterns and extreme weather events that could be an outcome of climate change, especially as these regions are those that are already struggling with security of food supply and the achievement of sustainable development. This was therefore noted as an *‘immediate and urgent global priority.’*

Cooperation by all countries was therefore called for on the widest possible scale, encompassing all measures that could impact on climate change and reduce levels of greenhouse gas emissions. The document highlights the UNFCCC wording that stipulates that *“...parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.”*

On climate change, it concludes *“We urge parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and parties to the Kyoto Protocol to fully implement their commitments, as well as decisions adopted under those agreements. In this regard, we will build upon the progress achieved, including... in Durban, South Africa... 2011”.*

Voluntary Commitments

The Rio+20 Secretariat, in partnership with the UN Global Compact and the Sustainable Energy for All initiative, has received over 700 voluntary commitments as a result of the conference discussions, and these commitments have been made by all stakeholders, including governments, UN system and IGO's, the private sector, civil society and NGO's alike. When considered together, these commitments bring together over \$500 billion in actions moving towards sustainable development.

“We have designed and established a platform to build voluntary commitments to action. That platform will provide the visibility and transparency to efforts undertaken by the private sector, while enabling social control.”

Dilma Rousseff, President of Brazil and President of the Rio+20 Conference

“I am encouraged by the more than 700 concrete commitments registered at the Conference from governments, business, industry, financial institutions and civil society groups, amongst others.”

Ban Ki-Moon, United Nations Secretary General

“This Conference is about implementation. It is about concrete action. The voluntary commitments are a major part of the legacy of this Conference. They complement the official outcome of the Conference.”

Sha Zukang, Rio+20 Conference Secretary General



Among the 700+ registered commitments are:

- Planting 100 million trees by 2017;
- Greening 10,000 square km of desert;
- Saving 1 Megawatt-hour of electricity per day;
- Empowering 5,000 women entrepreneurs in green economy businesses in Africa;
- Establishing a Masters programme on sustainable development practice;
- Developing an Environmental Purchasing Policy and Waste Minimization & Management strategy;
- Recycling 800,000 tons per year of PVC by 2020.

A full list of all registered commitments, can be found by following this link:

www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/allcommitments.html

Gap in Commitments and Necessary Changes

The sections dealing with climate change goes on to note with concern the significant gaps between the pledges made, and the required reduction in aggregated emissions specified by 2020. The pledges received do not equate to a hold in the increase in global average temperatures to 1.5 - 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Funding is recognised as a major issue here, and while the launch of the Green Climate Fund was welcomed, without UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol parties fully implementing their commitments, combined with the pledges made here, the global temperature rise will not be capped at this level.

Toby Aiken & Tim Dixon, 2/7/12