

Briefing

Rio+20: Is this it?!

Initial analysis of “Final Draft Text”

by Friends of the Earth England, Wales and N Ireland

Introduction

The “final draft text” of the negotiating document “The Future We Want” has now been “adopted”. There is a remote possibility that some paragraphs might be tweaked in the high level segment of the Earth Summit (June 20-22nd) but this is unlikely.

It is also possible that a short (2 page) high level “Political Declaration” will be produced during the high level segment as happened at previous Earth Summits, but the Brazilian hosts have not yet given any indication that this is their plan.

In other words, it would appear that the main substance of the Earth Summit has now been settled – one day before it started.

Commenting on the Final Draft text of “The Future We Want”, Friends of the Earth's Director of Policy and Campaigns Craig Bennett said.

“This damp squib of a draft negotiating text makes it clear the Rio Earth Summit has lacked the firepower needed to solve the global emergency we’re facing. It lacks ambition or urgency, and offers little that is new – other than a commitment to start a new process on sustainable development goals.

“Developed countries have repeatedly failed to live safely within our planet’s limits – now they must wake up to the fact that until we fix our broken economic system we’re just papering over the ever-widening cracks.

“As we enter the high level segment, it is critical that politicians like Nick Clegg bring some sense of purpose and urgency to the summit by spelling out, in concrete terms, how they intend to implement its commitments. They could start with simple steps like ending tax

For more than 40 years we’ve seen that the wellbeing of people and planet go hand in hand – and it’s been the inspiration for our campaigns. Together with thousands of people like you we’ve secured safer food and water, defended wildlife and natural habitats, championed the move to clean energy and acted to keep our climate stable. Be a Friend of the Earth – see things differently.

breaks for dirty fossil fuels – and begin changing business-as-usual for a new model of economic development that has the wellbeing of people and planet at its heart."

This is a rapid initial analysis of the Final Draft Text “The Future We Want” produced by our policy experts and campaigners at the Rio+20 Earth Summit. It is not a fully comprehensive assessment of the complete document, and will be updated and revised over the coming days and weeks.

Overview

Humanity is facing a global crisis of economic meltdown, billions of people going hungry and dangerous pressure on our planet’s life support systems. It is not possible to solve any one of these problems in isolation – they are all interlinked.

The Rio+20 Earth Summit could and should be the meeting where the international community decides to address this triple crisis in an integrated way. But the Rio+20 Earth Summit is in trouble.

But it would appear that the summit may well be over before it has begun. The Brazilian hosts are asserting that the main negotiating text has now been adopted – one day before the official high level summit has even begun.

And yet this draft text is lacking in ambition, urgency or political will, and there is very little that is new. Most of it repeats promises made at previous Earth Summits, and in some cases omits key references because attempts by some countries to step back from previous commitments.

There are some small steps forward on some very specific issues, such as on “Principle 10” (access to information and participation in decision making) and a recommitment on phasing out fossil fuel subsidies. But these are faltering baby steps or recommitments, that have been agreed on a piecemeal basis. What is completely lacking is the vision or ambition that characterised the original Rio Summit in 1992, or anything that will challenge the systemic nature of the environment, development and economic crisis.

Some countries will no doubt argue that the commitment to start a process to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a bringing together of the environment and development agendas. And it is true to say that this text recognises that environment and development are intrinsically linked.

All that has been agreed in Rio is a commitment to start a negotiating process on SDGs. But given the fears that many had about weak or inappropriate SDGs being agreed in Rio, this is no bad thing. What is critical now is for an open and transparent process, including civil society, to negotiate a set of appropriate SDGs that make up for the vision and ambition that has been missing in Rio. They will need to set clear targets and timescales for transformational change, based on the Rio Principles, including new commitments on finance and technological transfer.

What the summit should have done is reviewed progress on the sustainable development agenda over the last 20 years, identified gaps, and what steps are needed to address them. Such a process

would have identified that failure of mainstream economic policies to operate within environmental limits, or in the interests of the majority of the world's population. Instead, paragraph 20 of "The Future We Want" states:

20. We acknowledge that since 1992 there have been areas of insufficient progress and setbacks in the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, aggravated by multiple financial, economic, food and energy crises, which have threatened the ability of all countries, in particular developing countries, to achieve sustainable development.

This analysis is back to front. What the summit should have done is **recognise** that these crises have been **caused by** the insufficient progress in the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development - not the other way around.

This week, the leaders of the world's richest nations have gathered in Mexico for the G20 meeting to discuss the economic crisis while, in the majority of cases, leaving deputies and environmental ministers to meet in Rio to discuss sustainable development. And yet, we'll only be able to solve our problems by changing our broken economic system for a model that has the wellbeing of people and planet at its heart. It is one job, not two.

Nothing could more clearly illustrate the continuing failure of world leaders to recognise this, than the separation between the agenda and level of priority afforded by them to these two meetings this week.

CHAPTER 2: Renewing Political Commitment

SECTION A. "Reaffirming Rio principles and past action plans"

VERDICT: The Rio Principles preserved, at least, but no step forward

The text "reaffirms the Rio Principles" first agreed at the 1992 Earth Summit. This is something of a relief given that some countries such as the United States resisted the mentioning of them in earlier drafts. It is disappointing (and no accident) that they are not mentioned or reaffirmed individually, because this would have represented a stronger "affirmation".

The exception to this is reaffirmation of Principle 7 ("Common but Differentiated Responsibilities" or 'CBDR'). This recognises that the bulk of the responsibility for our environmental problems lie with the rich countries, and so should the bulk of the responsibility for solving them. This is the most important principle for developing countries and it was therefore a "red line": it had to be mentioned to gain agreement on the overall text.

Something to watch for in high level segment:

The US and EU believe that the principle of "Common but Differentiated Responsibilities" should only apply to environmental (not social or economic) agreements, however, and it is possible that these countries will spell this out in their speeches to the high level segment, so weakening the "affirmation" of CBDR.

SECTION B. “Advancing Integration, Implementation, and Coherence”

VERDICT: Nice words in places, but behavior of world leaders this week indicates real action is at G20 directly contradicting spirit of this text

See commentary in “overview” above (section C includes paragraph 20)

SECTION C: “Engaging major groups and other stakeholders”

VERDICT: Some baby steps forward in this section, but oh so baby steps

Principle 10

Paragraphs 43 and 44 build on “Principle 10” of the original Rio Principles (although it is not mentioned by name), and emphasise the importance of public participation, access to information and judicial proceedings in sustainable development.

In paragraph 44 countries “recognize that improved participation of civil society depends upon, inter alia, strengthening access to information, building civil society capacity as well as an enabling environment”.

Paragraphs 85 and 88 represent a small step forward by opening the door for better institutional mechanisms through which to achieve a global convention and guidelines to uphold the rights of citizens to protect their environment.

Friends of the Earth’s goal is for a global convention and guidelines on public participation in international processes to deliver principle 10.

Corporate sustainability reporting

In paragraph 47, countries “acknowledge the importance of corporate sustainability reporting and encourage companies, where appropriate, especially publicly listed and large companies, to consider integrating sustainability information into their reporting cycle”.

Company reporting on social and environmental performance is useful. But it is hard to see how this text could be made any weaker. Companies are merely invited to “consider” sustainability reporting – the most voluntary of failed voluntary approaches. And yet, company sustainability reporting is of most value when it is required and produced to common guidelines, allowing comparisons between different companies.

Elsewhere in this section, companies are encouraged to develop yet more models of best practice, and participate in yet more voluntary initiatives such as UN The Global Compact.

Nothing in this section will change the behaviour of companies that damage the environment, or allow communities the right of redress when they do.

CHAPTER 3: “Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication”

VERDICT: Could have been a lot worse but dangerous implication is still that free market will come to planet’s rescue despite all the evidence to the contrary

The green economy was included as one of the two key themes of the conference, but without a common understanding of what the term meant. The European Union was one of the key exponents of its introduction and was keen to see what it called a green economy roadmap – with targets, indicators and goals adopted at the summit.

Developing countries and many in civil society repeatedly expressed concerns that the term ‘green economy’ was being used to replace the agreed multilateral conceptual framework for sustainable development – with a focus on the single pillar of economics, rather than all three pillars of sustainable development.¹ Further to this, developing countries expressed concerns that these negotiations might pave the way for environmental issues to be used as the basis of trade protectionism or new conditionality for aid and loans.

Whilst in the UK context, the term “green economy” is regularly used to refer to incentives for low carbon development, internationally it is being used to drive the expansion of activities that enable environmentally negative activities to expand – such as monoculture tree planting, the growth of biofuels, increased carbon offsetting, and the setting up of new markets in biodiversity and forests. This is often led by multinational companies which are focused on the brown economy, but who are using the opportunity of Rio to greenwash their activities.² This led to a wide range of civil society groups calling for an outright rejection of the green economy as it has been articulated at Rio+20.³

In this context, it is welcome that Chapter 3 of the Final Draft Text affirms that there are

“different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions” (paragraph 56).

This is critically important given attempts by some to define a “one size fits all” model of the so called “green economy” which promoted unsustainable business as usual. There is also welcome recognition that policies should be “guided by and in accordance with all Rio principles, Agenda 21, and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation” (paragraph 57).

This is a significant victory for civil society, because it allows communities and countries to define their own vision of what a truly fair and sustainable economy might look like.

¹ <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title2/sdc2012/sdc2012.100502.htm>

² For an example see Friends of the Earth International’s publications ‘How corporations rule’:
<http://www.foei.org/en/resources/publications/pdfs/2012/how-corporations-rule-vale>

³ This is articulated by a number of social movements involved in organising the People’s Summit at Rio
<http://cupuladospovos.org.br/en/2011/12/mobilize-with-us-towards>

But Chapter 2 fails to set out how regulatory frameworks could and should be used to phase out unsustainable economic activity. Regulation is merely recognised as one of a “mix of measures” alongside voluntary and “other” approaches (paragraph 63).

There is an affirmation that policies should “promote sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns” (paragraph 58(o)) but no recognition that developed countries, whose unsustainable consumption patterns are causing most environmental problems, should take the lead on sustainable consumption and production.

The US has placed an unhelpful rider on Chapter 3: “We also take note of the further evolution of discussions and agreements on these issues since the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation” which is code for “we don’t think anything else is needed”.

There is a welcome recognition that “the efforts of developing countries that choose to implement green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication should be supported through technical and technological assistance” (paragraph 74) but there is no mention of finance to support the transition.

CHAPTER 4: Institutional framework for sustainable development

VERDICT: Too early to say – the devil will be in the detail and this chapter is lacking in detail

Principle 10

Paragraphs 85 and 88 represent a small step forward by opening the door for better institutional mechanisms through which to achieve better institutional mechanisms to uphold the rights of citizens to protect their environment.

Given the slow progress of international negotiations and failure of most politicians to introduce bold policies, Friends of the Earth believes it is critical that concerned citizens are empowered to take the steps that are needed to deliver sustainability.

Friends of the Earth’s goal is for a global convention and guidelines on public participation in international processes to deliver principle 10.

CHAPTER 5: Framework for action and follow up

Energy

This section recognizes the importance of providing energy to enable poverty eradication, but in a way that also addresses climate change. It talks of increased renewable energy sources, and “more efficient use of energy”.

But after pressure from Canada, Russia and others, the text also talks of “including cleaner fossil fuels technologies” and “modern energy services” which is code for so called ‘clean coal’ and, some will argue, nuclear power. All of these threatened to keep us locked into the same broken energy system which has resulted in a climate crisis, rising energy bills and huge profits for the fossil fuel companies.

Although there is welcome recognition that renewable technology and energy efficiency are necessary for sustainable development, there are not targets or timescales, and no real indication of how the transformation will occur, including no mention of technology transfer or finance (which were specifically removed). (Finance is mentioned in the specific context of “energy access”).

None of provides either the vision or mechanisms to enable the poorest communities and countries to ‘leap frog’ the dirty energy development pathways followed by the rich, industrialised countries.

Paragraph 129 “notes” the launch of the UN Secretary General’s “Sustainable Energy for All” (SE4ALL) initiative. This initiative does not form part of the official summit process. It was ‘welcomed’ in earlier drafts, but has now only been ‘noted’. SE4ALL is attempting to address the challenges of climate change and poverty, but its targets lack ambition, and the process had been corporate led, with little involvement of civil society or the people it is purporting to help. It also has a broad definition of “sustainable energy” which includes some types of fossil fuels.

Climate Change

There is a relatively short section on climate change – in recognition that the main place for debating this issue is in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The three paragraphs that are there, however, offer a welcome sense of urgency – which is missing from most of the rest of the document.

The text reaffirms the principles of equity and Common But Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) and “respective capabilities”. There is a temperature target (2°C or 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels), and a nod to “recognise the importance of” mobilising funds and transferring technology, as well as urging parties to honour their Kyoto commitments (a reference to the decision of Canada to leave the Kyoto Protocol and lukewarm support for it from other developed countries who want to weaken the only legally binding treaty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions).

Sustainable Production and Consumption

This section “recalls” previous commitments on sustainable consumption and production, and recognizes that “fundamental changes in the way societies consumer and produce are indispensable for achieving global sustainable development” but then offers very little thought on what to do about it. There is a reference a 10 year Framework of Programmes but the voluntary nature of this is highlighted.

In Paragraph 225, countries “Reaffirm the commitments they have made to phase out harmful and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies...” This is a small step forward, as it is the first time this has been stated in a text endorse by all countries.

But, given that the G20 adopted similar language in their 2009 and 2010 communiqués but then failed to act on their commitment, there will be real scepticism about how sincere this “commitment” is.

In the March budget, for example, George Osborne introduced he Chancellor announced two massive tax breaks for the oil and gas industry in the UK. Friends of the Earth has calculated that the expected impact of these announcements will be to produce at least as much carbon dioxide as the UK produces in a whole year (see www.foe.co.uk/resource/media_briefing/tax_breaks.pdf).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (paras 245-251)

First mooted by Colombia and Guatemala, the idea to develop international, universally applicable goals on sustainable development gathered great momentum in the run up to the Earth Summit. It is envisaged that these goals may merge with or complement the successor to the Millennium Development Goals (which expire in 2015).

But there was disagreement, principally between developed and developing countries, as to how to decide which issues or “themes”. Many developed countries wanted to see a focus on environmental goals while developing countries wanted the goals to reflect all three pillars of sustainable development – economic and social as well as environmental. The second major division was it the SDGs were to be “universal goals” subject to the Rio Principles and in particular Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) (which would ensure that there was the appropriate technology and finance was made available. The US and EU argued strongly that these goals shouldn’t be subject to the Rio Principles and specifically CBDR.

The compromise has been to launch a negotiating process to agree them in the run up to 2015 which noted that they were to be based on Rio Principles but did not explicitly mention CBDR.

Prime Minister David Cameron has agreed to be a co-chair of the UN High Level Panel on post-Millennium Development Goals, with President Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia and President Yuhdyono

of Indonesia. This panel will input into the discussions of the General Assembly of the UN which will bring together the ideas for Sustainable Development Goals and post-2015 poverty goals. It is critical that for a positive outcome of the process for determining the SDG goals it remains open, transparent and involves all key stakeholders and in particular civil society.

CHAPTER 6: Means of implementation

Finance

New and additional financial support is needed to help developing countries implement sustainable development.

On the positive side, this section offers recognises the “crucial important of enhancing financial support” but there is only one reference to “new and additional finance” is with regard to South-South and “triangular cooperation”, and nothing to suggest that there will be new finance from the North to South (although there is a reference to “new and additional finance” in the Africa section on providing financing for development).

The G77’s intergovernmental process under the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to “propose options on an effective Sustainable Development Financing Strategy” and the intergovernmental committee is a good outcome. But the challenge will be to achieve a fair process that builds and expands on this (rather than just becomes another process led by the UN Secretary General’s office).

Paragraph 264 on International Financial Institutions (IFI) financial resources may be a good thing in terms of increased financing. But IFIs also have a long history of structural adjustment conditionalities (i.e. countries only get the money if they only introduce the economic reforms donor organisations dictate to tell them) and other adverse impacts that have historically often caused more problems than solutions.

Paragraph 263 offers some useful wording on debt restructuring, debt relief and financing is, although it would have been stronger if debt “prevention and resolution” had been explicitly mentioned. It is not.

Paragraphs 258 and 259 on improving the quality and quantity of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) and aid architecture are important, but there is a glaring absence of most international financial architecture areas such as; capital flows and controls, financial and trade policy space, macroeconomic policy conditions, financial regulation and the role of banks, the international monetary system and global reserves and financialisation of food, commodities and nature.

Paragraph 266 stresses the importance of “fighting corruption and illicit financial flows” but, incredibly, does not mention accountability mechanisms or monitoring of the private or public sector.

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