

PRESS RELEASE

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SCIENCE IS NOT ENOUGH: RIO+20 MUST RADICALLY RETHINK INNOVATION

New Sustainable Development Goals must involve grassroots initiatives

A radical new approach to innovation is urgently needed to ensure a fair and green economy and avoid reversing progress made on global poverty reduction, according to leading scientists.

Ahead of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, or Rio+20, the ESRC STEPS Centre calls on negotiators to rethink the way science and innovation can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are likely to emerge from Rio.

Rio+20 is a golden opportunity to enhance the role that science, technology and innovation of many kinds can play in building an environmentally sustainable and socially just green economy at a global level.

“The stakes are too high at Rio+20 for a business-as-usual approach,” said Professor Melissa Leach, director of the STEPS Centre. “We are pushing up against planetary boundaries that are near, or already past, breaking point. Science, technology and innovation can help avert catastrophic developmental and environmental damage. But only if we move beyond outdated notions of whose innovation counts, to recognise the vital role different forms of innovation can play.”

“We would like to see Rio+20 provide a global framework supporting different forms of innovation that address sustainable development challenges at local, national and global levels. Beyond setting targets, this is about enabling the grassroots and enhancing innovation capabilities for the longer-term” added Dr. Adrian Ely, STEPS Centre head of impact and engagement.

The STEPS Centre has drawn up a set of recommendations for ways in which Rio+20 could pay attention not just to the 20-lane innovation ‘superhighways’ carved out by high-tech and well-financed industries, but to the bush-paths and mountain-trails of grassroots innovation trodden by less high-profile users, workers, consumers, citizens, activists, farmers and small businesses.

Recommendations – submitted to the zero draft of the Rio+20 outcome document – cover five areas for action: *agenda setting; funding; capacity building; organising; and monitoring, evaluation and accountability*. Recommendations include:

- UNEP/ the proposed new specialized agency on environment adopting the assessment, promotion and co-ordination of innovation for sustainable development as part of its mandate
- Transparent corporate reporting on R&D investments which focuses on poverty alleviation, social justice and environmental sustainability

Our vision is a world where science and technology work more directly for social justice, poverty alleviation and the environment. What this means for particular contexts, places and people will be enormously varied – as will be the means to achieve it. Nevertheless, we believe our recommendations can catalyse and provoke specific concrete actions to help achieve this vision.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITOR:

- **Available for interview** Professor Melissa Leach, STEPS Centre director; Dr Adrian Ely, STEPS Centre head of impact and engagement and convenor of [Innovation, Sustainability, Development: A New Manifesto](#)
- **Rio+20 recommendations** [STEPS Centre contribution to the Rio+20 zero draft document](#)
- **Images and video** available upon request

THE STEPS CENTRE (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) is a major interdisciplinary global research and policy engagement hub uniting development studies with science and technology studies. We aim to develop a new approach to understanding and action on sustainability and development. The STEPS Centre is a collaboration between the Institute of Development Studies and SPRU Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Sussex with a network of partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America. We are funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Find out more at www.steps-centre.org and follow [updates from STEPS on Twitter](#) (@stepscentre).

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