



## **Rio+20 Dialogues Facilitators' Report** **Sustainable Development for Fighting Poverty**

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### **Introduction**

The dialogue space on 'sustainable development for fighting poverty' engaged with one of the core areas of contention in the run-up to Rio+20, the theme 'Green Economy in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication'. The focus on poverty alleviation combines the third (social) pillar with debates about environment and economy. This focus recognizes that discussions in Rio (as in predecessor summits) must prioritise the needs of the world's poorest, but that even within this focus there may be complex trade-offs, for example between short-term and long-term reduction of poverty and protection of livelihoods.

The online discussions illustrated the different contexts in which these debates have played out across the world, in the areas of energy, health, education and food and agriculture. There were obvious links across to the other dialogue spaces, and the traffic generated illustrates the concern for these issues among disparate communities around the world. In many cases contributors were keen to follow-up on discussions beyond the Rio+20 conference, proposing alternative platforms as well as continuing with their debates after the voting phase had begun.

### **Summary**

The dialogue was facilitated by Professor Eun Mee Kim (Ewha Womans University, Rep of Korea), Professor Rodrigo Medeiros (Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro – UFRRJ, Brazil), Dr Matthew Lockwood and Professor Melissa Leach (Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK) (IDS will be represented in Rio by Dr Adrian Ely). Adrian Bannister (Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK) and Emilia Melo (Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro – UFRRJ, Brazil) played a key role in contributing to the discussions and in synthesizing recommendations and linking across discussion threads. To help kick-start discussions, the facilitators team posted five short think-pieces focusing on different dimensions of the social and political challenges involved in integrating sustainability and poverty reduction.

There were a large number of rich contributions across a very varied range of issues, and it was a challenge to integrate them into clear and concise outcomes. Eric Anderson (UNDP) also provided assistance in highlighting popular posts and in supporting the development of recommendations. Following discussions with some of the original posters, the ten recommendations outlined below were put forward for voting.

## **Conclusions**

The discussions provided a platform for varied ideas to be shared, representing the diversity of obstacles to poverty reduction. In the 'Sustainable Development for Fighting Poverty' space, a number of themes emerged and fed in to some of the 10 final recommendations. These can be categorized as:

- Education, including discussions of primary education to build human capabilities and responsible management education.
- Health equity, which appeared in numerous posts relating to health systems, sanitation and access to healthcare.
- Technology and innovation of different kinds, which were seen as key contributors to sustainable development for fighting poverty. The importance of facilitating bottom-up (grassroots) innovation including by poorer people themselves was highlighted, as was promoting and sharing intellectual property and know-how. In both cases concrete proposals were put forward, with calls for (increased) funding.
- Diversity, seen as a vital contributor to sustainable development and poverty alleviation, was highlighted in bio-cultural terms as well as in relation to gender and sexual orientation.

Very few (if any) recommendations contained suggestions on how they could be implemented or by whom. Most were expressed at a very general level. This reflects a shortcoming of the dialogue, since we would argue that the major barrier to achieving sustainable development is not a shortage of ideas, but rather a lack of political strategies to overcome the power relations that lock in unsustainability.

## **Recommendations**

At the time of writing it was not possible to indicate the votes for each of the final 10 recommendations. Comments on those recommendations follow below.

1. **Integrate social equity in the design and delivery of public health services and systems**

Public health, through its contribution to human capabilities, is one of the key enablers of development. Social equity in health service provision (linking to recommendation 7) provides the basis for inclusive development in the longer term and is to be welcomed. Although several interesting ideas were put forward, there was no consensus in the online discussions precisely how these ideas should be implemented at national or international levels. Nor did the online discussions directly address relationships between public health and

environmental sustainability. However given the strong interlinkages between poverty, ill-health and environmental degradation (e.g. in polluted urban areas where increasing proportions of the world's poor live, as well as rural settings facing poor sanitation and vulnerability to environmentally-related infectious disease threats), we would recommend that integrated approaches to public health and environment be promoted. This requires new forms of collaboration amongst health and environment ministries and NGOs, and the enhancement of integrated policy platforms (building on existing efforts in the field of Ecohealth and 'One Health'). As the online discussions emphasise, it is critical that social equity be built into new arrangements.

2. Promote grassroots innovations to fight poverty and achieve sustainable development

This recommendation was supported by a strong and novel discussion highlighting the need for an international programme to – amongst other activities - identify, record, validate and disseminate grassroots innovations that support sustainable development and poverty reduction. Important examples were given from the fields of agriculture and energy amongst others, highlighting the value of innovations by poorer women and men grounded in their own knowledge and experiences. The broad ideas were reflected in other discussions around the role of design in autonomous social innovations and the need to support the innovation process in poor and marginalized communities. This is a strong and valuable recommendation that helps address a gap in the Rio draft outcome text, where discussions of technology are limited to 'top-down' technology transfer (see also recommendation 4). While the online discussion highlighted the need to list and 'catalogue' grassroots innovations, governments, NGOs and international agencies also need to develop funding arrangements to support them and policy approaches to enable 'bottom-up' innovation to connect with national and global initiatives.

3. Enhance South-South (developing countries) cooperation in clean technology proliferation and development

Going beyond activities already discussed under the UNFCCC technology mechanism (contributing to universal access to modern low-carbon energy services), this recommendation highlights the need for sharing appropriate forms of environmentally sustainable technology between developing countries. Proposals included the establishment of a formal system of credit for South-South collaboration, and increasing financial support for technology exchange.

4. Promote the use and transfer of latest technology as a means to advance sustainable development

Linking to recommendation 3, the online discussions focused on agricultural technologies and industrialization. Modern technologies can under some circumstances support sustainable development and poverty alleviation but in others, lock societies in to unsustainable patterns of development - the recommendation should therefore not be interpreted as a call for support to *all*

forms of 'latest technology'. Rather, there needs to be consideration of the diverse economic, social and ecological settings in which poor people live, attuning technology choice to these. In some settings, modern technologies might be complemented by or adapted through grassroots innovation (linking to recommendation 2).

5. Ensure economic empowerment to promote self-reliance

The online discussion stressed the need for individual economic security, pointing to policies providing social protection, secure land tenure and access to finance. The recommendations were directed towards civil society and government at national and international levels. These ideas are of course long-standing, and the key issue is how these basic requirements for economic empowerment can be delivered politically and practically. The area which has seen the most progress in the last decade is social protection, and lessons for other areas might perhaps be usefully learned from that recent history in order to make the recommendations more specific and concrete.

6. Promote global education to eradicate poverty and to achieve sustainable development

Whilst the concept of 'global education' remained relatively under-defined, there was strong support in the online discussion for international efforts towards education for global citizenship. There is a key role for education in opening up the debate on sustainable development to more and more people in the wider world. This recommendation – which points to European guidelines for global education - aims to extend the right to education to generate future generations of global citizens with an understanding and appreciation of international cooperation.

7. Ensure universal health coverage to achieve sustainable development

Universal primary health coverage has been discussed since the Alma Ata Declaration (1978), but governments continue to struggle to attain the goal (which links to recommendation 1). The online discussion did not deliver clearly articulated or novel ideas for how such an objective could be realized. However there are opportunities to connect health, environment and development more fully – see comments under recommendation 1.

8. Advance gender and sexual orientation rights as an instrument to promote sustainable development

Whilst they are a key dimension of inclusive development and broader efforts towards building human rights, it is unclear from the discussion how gender and sexual orientation rights can act as an *instrument* of sustainable development.

9. Consolidate the principle of non-regression as a key principle for environmental and social policies

Regression (or reversal) in laws for environmental or social protection can undermine sustainable development and disincentivise business investment in

cleaner technologies and decent working practices. As such, the principle of non-regression is important, and is linked to the problem of credible commitment in areas such as monetary policy. It is unclear what the specific proposals for guaranteeing non-regression are, and whether this might be done through legal measures or through institutional arrangements (such as politically insulated bodies).

10. Reduce poverty by promoting bio-cultural diversity, linguistic rights, intercultural dialogue and by means of a neutral international language

Diversity in social, technological and environmental systems is a key foundation to sustainable development, and exchange of ideas across varied cultural contexts needs to be supported. Based on earlier regional attempts to develop neutral languages, the potential for a neutral international language seems limited in the short-medium term.

These recommendations are relevant contributions to the Rio process and in some cases deserving of serious attention. However, in order for sustainable development to truly play a role in fighting poverty, policy proposals alone are insufficient - real change will necessitate challenging prevailing power relations and placing the needs of the world's poorest at the centre of a green and fair economy.

During the Dialogues Panel in Rio de Janeiro in June, 16<sup>th</sup>, we expect that the open discussion with the plenary and the support of the invited panelist the three most voted recommendations can express clearly the diversity of ideas discussed in the platform and contribute to the final outcome of the conference.