

IKV BRIEF

RIO+20 NOTES: IS IT ENOUGH TO BE HOPEFUL?

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Introductory Remarks



RIO+20
United Nations
Conference on
Sustainable
Development

Rio+20 UN Sustainable Development Conference or Rio+20 Earth Summit as it is commonly called, convening in the same place after exactly 20 years, brought members of United Nations together once more on 20-22 of June in order to evaluate last the 20 years and deficiencies faced in the implementation process.

As it is known, all countries continued negotiations on the *draft text* to be submitted to the Summit since January 2012. An intensive process has occurred on key issues such as strengthening UN Environment Program (UNEP), green economy, oceans, injustice, poverty eradication and sustainable development targets which constitute the content of the text, until the day of the Summit. Being slightly different from the year 1992, 'green economy' model which may be said to mark the terminological the well-known concept of 'sustainable development' has been presented to negotiators as an ideal solution.

Furthermore, seven areas have been brought out to be of primary importance in the preparation process of the conference: Work opportunities, sustainable cities, food security and sustainable agriculture, water, oceans and disasters.



For better understanding the importance of the Conference, what does the picture before and after 2012 show us?

Indicators

The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated the importance of the Summit in an article published in New York Times dated the 23rd of May, 2012, 'We notice to have taken a step to a new age. Even some call it to be a new geological age which human beings changed the motion of world radically.'¹ However, although importance of the issue increases every passing day, it is felt that the same attention is not reflected to consistency of promises made by countries and/or leaders. Even though a common purpose is observed in the messages from EU and other countries, the seriousness of the situation still was not emerging to be seen for different reasons. The World Population has experienced continuous growth since the last decade (see Table 1). Thus, the rising income level has conspicuously influenced the rate of consumption.

When it comes to projections about the indicators in 2100, the rate of world's population in total is expected to reach 15 billion. Since the year 2007, the consumption of sea foods has increased by % 32 while the rate of consumption of meat products increased by 26 per cent.² Likewise, 25 per cent of the world population is faced with a shortage nutrition.

Table 1. Population (2000-2050)

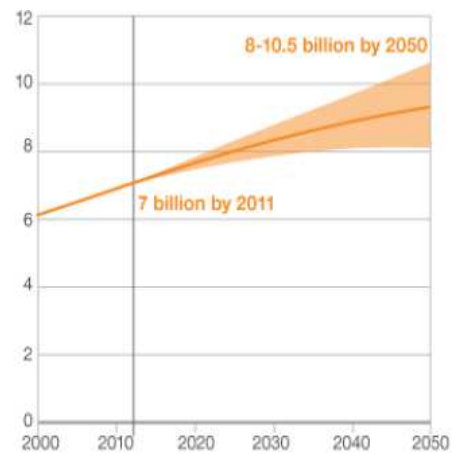
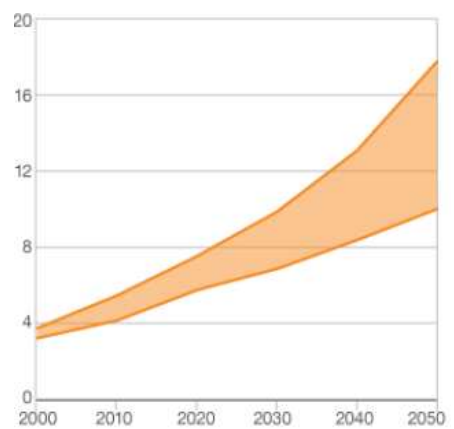


Table 2. GDP (US Dolar)



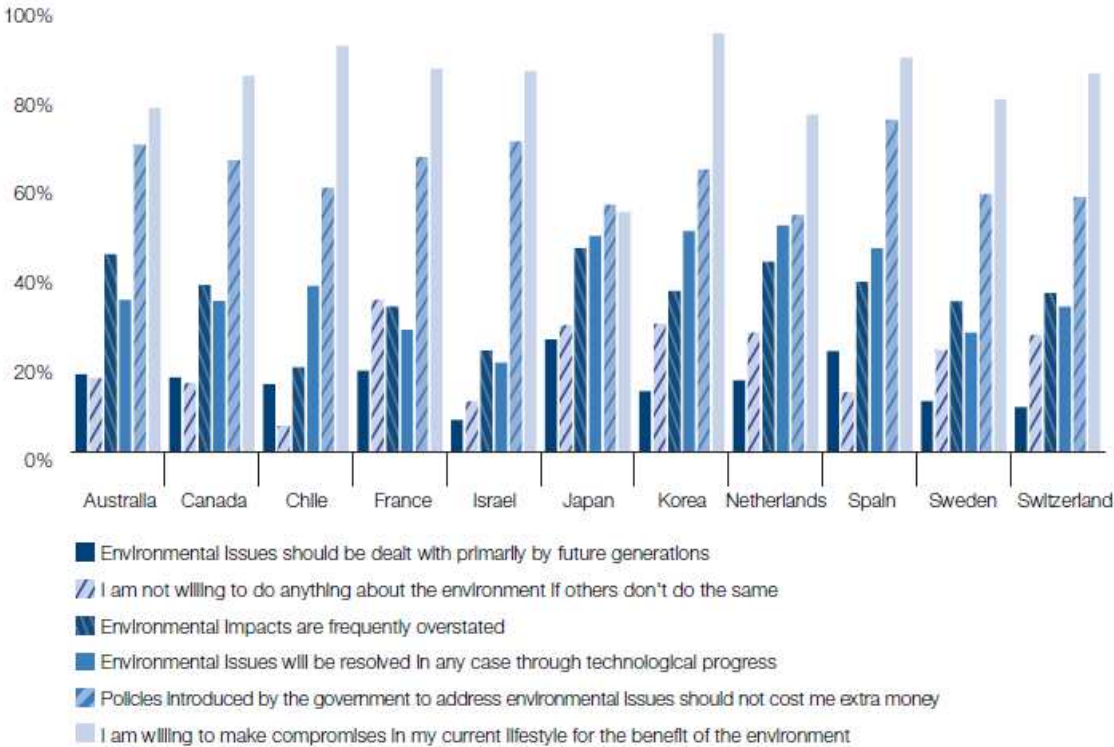
Source: UNDESA, 2009, *Wealth, Van Vuren et al, 2012*
http://www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/geo5/GE05_report_C16.pdf

¹ The related statement can be found on this web page: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/24/opinion/the-future-we-want.html>

² UNEP, 2011

What about the perceptions on environmental issues? It is clear to state that the greening consumer behaviour reflected in household consumption patterns has a significant effect on environmental quality. On the one hand, the OECD indicators illustrate that (See Table 3) perceptions on environmental protection and willingness to pay extra for the use of renewable energy is high in general (60 per cent of people).

Table 3. Do Consumers Care About Environmental Issues?



Source: OECD Greening Household Behaviour: Results of the 2011 Survey

On the other hand, it is still debatable how much this high rate reflects the reality. Indeed, according to Table 3, 45 per cent of people think that renewable energy is not an useful option to fight against the harmful effects of climate change. Some industrialized countries such as Japan and Australia also view environmental challenges as an exaggerated issue. According to opinion polls, the rate of respondents who think in this way is currently 40 per cent. In response, governments should definitely introduce measures to encourage people to reconsider their way of consumption and decisions. Moreover, better understanding of what influences people’s behaviour towards environment can help governments to promote more effective policy instruments.

Another thing which should be remembered is that % 50 of the world population is living in big cities and is expected to reach 70 per cent by 2050. Cities also generate 67 per cent of the use of energy globally.

Rio+20: Is it Enough To Be Hopeful?

Third Preparatory Committee (June 13-15, Precom III) lasting three days along with the opening day of the Summit ended on

the 15th of June. According to *Third World Network*, which is only non-governmental group publishing daily reports with respect to negotiations, demand by G77 group for adoption of different approaches on issues of green economy concept, sustainable development and poverty eradication were rejected by countries such as USA, Switzerland, EU and Korea. While



the EU wants green economy concept to be added to the draft as a 'means' for all countries, the G77 group advocated green economy policies to be 'one of the means used' and 'not to contain strong and binding rules'.³

In addition to differences of opinion on key issues, important state leaders such as Barack Obama, David Cameron and Angela Merkel announced that they decided not to convene at the desired high level of attendance. That was actually demonstrating that the Rio+20 Earth Summit would not be brought to the desired level.

Details of the Concluding Document⁴

Above all, maybe the most important output of the conference is the adoption of the Draft Final Document (Concluding Document) entitled *'The Future We Want'* presented

³ Further information can be found on this web page:

http://www.rec.org.tr/?module=newsletter&item=newsletter_issues&issue_id=105#article_1794

⁴ The original document can be read on this web page:

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>

to state leaders. However, the Document is being criticized by many people with different view of assessments: Some state that 283 articles in the final document were not so convincing and did not contain goals designed to any *concrete* result. Some think that the adoption of the document is better than nothing while considering the whole event. So what did leaders adopt in the Draft Document? Its highlights can be summarized as follows:

- An organizational body will be created to prepare ten-year framework of sustainable consumption and production programs.
- The third conference for developing small islands will be organized in 2014.
- The concept of a high level forum which will replace Sustainable Development Commission will be determined.
- The structure of UNEP will be strengthened; sustainable development goals will be determined by a special study group.
- A report for an effective strategy in financing sustainable development will be developed.

More details

(a) Sustainable Development: Sustainable development objectives of a special study group so as to include all countries until 2013 will be presented to the UN. (b) Fossil Fuel: Support for fossil fuel will be reduced and reset until 2020. (c) Oceans: Countries will provide necessary support in preventing ocean and sea pollution until 2025 (it is stated that a few countries such as USA, Canada and Russia loosened the concerned items). (d) Forests: A net result is not seen on forests. (e) Corporate Structure: A net result did not emerge in development of institutional structure. (f) Green economy: Applications will be foreseen in this issue by taking into account national strategic priorities of countries. So it is left to their own wishes of green economy countries. (g) Employment: Countries will be encouraged to take advantage of related funds through UN Programs and Agencies. National programs will be supported in creating job opportunities. (h) Climate Change: Greenhouse gas emissions reduction will be provided until 2020 (not specified how much); green climate funds will be encouraged. (i) Cities: Waste management, transportation and energy productivity have been referred in meeting demands of increasing urban population in the last decade around a sustainable

urban planning. (j) Health: Social cohesion and sustainable health and economy models will be developed in health systems in universal level. (k) Education: It was envisaged to ensure compliance with Training Program for UN Sustainable Development (2005 - 2014) by Members. (l) Disasters: Importance of Hyogo Action Framework (2005-2015) was emphasized. (m) Bio-diversity: Importance of 2011 - 2012 Strategy Plan was emphasized.

Concluding Remarks

When the text is examined, the document is full of positive statements in all its forms. Nevertheless, only previously concluded texts having internationally binding rules were referred. Positive messages were given over existing programs. Importantly, there is no clear statement showing us how these wishful messages would be realized in practise. Another point which is being criticized is the use of the term '*sustained growth*' instead of 'sustainable growth': This may lead to other interpretations outside its terminological meaning⁵. On the 25th of June 2012, the Guardian on its web page published the statement as a conclusion of the Conference. To the statement, sustained growth used in the document renders '*continuous growth*' and consumption mechanism. In fact, some say that as a result of Rio+20 meeting, using the term of sustained growth requests for 'a growth due to machinery, which is exactly contrary to sustainability principle'. At this point, it will not be wrong to mention that the Summit brought into being a document based on the priorities of members rather than on concrete and achievable objectives. The green economy model is clearly based on national plans and priorities and do not reflect the global needs of fighting against the ill effects of climate change.

⁵ The related criticism can be found on this web page: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jun/25/rio-governments-will-not-save-planet>