

**BOND-DEG – UK NGO's Joint Rio+20
Narrative**

for

**The United Nations Conference on
Sustainable Development – 4-6 June 2012**

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Who We Are

The authors of this joint narrative are voluntary, development and environmental organisations and trade unions. Most co-signatories are members for the BOND¹-Development and Environment Group (BOND-DEG), however some organisations have co-signed in an individual capacity. This narrative represents a consensual view of the organisations involved. However, it does not bind any organisations to the views expressed and each is free to develop its own views and policies.



ICE Coalition
Creating the International
Court for the Environment



FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



¹ Bond is the UK membership body for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in international development - www.bond.org.uk

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*"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."
-R. Buckminster Fuller*

1. Introduction

**Our vision is of a Green
and Fair Economy.**

This must be achieved through
a just transition.

It must deliver a better quality
of life for all within
environmental limits, now and
into the future.

Humanity faces critical decisions. The scale of our current economic crisis will soon be overshadowed by the impending environmental crisis in both impacts and costs. Over the past 50 years our current global economic model has failed to deliver the sustainable society that we need.

The concept of sustainable development that was elaborated at the first Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 still provides a compelling vision of the transformation that needs to be made. But implementation of that vision has fallen far short.

Operating within planetary boundaries is a necessary precondition for sustainability. But at present the world is pressing harder against ecological limits and we have already breached the safe operating or boundaries for three of nine key planetary systems (climate change, biodiversity loss and excess nitrogen and phosphorus production).²

At the same time inequality and unfairness is growing between and within countries. Poverty has increased in absolute terms, and the gap between rich and poor is growing. Furthermore, the world’s population is increasing rapidly (a projected 9 billion by 2050 from 7 billion now) increasing the demand for resources and adverse impacts such as pollution and waste.

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) to be held in Rio in June 2012 (Rio + 20) presents world leaders with a unique opportunity for change. We need to revive the original Rio momentum and launch the transformation towards a truly sustainable global economy that promotes true prosperity for all in a socially just and equitable way now and into the future, while acknowledging and respecting environmental limits; that is the **Green and Fair Economy**. This will require bold political leadership and engagement of all parts of society to bring about the necessary transformation of the global economy. It will require fundamental reforms in political systems and institutions and a shift in values and behaviours.

Minor modifications of present policies within an essentially business as usual model of the economy cannot bring about the scale of transformation needed. Developed countries such as the UK need both to transform their own economies by creating more sustainable pathways for the future; and help developing countries find a greener and more equitable pathway for their own future development.

All parts of society need to be engaged in the transition, and will be affected by the changes. So the transition must be managed in an open and co-operative way that ensures a just and fair transition to the sustainable green economy. We need common value and language and new politics to shape and guide the transition in a harmonious and equitable way. Only then will we create the trust required to build socio-environmental security and resilience, now and into the future.

² Rockström, J et al. Planetary boundaries: Exploring the safe operating space for humanity. *Ecology and Society* [online] 14, 32 (2009). www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32.

2. The Green and Fair Economy

The Green Economy needs to be a **fair** one, with all that this implies. To this end, the social dimension of sustainable development needs to be given greater emphasis. The basic preconditions for this are: social cohesion, fairness, including inter-generational fairness, fair redistribution and solutions for social problems such as growing inequality, lack of access to a whole range of resources, poverty and unemployment.

The Green and Fair Economy should not be used as a euphemism for green growth to promote the business as usual agenda of growth at all costs. Rather we must **acknowledge key environmental limits/planetary boundaries**, and this does require us to rethink our growth pattern and help define pathways for sustainable development.

The transition to a Green and Fair Economy and a sustainable future is fundamental to the process of change, in developed and developing nations. Seeing it as a just transition is about recognising and planning fairly and sustainably for the huge changes that climate change policies will have for the whole economy. There are key conditions to ensuring a just transition to a green and fair economy, these include:

- **Access to Information and Stakeholder Engagement** – In line with Rio Principle 10 and the Aarhus Convention, all individuals should have access to environmental information, be able to participate in decision-making processes and have effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings. This includes inclusive and effective consultation processes between all stakeholders (government, business, trade unions, voluntary, development and environmental organisations) on the changes required in transitioning to a green and fair economy.
- **Investing in People** – The transition must also ensure the creation of quality jobs and decent work, investments in communities, investments in relevant education/training and skills programmes and strong and efficient social protection systems in the transition to a sustainable economy. General Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) programmes must be given higher priority and support.
- **Respect for Labour and Human Rights** - Democratic decision-making and respect for human and labour rights are essential in order to ensure the fair representation of workers' and communities' interests.
- **Improving Financing and Investment for Sustainable Development** – Financial decisions and investments must begin to flow towards restoring our environment and generating a better quality of life for all. This means reforming subsidies, taxation and public sector financing to meet environmental and societal needs rather than just GDP growth; driving investment towards new private sector markets; and putting an end to short-term market speculation.
- **An Earth-centred Governance Approach** – For development to be truly sustainable it needs to be founded on Earth-centred principles which promote the long-term health and integrity of the Earth, recognising that Earth has limits within which humans must live, and respecting the inherent rights of all life on Earth of present and future generations.

The Green Economy means many different things to different people. The broad spectrum can create confusion. However, a singular definition will be next to impossible to agree with such a large, diverse group of stakeholders. Furthermore, the economic, political, cultural and environmental context of each country needs to be taken into account, and there is no one prescriptive model. Instead, **principles for a Green and Fair Economy should be agreed, and which will act as a decision-making framework** in practice. **Underpinning measures/mandates for greening the global economy** should also be discussed and agreed at Rio+20. These should include:

- Measuring progress in the just transition;

- Educating for the green and fair economy;
- Fiscal measures for the green and fair economy;
- Investing for the green and fair economy;
- Regulating for the green and fair economy;
- Targets and goals for sustainable development in different sectors of the economy that can feed into the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) review in 2015, and any new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs – see Section 2 below for further details).

Specific initiatives to be put forward at Rio+20 on the Green and Fair Economy include:

- **Beyond GDP** - The current reliance on economic growth and GDP as an indicator of success has led to perverse outcomes. It has not delivered fair levels of well-being for society or individuals. GDP is an inadequate metric through which to gauge well-being over time. Instead we need to reassess our common values, making decisions that lead to a green and fair economy around what we really value. There is an important distinction between assessing *current well-being* and assessing *sustainability*.
- **Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and Capitals** - The poor management and regulation of natural assets and ecosystems leads to increasingly frequent and severe regional and global crises, and is a major factor behind food, water and energy insecurity (see Section 3 below for further details on these securities). Outcomes from Rio+20 must ensure that national development strategies take full account of the state of natural assets and ecosystems and their role in sustaining human and animal well-being and economic activity; actively investing in their conservation and enhancement to avoid a devastating and irreversible global crisis.
- **Fiscal Reform** - True environmental costs of production and consumption must be internalised into accounting models in order to address the causes rather than simply the symptoms of environmental degradation. The polluter pays principle should be adopted in practice in standard accounting and reporting practices for both business and governments, so that these costs can be reflected in market valuations and environmental impact assessments. Furthermore, green taxes should be used to incentivise positive behaviours and discourage harmful ones. For example, an internationally agreed mechanism to raise finance from international transport. A global Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) should be implemented, with a significant proportion of the revenue raised used to support long-term efforts to fight climate change in developing countries and implementing sustainability programmes. Lastly, all subsidies that undermine sustainable development should be eliminated, particularly those underpinning fossil fuel use and unsustainable agricultural and fishery practices.
- **Sustainable Public Procurement** – Governments must use public procurement as a leadership and leveraging tool to promote the green and fair economy. All public procurement contracts should include specifications for labour and environmental sustainability standards.
- **A Declaration on Planetary Boundaries** - Rio+20 is an opportunity to formally recognise key environmental limits - such as planetary boundaries - within which we must remain, and the thresholds that we must respect in order to maintain the sustainability of our planet. Rio+20 should begin the process of creating a 'Declaration on Planetary Boundaries' which outlines key principles and shows political commitment by attendees to this concept.
- **A Convention on Corporate Sustainability** - All corporations must be mandated to report on their environmental impacts and contribution to wellbeing, or explain why they

are not doing so. There should be a commitment at Rio+20 in the form of a Convention on Corporate Sustainability to develop national regulations which mandate the integration of material sustainability issues in the Annual Report & Accounts; and therefore providing effective mechanisms for investors to hold companies to account on the quality of their disclosures.

- **Global Convention on Rio Declaration Principle 10** – Access to environmental information, participation in transparent decision-making processes, and access to judicial and administrative proceedings should be basic rights for all, at all levels of decision-making, including local, national and international processes. Rio+20 should support a proposal for a Global Convention on Access to Information based on Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration. There could also be regional replications of the Aarhus Convention in other parts of the world.

3. Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development

It is vital that form must follow function for any reform of the institutional framework for sustainable development. It is important that Rio+20 should seek to improve the integration of the different elements on sustainable development; social, environment and economic. Furthermore, a renewed emphasis must also be placed on Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration. Transparency, access to information, public participation in decision-making, accountability and access to justice are fundamental and necessary elements for effective and legitimate governance.

Integration of the different sustainability pillars could be effectively achieved through the creation of a **Sustainable Development Council (SDC)** at the top of the UN system. It would report directly to the General Assembly (on the same level with Security Council), and integrate and strengthen the work currently done separately in the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). It should be charged with driving forward global action on all aspects of sustainable development, promoting the transition to a green and fair economy, and initiating action on new and emerging issues such as food and energy security. Below this, a **Sustainable Development Board (SDB)**, answering through ECOSOC to the new SDC, would merge the boards of UNDP/the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food programme (WFP), bringing those agencies together in engaging individuals, allocating funding, delivering programmes and most importantly scrutinising outcomes against the criteria of both sustainable development and wellbeing. Horizontally linking nations, the SDB would facilitate an exchange of information from North to South, engendering co-operation, while also de-linking the concepts of well-being and material wealth.

In addition to the horizontal integration of sustainable development across the UN (and national) structures, there is also a need to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainability giving it equal political weight to social and economic pillars within the UN system. Rio+20 must consider either **strengthening the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)**, or upgrading it to either a **UN Environment Organisation (UNEO)** or **World Environment Organisation (WEO)**. Either way, this reformed/upgraded UNEP must have universal membership with civil society represented on the governing body. It must also be given greater powers and an additional mandate to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Its portfolio and funding must also be expanded to support sustainable development activities and partnerships at the regional levels.

Specific initiatives to be put forward at Rio+20 on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development include:

- **Sustainable Development Goals** – In August 2011, Colombia submitted a proposal to the UN to introduce Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It sees these as a possible foundation for building international political commitment at Rio, providing measurable 'tangible goals' for the sustainable development debate. The SDGs would address the Agenda 21 aims produced at Rio 20 years ago. The SDGs would apply in all countries, and therefore act as a complementary, successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which end in 2015 and focuses mainly on the Global South. Furthermore, SDGs would also shift the centre of gravity away from the economic (poverty reduction) pillar of the MDGs and more towards the environmental and social pillars of sustainable development. For example, by providing measurements against metrics of planetary boundaries, and a strong focus on consumption patterns in the Global North. However, the SDGs should not detract from the urgent need for a post-2015 framework that focuses on poverty or from funding for that agenda.
- **National, Local and Regional Governance** – National Sustainable Development Strategies need to be revived and refreshed with full engagement and support from business and all parts of civil society. These strategies should be underpinned with route maps outlining national actions towards a green and fair economy. Advisory bodies such as Councils for Sustainable Development need to be adequately resourced

to play their full part in bringing forward new thinking and maintaining pressure for progress.

- **Reform of International Financial Institutions** – There must be better incorporation of sustainable development parameters in the existing International Financial Institutions, particularly in terms of funding, operations, strategic plans, objectives and implementation. Additionally, Rio+20 should pursue further reforms to strengthen the efficiency of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
- **Planetary Boundaries Institution** – As part of the Declaration on Planetary Boundaries, a Planetary Boundaries Institution (PBI) should be given the role of promoting and developing the principles of the Declaration.
- **High Commissioner/Ombudsperson for Future Generations** – The needs of future generations are a crucial element of sustainable development, but are not represented in the relevant decision-making processes. In order to remedy this situation and ensure that long-term interests are heeded, it is proposed that a High Commissioner/Ombudsperson for Future Generations be created at UN and national levels.
- **International Court for the Environment** – Environmental problems extend across international boundaries, but there are few effective international institutions to deal with them properly. Strengthening international environmental law mechanisms are essential to securing sustainable development. The Rio+20 outcome document should accordingly recommend the establishment of an International Court for the Environment (ICE). This would *build trust, harmonise and complement existing legal regimes and provide clarity and access to justice as well as redress.*

4. Sectoral Issues

There are also specific sectoral and thematic issues that must be discussed at Rio+20. These issues have reached a point of urgency and require immediate attention. The issues include, but are not limited to:

- **The water, energy and food securities nexus** – Global trends such as population growth and rising economic prosperity are expected to increase demand for energy, food and water, which will further compromise the sustainable use of natural resources and equitable access. This pressure on resources could ultimately result in shortages which may put water, energy and food security for the people at further risk, hamper economic development and poverty reduction, lead to social and geopolitical tensions and cause lasting irreparable environmental damage.

Ensuring the resilience of basic ecosystems services through the integration of common challenges and solutions of these securities is vital; which should be coupled with principles of fair and secure access to water, energy and food for all people.

- **The Blue Economy** – Healthy oceans provide tremendous economic, social, and environmental benefits that directly support livelihoods around the globe, and further support life-sustaining processes for the planet. Consideration and inclusion of these services at Rio+20 is imperative to ensure the global community can continue to rely on the marine environment on which it so essentially depends.
- **Sustainable Agriculture and Food** – Rio provides a key opportunity to set us on a new global course for food and agriculture. There is a need for urgent, radical reform of the global food system. As climate change is predicted to be a major driver of future food poverty, it is the duty of the planet's decision makers to take steps to avoid this coming catastrophe. This requires an understanding of the complexities of our planet's ecosystem services, the way in which they interact with one another and our impacts on them.

While these issues are seemingly environmental, they are, at heart, issues of fairness. Our current activities (e.g. fossil fuel and water consumption, use of chemicals and forest clearance) are reducing the planet's ability to sustain life. Our current food system is broken in that it allows widespread hunger, obesity, obscene waste, animal cruelty and appalling environmental degradation. It is a system that was set up with the primary purpose to deliver profit for an elite few. Through increased efficiency, reducing wastage and sharing best practice we have the ability to feed everyone on the planet without devoting any more land to food growing. Yet, at the moment estimates state that one in seven people on the planet go hungry everyday. So not only are we destroying our own only life support system, we are doing so in a highly inequitable manner.

UN policies and programmes and Rio+20 provide an opportunity for global leaders to agree on humane and sustainable agriculture policy and practice, with a focus on agro ecological approaches and recognising the fundamental role of small scale farmers in providing food for those most in need, the majority of which are women. In addition to improving the efficiency of food systems and reducing waste, a focus should be on improving production. These goals can be achieved in part through sharing of knowledge, best practice and technology.

Animals are important to biodiversity and they have an important role in maintaining the healthy balance of life on earth. Rio+20 outcomes must acknowledge the role of animals and their welfare within greener agriculture systems and wider society.

- **Renewable Energy** - Our current models of energy production are driving dangerous climate change. Addressing energy access through locally appropriate renewable technologies therefore enables development and catalyses a global shift away from

fossil fuels. By installing enough renewable energy, the cost of investment will continue to fall until it becomes competitive with fossil fuels, thereby making renewables the default choice. The necessary levels of investment will not be delivered by market forces alone, especially around the decentralised systems the International Energy Agency predicts will dominate future spending, meaning public policies and investment will play a pivotal role.

UN initiatives and Rio+20 are both opportunities that should not be missed, and policies should be based on the extensive research that exists on the most effective way to catalyse the uptake of renewable technology. Meanwhile, outcomes must ensure that the necessary energy transformation respects the principles of a green and fair economy. Communities and civil society must be central to all policies at each stage and on all levels (global, national and local level). This provides legitimacy and longevity through local ownership, as well as protection from environmentally and socially harmful technologies and practices which would not deliver sustainable development.

The installation, operation and maintenance of renewable energy is far more labour intensive than our large-scale, centralised fossil fuel-powered energy systems. Therefore pursuing a policy of renewable energy access that respects labour and human rights can create the quality of jobs and training programmes that are necessary for a sustainable economy in both the Global North and South.

- **Population dynamics and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights** – Population dynamics, including growth, urbanisation and migration, interact with the environment to influence availability of natural resources, biodiversity, climate change and other key Rio+20 priorities. Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health programmes that respect and protect human rights would enable all women and couples to plan and space their children as they wish, offering scope to achieve population stabilisation and contribute to poverty alleviation, gender equality, environmental sustainability and other important aspects for sustainable development.
- **Urbanisation and Planning** – Taking population dynamics into account, including population growth, urbanisation, migration and ageing, will help focus the sustainable development agenda. Between 1995 and 2005, the urban population of developing countries grew by an average of 1.2 million people per week, or around 165,000 people every day. By the middle of the 21st century, it is estimated that the urban population of these countries will more than double, increasing from 2.5 billion in 2009 to almost 5.2 billion in 2050.³ In 2008, developed nations were about 74 percent urban, developing nations were 44 percent urban and for the first time the world's population was evenly split between urban and rural areas. The urban areas of the world are expected to absorb almost all the population growth expected over the next four decades while at the same time drawing in some of the rural population.⁴ While the overall proportion of the world's population living in slums has fallen in the last decade from one quarter to one third,⁵ the population of slum dwellers in absolute numbers has continued to rise to in excess of 1 billion today.⁶ Efficient and inclusive urban mobility is essential for economic and social development since it enables citizens to access goods, services, jobs, markets, education opportunities and social contacts. Yet, urban planning and management has been unable to either cope with the growth thus far or address urban challenges. So without improved capability for urban planning and greater political

³ WHO Urban Population Growth URL:

http://www.who.int/gho/urban_health/situation_trends/urban_population_growth_text/en/index.html

⁴ UNDESA Population Division (2010) World Urbanisation Prospects, The 2009 Revision, Highlights. URL:

http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Documents/WUP2009_Highlights_Final.pdf

⁵ The Economist, Slum Populations: Slumdog Millions, March 24th 2010. URL:

<http://www.economist.com/node/15766578>

⁶ UN-HABITAT, Former Executive Director, Statements and Speeches, "Urban Housing Challenges and Opportunities in Developing Countries <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=1345&catid=14&typeid=8&subMenuId=0> [accessed 03.07.2011]

vision and support, this future increase is likely to cause significant socio-environmental problems for our cities and towns. The rapid urbanisation and growth of cities must be addressed so that there is fair access to resources as well as sustainable resource use. This means green and low impact development in cities, growing urban food networks, increasing urban biodiversity, reducing pollution, recycling resources, and managing land-use through robust and inclusive planning systems focussed on the delivery of sustainable development, operating within environmental limits and enabling social justice.