

**IMPLEMENTING DECISIONS FROM THE RIO+20 OUTCOME DOCUMENT  
TO BUILD  
A BETTER FUTURE**

A background paper prepared for the FORUM December 13, 2012 workshop  
Oslo, Norway

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*“International civil society networks come and go, rise and decline, provoke a fuss and wither on the vine. They take the familiar path from charisma to regularised routine, from inventiveness and passion to bureaucracy, hierarchy and instrumental reason. Or alternatively, they fracture, mutate, dissipate, gather no moss. To be in motion is to be at odds with many of the criteria on which serious politics has come to be judged.”*

“Social movements, World Politics?” R.B.J. Walker in Millennium: Journal of International Studies, 1994.

**To the reader of this paper**

Each of the four sections in this paper can be read as separate entities. The intro section is only two pages long. However, all four sections do belong organically to what I would call the general challenge of implementing the Rio plus 20 outcome decisions and building a better future. The key focus of the entire paper is the institutional challenge of building better global governance systems which focuses on UNEP and the organisational mechanism which is to follow the present Commission on Sustainable Development.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that this paper is a think piece, still in a somewhat draft format by the author. The analysis is indeed the ultimate responsibility of the author as are any mistakes, and if any occur, they are not intentional..

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### **1.1 - The future challenge of major groups and civil society - how do we implement the Rio+20 decisions and build the “Future we want”?**

The Rio+20 Outcome Document, aptly named “The Future We Want” has given us a challenge – to build a better future. This is no small challenge. In a complex and interdependent world, as the world today is, we can only do this in cooperation. Formidable forces oppose change and are adamant at preserving status quo. Still, a better world is constantly being created. Taking the decisions from the drawing board to the status of implementation is what we will be faced with in years to come. The relationship between ideas, knowledge and action is always a complex one. Bridging this gap will be of paramount importance to civil society. Bridging this gap will have to be done at all levels. Participating on the global arena is often being subject to a frustrating and slow-moving process. Results seem often to be few and far between, and when they come, they may appear to be of a piecemeal kind, and lagging far behind the more ambitious goals of civil society. But the intergovernmental processes do yield results. The global normative system having grown out of sixty years of intergovernmental collaboration, the more than seven hundred bi- and multilateral environment conventions, the many decisions on governance, on development on social issues are all tangible results from these processes. Civil society has a role in making these decisions better. It is fair to posit that without the adamant positions of civil society, all of these decisions would have been of a lesser quality. The UN is after Rio+20 again inviting civil society to collaborate, be creative, help develop, analyse, criticise, lobby and negotiate within the formal processes. If we walk away from these processes, their outcome will be weakened and ultimately of a lesser quality, and we would be contributing to excluding civil society from participating in similar processes in the future. We have a responsibility to fight the good fight for good governance and justice. Forgetting or ignoring the global arena is tantamount to wilful negligence of hard won democratic victories.

### **1.2 - Embracing democracy and good governance**

IFSD – the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development - and good governance came out of Rio strengthened. Whereas section IV of the Rio outcome document is the primary IFSD section with paragraphs 75 to 103 detailing governance issues, there are many references to governance elements interspersed throughout the document. Already in the first section aptly called ‘Our Common Vision’ we read in paragraph 10 of the document: “We acknowledge that democracy, good governance and the rule of law, at the national and international levels, as well as an enabling environment, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger. We reaffirm that to achieve our sustainable development goals we need institutions at all levels that are effective, transparent, accountable and democratic.”

### **1.3 - Will we build a better future?**

Former Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Anan was behind many challenging and illustrative reports, one of which is called “In larger Freedom”. Paragraph 57 of this report reads: “We fundamentally depend on natural systems and resources for our existence and development. Our efforts to defeat poverty and pursue sustainable development will be in vain if environmental degradation and natural resource depletion continue unabated.” Anan also stated that: “Good governance at the local, national and international levels is perhaps the single most important factor in promoting development and advancing the cause of peace.” The content of both these quotes are relevant to all levels of work – locally, nationally, regionally and globally that we must perform today.

#### **1.4 - What do we do with the Rio processes?**

The Rio outcome document has through its decisions started fifteen processes. They are all listed and referenced in paragraph 2.13 in this paper. Each of these processes warrants its own background paper. Several stand out – the SDGs process, dealing with a set of Sustainable Development Goals that are to be universal in nature and be functional by 2015, and the Open Working Group, the OWG – to deal with the SDGs and the integration of the dimensions of sustainable development are processes that need the ever vigilant, active and creative eye and participation of civil society. Already there are disturbing signs of governments trying to bury these important processes in a quagmire of bureaucratic dilettantism simply because these processes speak of a different and perhaps a more just future. Only a sustained, informed and active participation from a global civil society can help bring the processes to attain the goals that even governments expressed during the UN Summit days in Rio in June 2012. And when governments chose to forget, civil society must remember. That is an integral element of holding governments accountable. And only thus can we honestly say we promote “We, the peoples”.

#### **1.5 - Do we hold the future of the world in our hands?**

NGOs and other relevant stakeholders working on environment, health, democracy, human rights, just economy, fair distribution and creating popular interest with strong support and ensuing activities in their constituencies, form a potent alliance, a force strong enough and important enough to change the direction of history. 40 years on and the UN in general and UNEP in particular are again at a cross roads: a UN reform is actually suggested by the Rio Outcome document to deliver a unified message attached to a strong implementation programme. But do decision makers, civil servants, politicians, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders take the challenges from Rio+20 seriously? In other words, do these actors and players seem willing to act to save the world from an impending social, environmental and financial disaster?

#### **1.6 - This paper is divided into four sections.**

You have almost completed reading the short two- page introduction called **Section 1**, which covers a small overview of some of the outcome challenges found in the Rio+20 Outcome Document. Each of these four sections in this paper can be read as separate entities. However, all four do belong organically to what I would call the general challenge of implementing the Rio plus 20 outcome decisions and building a better future. The key focus of the entire paper is the institutional challenge of building better global governance systems and focuses on UNEP and the organisational mechanism which is to follow the present Commission on Sustainable Development.

#### **1.7 - Section 2**

is a more detailed analysis and overview of what happened to one of the two main agenda points from the Rio+20 Conference – the IFSD – the Institutional Framework on Sustainable Development. This section covers the new mechanism to be developed at the UN to deal with sustainable development, it covers UNEP and the key paragraphs dealing with this UN institution and it gives a general overview of the role that civil society is given by the Rio Outcome Document.

#### **1.8 - Section 3**

presents a few, brief historical facts of the UN and civil society, of UNEP and its founding days and brings a sketchy overview of CSD – the Commission on Sustainable Development.

## 1.9 - Section 4

contains a bullet point overview of what the UN in particular can offer civil society/NGOs if they choose to participate in UN processes. It closes with a number of key questions that an NGO should ask itself or at least consider when getting involved in an intergovernmental UN process.

## 2.0 - Governance came out of Rio plus 20 strengthened with new opportunities to influence global politics

IFSD, the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development, is dealt with in many different paragraphs throughout the outcome document, but this paper will primarily concentrate on the paragraphs that attempt to upgrade and strengthen governance on sustainable development within the UN, and review what happened to the efforts at strengthening UNEP

It is also worth noting that the Rio outcome document consistently refers to the three dimensions on sustainable development, and not the three pillars as has been the accepted 'jargon' since the formal introduction of the concept in 1987.<sup>2</sup> Using 'dimensions' rather than 'pillars' also expresses a widening and deepening understanding of the SD issue.

### 2.1 - A compromise institution on sustainable development

During the negotiating process leading up to the Summit, three options were discussed as possible mechanisms to upgrade the present Commission on Sustainable Development, CSD. And as often is the case in multilateral negotiations, the compromise wins out in the end.

The compromise was called a high-level political forum<sup>3</sup> and the Summit agreed to establish a process to develop this forum further. As paragraph 84 states:

“We decide to establish a universal intergovernmental high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently replacing the Commission. The high-level political forum shall follow up on the implementation of sustainable development and should avoid overlap with existing structures, bodies and entities in a cost-effective manner.”

### 2.2 - Which functions in the new institution?

A tacit agreement among a majority of nations had been reached before Rio 20 opened on a number of functions which the new mechanism could perform. These functions are listed in paragraph 85, and proposes that the new mechanism could: provide political leadership, make sure the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development is carried out throughout the UN system, carry out regular dialogues, develop an action oriented agenda, follow up decisions stated in Agenda 21 and the JPOI and implement these, emphasise and

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<sup>2</sup> The term sustainable development is usually associated with the so-called Brundtland commission and their report titled 'Our Common Future', where the three pillars of sustainable development is referred to: the economic, social and environmental pillar.

<sup>3</sup> As is explained later in this paper, the high level political forum is written in lower case letters. This is extremely important. Changing this writing to higher case letters, or abbreviating it to HLPF, may be seen as prescriptive and set precedence in naming the forum a Forum, which in the UN is a mechanism with low political priority. To be consistent, I have therefore chosen to write the mechanism in full every time – the high level political forum, and not be tempted to use any other designation at this juncture in time.

use science and evidence based decisions and develop mechanisms that will allow for ‘appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges’.

### **2.3 - What does §84 promise – if anything?**

First - §84 seeks to establish a mechanism that would elevate the importance of sustainable development within the UN and subsequently also within the multilateral world. The mechanism is loosely named a forum, but written with lower-case letters, indicating that the mechanism is yet neither placed in the political hierarchy of the UN nor is it given a political designation with a mandate.

Should the resulting outcome from the process dealing with the high level political forum be to establish a Forum, such as the UN Forum on Forests, it is of utmost importance to understand that a Forum within the UN system is treated like a subsidiary, functional committee of ECOSOC. This is the exact same position that CSD enjoyed in the intergovernmental hierarchy between 1992 and 2011. CSD was (and still is) a subsidiary body with subsidiary importance at the UN. Establishing a sustainable development forum along these lines would accordingly not be a move that would strengthen IFSD.

### **2.4 - What will replace the Commission on Sustainable Development?**

Paragraph 84 gives indications of the political importance of the new mechanism. The proposed high level political forum will be as it signifies at a “high level position” as well as being ‘universal’ and ‘intergovernmental’. This indicates much more than a subsidiary level mechanism.

However, it is of utmost importance that the new mechanism stays true to the content of paragraphs 84 and 85, including the governance and sustainable development messages as well as the integration of the major groups/civil society found throughout the Rio+20 Outcome Document. Paragraphs 84 and 85 outline in broad strokes the functions the new mechanism needs to perform. The normative content of the entire outcome document points to the political importance the high level political forum should have in the future. It would be important to understand and develop the new mechanism with an all-out operational mandate. As it is now, the reference to ‘operational’ is only found in §85d – where an ‘action oriented agenda’ should be seen in relation to ‘emerging issues’. Developing an operational mandate is no small task as many CSD member nations were often quick to denounce CSD for not being operational after the review that took place at WSSD and CSD 11(2003).

### **2.5 - IEG and ISDG - an important conceptual and political difference**

Over the past ten years a growing understanding of the differences between the two concepts – International Environmental Governance and International Sustainable Development Governance has taken place. The two concepts were often mixed and sometimes used as synonyms in the lead of to WSSD in 2002. This resulted in creating confusion over how governance and implementation of governance in relation to the environment and to sustainable development were to be handled, not the least institutionally. The Rio Outcome Document reflects this deepening of understanding. To clearly differentiate between the two governance concepts, Chapter C deals with IEG, International Environmental Governance.

### **2.6 - UNEP – in better shape than ever?**

High hopes and high ambitions described the initial attempts to upgrade UNEP as the primary global institution on environment with a powerful mandate in the Rio process. Again two camps developed and again a compromise won out. Efforts were made at an early stage in the preparatory work to upgrade UNEP to a specialized agency. The EU seemed uncompromising in its effort to create such a unit and referred to their proposal as the World Environment

Organisation. But even if that proposition received staunch support from most African nations lead by Kenya, the necessary unanimous consensus was never reached. Paradoxically, those who opted for a specialised agency as well as those who struggled against it, all claimed to have UNEP's and global environment's best interest at hand.

Even though only four paragraphs in the Rio Outcome Document (87 – 90) deal with UNEP, the organisation came out of the process strengthened. And in some ways this also reflects the growing understanding of environment among the nations of the world. Environmental protection and healthy ecosystems are strongly linked to the well-being of people and of the planet, as well as to poverty eradication and such language is not always seen in documents at GA level receiving wholehearted support from G77 plus China.

### **2.7 - UNEP - in command of the environmental pillar**

Chapter C of the IFSD section is called “Environmental pillar in the context of sustainable development”. This establishes beyond doubt the fact that the environment is the responsibility of UNEP, also in the work mandated to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development by focusing on incorporating environmental concerns across the UN System. Paragraph 87 gives UNEP the mandate to work on International Environmental Governance (IEG). This must be seen as an acknowledgement and an expression that there is indeed a difference between ISDG – International Sustainable Development Governance – and IEG, with sustainable development governance and the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, environment, social and economic, given to the proposed high level political forum.

### **2.8 - UNEP strengthened**

The new and strengthened UNEP will have universal membership, possibly better funding, strengthen its capacity to pursue and develop its science base, proved capacity building to all nations and help develop environmentally sound technology. Rio+20 also decided to adopt the 10-year framework programme (10YFP) on sustainable consumption and production. Paragraph 226 states that: “We adopt the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns, as contained in document A/CONF.216/5, and highlight that the programmes included in the 10-year framework are voluntary.” UNEP will again focus on these issues.

Rio+20 mandated UNEP to strengthen its regional presence and be the environment coordinator of the UN. As paragraph 88 C states: “Enhance the voice of UNEP and its ability to fulfil its coordination mandate within the United Nations system by strengthening UNEP engagement in key United Nations coordination bodies and empowering UNEP to lead efforts to formulate United Nations system-wide strategies on the environment;” This last sentence may create many interesting debates within the UN family as almost all UN bodies have assumed their own responsibility and interpretation of how the environment should be dealt with.

### **2.9 - UNEP and civil society**

Paragraph 88 h states: “Ensure the active participation of all relevant stakeholders drawing on best practices and models from relevant multilateral institutions and exploring new mechanisms to promote transparency and the effective engagement of civil society.”

With the strong reference to the Malmoe Declaration from 2000, UNEP has been given a mandate to upgrade civil society and other stakeholders. Paragraph 14 from that

Declaration states: (the Declaration contains only 25 paragraphs of which 7 are devoted to civil society) “Civil society plays a critically important role in addressing environmental issues. The role, capabilities and involvement of civil society organizations has seen a substantial increase over recent years, which highlights the need for national Governments and for UNEP and international organizations to enhance the engagement of these organizations in their work on environmental matters.”

As the major groups and civil society with relevant stakeholders have been given prominent roles throughout the document, it would be logical to strengthen the institutional and operational system around the major groups and other stakeholders at UNEP, at headquarters as well as throughout UNEP's six regional offices.

UNEP has also been asked through the Rio +20 Outcome Document to explore new mechanisms to promote transparency and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders and increase its effort to disseminate information.

### **2.10 - Positioning the major groups and civil society**

The importance of civil society and the major groups is integrated and emphasised throughout the Rio+20 Outcome Document. In the opening paragraph of the document, in the first sentence, we read “... with the full participation of civil society”. Referring to the General Assembly resolution calling for Rio+20, and with the subsequent modalities developed by the Bureau specifically involving civil society, this quote is to be understood as ‘we will all renew and ensure our commitments to promote sustainable development’.

Chapter C under Section II, Renewing Political Commitments is all about civil society, the major groups and other relevant stakeholders. Although other stakeholders are mentioned, there is little specificity as to which stakeholders the document addresses. This should be revisited. The section reiterates unequivocally what was initially stated already in paragraph 13 that sustainable development can only be achieved through a working alliance with governments, business and civil society and other stakeholders. Reference is made to civil society in the chapters on Green Economy, the Sustainable Development Goals ( the most innovative outcome from the Rio process) and in the chapters on implementation. There are also direct references to civil society/ the Major Groups in the paragraphs on IFSD and UNEP (§ 85 and § 88).

### **2.11 - Governance – gaps to be filled, but there is hope**

The biggest gaps are still found in the areas of economic development and trade. A few paragraphs are all the same worth noting and remembering. Chapter D under the section on IFSD called “International financial institutions and United Nations operational activities” does talk about the need to govern these institutions. §92 has the following language: “...and reiterate the importance of the reform of the governance of those institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions.” And in the section on “Means of implementation” § 252 states that: “We acknowledge that good governance and the rule of law at the national and international levels are essential for sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger.”

Almost reminiscent of the discussions in Johannesburg on trade, the paragraphs in the Rio Outcome Document deals with trade issues in a rather bland and docile manner. It is as if trade is still the powerful force in the world that nature and humans need to bow down to and respect no matter what. Another weak point is the lack of governance issues and subsequent



language in relation to the green economy discourse and the Sustainable Development Goals. The fact that the struggle to have an ombudsperson for future generation did not generate enough political support is also a weak point in the Outcome Document. It is to be hoped that good governance, as the underlying principle and overarching goal of the Rio+20 Process, will continue to play an increasingly important role in the sustainable future we want to have and develop.

## **2.12 - Conclusion**

The Rio Outcome Document, aptly named “The Future We Want” is a pragmatic and a paradigmatic outcome document. As has been pointed out through this document, new issues have been identified and recognised in the discussion relating to the institutional framework on sustainable development and environment at the UN.

Summing up a few general impressions, it is fair to state that:

- ⊙ Sustainable development and the environment came out of Rio strengthened as did IFSD and good governance
- ⊙ There is consistent reference to the three dimensions of sustainable development and their integration; there are no longer ‘the three pillars’ of sustainable development, metaphorically and practically impossible to integrate
- ⊙ With major groups and civil society referred to and given a position in the process through 8 of the 29 paragraphs in the UN GA resolution calling for the Rio+20Conference, it is fair to state that such a process has never taken place before in the history of humanity
- ⊙ With the Bureau’s decision to invite all stakeholders in the world to contribute to the zero draft document, the outcome document is, despite a few setbacks, the result of an open and interactive process where civil society played a not insignificant role.

The Rio Outcome Document has started 15 processes (annexed), and again these processes rest on the value basis of the spirit of Rio which is permeated by the principles of good governance – open, transparent, interactive, accountable, accessible and participatory.

## **2.13 - The 15 processes**

The fifteen processes to be initiated by the Rio 20 work and anchored in the Rio Outcome Document, are chronologically listed as they appear by the numbering of the paragraphs and not as an attempt to prioritise according to relevance or importance.

- The green economy process, § 56 -71
- The high level forum on SD, § 86
- Intergenerational solidarity, the ombudsperson for future generations, § 86
- Strengthening UNEP, § 88
- integration of the three dimensions of SD, § 93
- Outcome of Delivering as One Process, strengthening operational activities, § 95
- Sustainable Energy for All (SG initiative), § 129
- GA process on the maritime jurisdiction beyond national boundaries, conservation and resource use of marine resources, §161, 162
- Challenges facing Small Island States, § 180
- 10 Year Programme on Sustainable Consumption and Production, § 226
- The Sustainable Development Goals – through to 2015 § 248,249
- Assess financing needs, § 255, 257
- Clean environmentally friendly easily adaptable and usable technologies, § 273

- The registry of commitments, § 283
- Sustainable agriculture – end hunger (Secretary General initiative), announced in Rio

### 3.0 - The UN and civil society has a history

According to its Charter, the UN formally recognises only three entities as official participants; these are the official national delegations, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations, NGOs<sup>4</sup>. The latter is recognised through paragraph 71 of the UN Charter. To be accepted as an official UN player, to be accredited as the technical phrase is, and to be heard and be influential, a number of minimum criteria will have to be met. It is the NGO committee within ECOSOC<sup>5</sup> that sets the formal rules of accreditation, and it is this body that formally issues the letters of accreditation to NGOs, but it is the behaviour, input and work and its quality or lack thereof that decides the impact and efficiency of NGOs.

NGOs have been working the UN scene for ages now and hold a number of facts to be self-evident: that the UN is an intergovernmental system, that the member states hold the decision making powers, and that any change must take place within the confines of the UN legal and formal framework. If you do not know the system, how to work it and respect it, you will never be successful. This is a basic lesson in politics that every player understands.

#### 3.1 - Stories need to be told – from UNEP in 1972

Stories need to be told, and history documented. Sometimes stories need to be retold and history reread for it to make an impact.

How many among the active people within the NGO population today (or within the international community for that matter) know or remember the story of Ms. Dora Obi Chizea from Ibadan in Nigeria and what she did at the founding conference of UNEP in Stockholm in June, 1972? Or the popular demonstrations through Stockholm against whale hunting that contributed to creating a moratorium on the whale hunt? Or the demonstrations outside the UN conference against the Vietnam War and the use of Agent Orange?

During a discussion at the Environmental Forum during one of those beautiful Scandinavian summer days back in June 1972, when the well-known author and demographer Paul Ehrlich was expounding on his theory asserting that the population explosion was the biggest threat to the global environment, Ms Chizea resolutely got to her feet, took the microphone away from the somewhat surprised Ehrlich and said that as this discussion was about the third world, she and her colleagues at the conference would direct the content. She challenged the population bias, and infused into the environmental debate a completely new perspective, that environmental degradation was caused by numerous factors, and economic exploitation was one of them.

Outside the halls of the UN conference in Stockholm in 1972, some 7000 people, many of them war veterans, demonstrated against the use of Agent Orange in the warfare in Vietnam. The Swedish Prime Minister at the time, Mr. Olof Palme, took the issue of Agent Orange, a potent pesticide used to de-foil the forests in Vietnam, into the discussion at the UN Conference.

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<sup>4</sup> Anita Anand in “Whose world is it anyway?”, John Foster & Anita Anand, editors, The UNA, Ottawa, Canada, 1999, page 67

<sup>5</sup> ECOSOC, The Economic and Social Council, one of the 5 permanent UN bodies

“The demonstration was part of an effort to create people's participation in world environment problems by making a People's Forum and other activities protesting against the UN Conference. Other protests from scientists and popular organisations made the issue intensively debated in spite of protests and many other attempts to stop public discussion from the US. The Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme addressed it at the official conference and the US stopped using Agent Orange in Vietnam before the war ended. A key factor in the integration of different international alternative activities in the streets and discussion fora was the local social and environment group that both before and since then has maintained a strongly participating and initiating international activities cooperating with many different popular movements.”<sup>6</sup>

### **3.2 - That was 1972 - this is 2012**

Sustainable development concerns have finally become hot topics on the global agenda. People in general, and an ever-growing group of responsible and influential politicians feel compelled to work on these issues. Granted, the global sustainable development agenda seems at the moment to consist of only climate and energy issues. Still, the fact that so many talk about environmental issues, social rights and even just economic growth and the fact that there seems to be a growing understanding that something must be done to these issues, may propel key institutions of the UN including UNEP to a new importance in global politics.

### **3.3 - The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) - an experiment in intergovernmental participatory democracy**

Many have referred to the CSD7 process as one of the more intriguing and interesting processes for testing innovative ways to involve civil society in intergovernmental processes. Begun after Rio in 1992, some have hailed it as a success in international democratic development bringing the voices of the peoples in direct interactive roles with representatives of governments, others maintain that the CSD amounted to little less than a talk-show under the aegis of good governance. It is however fair to state that CSD did not fail sustainable development, neither did sustainable development fail CSD. Governments failed sustainable development and as a consequence also failed CSD.

The sheer numbers of representatives from civil society that over the years found their ways to and participated in the CSD processes, may be indicative of the importance these representatives attached to this political process: The WSSD, the pinnacle of the CSD process in 2002, had more than 8 000 civil society persons attend, close to 10 000 participated in Rio plus 20. By CSD 13 in 2005 the number of civil society representatives had climbed to above 1000 pre-registered with well over 800 participating from all over the world, figures that would be fairly stable until the last of the CSDs before the Rio 20 process started in earnest in 2011.

## **4.0 - What opportunities do the intergovernmental system in general and the UN in particular offer civil society?**

### **4.1 - A bullet point overview of some of the opportunities**

The UN is little used by civil society, many opportunities to work successfully for policy and implementation outcomes are missed because civil society fails to understand the

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<sup>6</sup> Tord Björk “The emerging global NGO system, Political Globalisation at UNCHE 1972 and UNCED 1992”, Folkørelsesstudiegruppen, Sweden, [info@folkorelser.nu](mailto:info@folkorelser.nu)

<sup>7</sup> CSD – the Commission on Sustainable Development, a standing committee under ECOSOC charged to follow up and monitor the decisions taken at Rio, UNCED in 1992 and at the WSSD, in Johannesburg 2002.

intergovernmental system and the many opportunities it offers civil society to work successfully.

#### **4.2 - In general the UN and the intergovernmental system offer civil society opportunities to:**

- Setting agendas
  - Negotiating outcomes
  - Conferring legitimacy
  - Implementing solutions
  - Influencing the text that will be negotiated;
  - Building and cultivating alliances for future work;
  - Showcasing studies of successes that your organization has achieved;
  - Learning about how intergovernmental negotiations work;
  - Raising funds for your work
- 
- A forum for a broad discussion
  - On overarching or cross cutting issues
  - On normative issues,
  - On issues that have direct relevance for work on local, national and regional level
  - Access to the outcome document as it is being developed
  - Allowed your organisation to have written comments to the outcome document
  - To bring the result of the negotiations home, and follow up the decisions and see how they are being implemented
  - To disseminate information about decisions taken
  - To see if decisions taken at UN level should be brought to other sectors of the decision making process in your country, in addition to the participating ministry
  - Connect with governments
  - Provoke governments
  - Criticise with a friendly attitude
  - Offer new insights
  - Showcase major group benchmarks
  - Network with other NGOs, major groups
  - Ask questions
  - Discuss what can make a successful partnership, keeping the integrity of various stakeholders intact
  - Identify good practices that could be replicated
  - Identify policy practices impairing partnerships and processes from being developed
  - Identify a framework for developing partnerships and processes
  - Raise issues and bring them to the table, and thus help influence the agenda
  - Keep the issues of participation, accountability and transparency alive and relevant
  - Political leadership and agenda setting
  - Ensuring implementation
  - Offer periodic review mechanism
  - Monitor progress
  - Transfer of environmentally and sustainably sound technologies
  - Capacity building and know-how
  - Analyse relevant input from NGOs
  - Integrated the scientific and the private sector

... and so on

#### **4.3 - Overarching goals and vision for Major Group participation at the UN**

The strength of civil society will of necessity grow when various organisations can work together. Networks have proved highly influential in a number of policy contexts at intergovernmental levels. To help facilitate such networks, common goals and visions need to be had.

Collaboration among NGOs could rest on a common vision with a common set of goals. The following could serve as a point of departure and inspire to a discussion on overarching goals: “To work for an integrated approach between UN and civil society where both can play significant roles in shaping modern policy based on interactive democracy; to work to get the best-qualified organisations to participate actively in the policy processes at various mechanisms and bodies of the UN; to bring the goals and visions of these entities to the general public to create awareness and understanding; to enhance proficiency and promote capacity building; to solicit a wider public participation in the development and adoption of appropriate strategies for civil society in the work for sustainable development, its three dimensions as well as the environment in all its aspects.”

#### **4.4 - Concerns to be address for a successful civil society participation**

The above outlined vision could find its expression in many ways. But areas of concerns to be resolved and understood by civil society could also be listed in the following way:

“To enhance participation for all 9 Major Groups<sup>8</sup> and other relevant stakeholders in the follow up to Rio, they should focus on five overarching areas of concern. They are:

- Governance and multi-stakeholder processes, such as access, legitimacy, transparency etc.
- Issues development, policy work, capacity building and lobby
- Information dissemination
- Lobby, Implementation and follow up
- Preparation, participation, travel and related logistical concerns

More specifically:

- To maximise participation of representatives of the 9 Major Groups from across the planet in the various relevant UN for a, UNEP Governing Council (UNEP GC) and the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (UNEP GMEF), CSD and its successor, and other relevant UN for a;
- To facilitate and see that Major Group’s members with specific issue knowledge are brought into the focus at these UN meetings, both in the local, national and regional contexts;
- To ensure balanced representation on the basis of gender, focus and region.
- To ensure the issues that are relevant to UNEP, CSD, the COPs etc and their related meetings as expressed through the agenda points at the meetings are dealt with by knowledgeable representatives of the Major Groups;
- To ensure that participating Major Group members have access to information and are able to, in an informed manner, participate at all levels and at all times including informal meetings and have free and *unfettered access to delegates*.

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<sup>8</sup> As specified in Agenda 21.

#### **4.5 - Central questions to be asked to members of the civil society community in preparing for intergovernmental work**

In preparing members of civil society to participate in intergovernmental processes, a number of questions should be asked of civil society for them to at least think about. These questions can be summarised in the following way:

##### ***Are we willing to:***

- Be present at the sessions, every day and full time;
- Defend language and hard won victories;
- Bring forth substantive knowledge and coherence;
- Involve organisations at all levels, from local to global.

##### ***Are we willing to***

- Stay the full time sequence and plan for that;
- Understand what it implies for the organisation to do precisely that in terms of input, work-hours, strategy, finances etc, and take the practical consequences of such an understanding;
- Legitimise to our organisation that working on this rather ‘expensive’ and time consuming processes for several years period is within our expressed mandate;

##### ***Are we willing to consider the following:***

- Make sure that we all bring relevant and well thought out positions to the table;
- Make sure the people we bring to the conferences have first-hand knowledge of the issues at stake and have good contacts with their constituency;
- Make sure we are accountable to a constituency and have consulted as much as is practicable, with that constituency

##### ***Finally, the following should be addressed:***

- How would you develop a two-year (several years) strategy to be involved in the Rio plus 20 follow-up (one or several of the 15 identified processes?);
- Which of the processes will you choose to concentrate on?
- How do you plan to integrate the various segments of the identified process (processes) into your organization’s work programme?
- What would your needs be to fulfil your designed strategies?
- How could the various major-group focal points serve you best to become an influential stakeholder?
- How do you plan to involve your stakeholder constituency and explain the relationship between the grass roots and the intergovernmental level?
- How will you utilise the fact that your government is already working on these issues, have made reports on this (a public document) and probably sent it to the UN?
- How do you plan to make this into a national campaign to make other organisations, your media and people in general aware of what’s going on?
- Your country has probably written a national strategy on environment/ sustainability/ governance issues – provided you know of it, how will you use it in this context?

environment in the 1970s through the Stockholm Conference for Environment in 1972 and has stayed with this arena ever since. After having worked on disseminating information on and teaching about UN issues during the 80s and early 90s, he has followed and worked with the CSD process (UN Commission for Sustainable Development) diligently every year since 1997, when he that year, worked as a liaison officer between the UN and the NGO community at the UN headquarters in New York. After his first assignments for the UN in Latin America in the 70's, Jan-Gustav has worked and lived in Botswana, Uganda, the US and Sweden in addition to Norway. Between 1985 and 2005, Jan-Gustav reorganised, coordinated and helped build a development-environment NGO (Utviklingsfondet) in Norway from scratch to be one of the largest ones in Norway with projects in more than 20 countries in the developing world. He has extensive NGO experience developed through three decades in almost all continents in the world. He speaks several languages, is a seasoned lecturer, and has lectured at the University of Oslo, and given workshops and guest lectures all over the world on the UN, governance, the environment and sustainable development, evaluated projects and organisations, advised governments on relations with civil society, chaired UN meetings and facilitated UN processes, translated several books from English to Norwegian and authored two books and numerous articles on the environment. For more than 10 years he was the senior editor for a UN conference newsletter on environment and sustainable development, and still comments regularly on sustainability issues while observing and writing on political behaviour.

For ten years (2001 – 2011) he served as the UN CSD NGO Co-Organising Partner coordinating for UN DESA (New York) global NGO input into the UN CSD process as well as serving on a global civil society committee for UNEP on environmental governance and civil society policy issues for that organisation where he also performed the same duties as those for the UN CSD. He now functions an adviser for these committees. From 2010 until end of July 2012, he also held a central position as a consultant to the UN at the global level on governance, modalities and process-related work leading up to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development that was held in June 2012 in Brazil, the Rio plus 20 Conference. As a trainer on the Rio process and content, he conducted more than 30 workshops all over the world for the UN in the same period.

Jan-Gustav joined Stakeholder Forum, (SF) London, UK (<http://www.stakeholderforum.org/sf/>) early in 2011 to work with them on the UN DESA project administrating, developing and carrying out global capacity building and NGO/ civil society liaison work and working on governance issues, all in connection with the UN Summit on Sustainable Development. He is presently involved (with SF) in contributing to develop the new organisational mechanisms at the UN to deal with sustainable development policies as a result of decisions made at the UN Summit in Rio in June 2012.

He joined in 2008, the Haring Woods Studio, ([www.haringwoods.com](http://www.haringwoods.com)), a think tank based in London, UK, as an associate. For 12 years, from 2000, Jan-Gustav held a principal position in ANPED, (The Northern Alliance for Sustainability, [www.anped.org](http://www.anped.org)), now a Brussels-based, EU funded, international NGO, and helped develop this organisation to become one of the largest networks on sustainable development in Europe. In addition, while also having time to function as a free-lance adviser, Jan-Gustav advices on CSR issues for a private-sector Norwegian think tank called PURE CSR (<http://www.purecsr.no/?lang=2>). When he is not travelling the world, writing, lecturing or otherwise working abroad on environment, governance and sustainability issues, he works out of his home outside Oslo, Norway.