

RIO+20

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), popularly known as the “Earth Summit”, was held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. This groundbreaking UN meeting led to the establishment of a number of international environmental conventions and processes, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as to the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). One of the major outcomes for indigenous peoples was their recognition as a major group by the Rio Conference, thus providing for the political participation of indigenous peoples in various processes relating to sustainable development.

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. During the WSSD, representatives of the indigenous peoples submitted a document known as the “Kimberly Declaration” and defined a Plan of Implementation for the next decade. In these documents, indigenous peoples committed to contribute to achieving the human and environmental sustainability of the world. At the same time, the WSSD acknowledged the potential of indigenous peoples to act as “stewards” of national and global natural resources, and reaffirmed the important role of indigenous peoples in sustainable development. The Johannesburg Declaration of 2002 states: “We reaffirm the vital role of the indigenous peoples in sustainable development.” However, translating this political recognition into concrete advances locally, nationally, regionally and internationally remains a huge challenge for indigenous peoples. Twenty years on from the first Rio Conference, indigenous peoples are still facing problems and the non-implementation of conditions and rights pertaining to indigenous peoples in relation to sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) was organized in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 64/236 (A/RES/64/236) to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 Rio Conference and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 WSSD. The

Conference focused on two themes: (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development. It resulted in a political document entitled “The future we want”.

Preparing for Rio+20

In August 2011, indigenous representatives met in Manaus, Brazil, to develop a strategy and process for Rio+20, resulting in the Manaus Declaration. An Indigenous Global Coordinating Committee was established in order to coordinate the activities leading up to the Rio+20 conference. Following the meeting in Manaus, and as one of the official organizing partners of indigenous peoples as a major group in Rio+20,¹ Tebtebba was given the task of compiling a contribution for an indigenous submission to the Rio+20 Zero Draft document, the document that would constitute the basis for the negotiations. This indigenous zero draft document was submitted on 1 November 2011, and contained five key messages:

1. Recognition of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.
2. Recognition of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a standard in the implementation of sustainable development at all levels.
3. The cornerstones of green economies are diverse local economies, in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development, biodiversity loss and climate change.
4. Safeguarding of the lands, territories and resources, and associated customary management and sustainable use systems.
5. Indigenous and traditional knowledge as distinct and special contributions to 21st century learning and action.

These five key messages constituted the basis for further negotiations and advocacy work by indigenous peoples, and for the inter-sessional and preparatory meetings which took place from January 2012 – June 2012 in New York. Indigenous representatives lobbied heavily for the five key messages to be included in

the official document. Furthermore, they built alliances with other major groups and pushed for common concerns.

Through the global steering committee, indigenous representatives met on several occasions during the preparatory process to discuss their strategies, agree on their presence at the Rio+20 conference and update each other on regional processes. Furthermore, indigenous peoples organized several regional preparatory meetings for Rio+20. The regional positions and strategies consolidated at those meetings were ultimately fed into the global process and indigenous peoples' positions.²

Indigenous peoples at Rio+20

The official Rio+20 conference took place in June in Rio de Janeiro. A large number of indigenous representatives participated in the Rio+20 official meeting, as well as in the Peoples' Summit (the parallel event organized by civil society). They engaged in the official negotiations, organized side events and participated in events and roundtables organized by governments, business, NGOs, etc.³ Outside the official conference, indigenous peoples organized three events:

The Kari-Oca II, the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Territories, Rights and Sustainable Development, organized by the Brazilian Inter Tribal Committee in cooperation with other indigenous organizations from around the world such as the Cordillera Peoples' Alliance, the Indigenous Environmental Network and others. The event was entitled Kari-Oca II in reference to the indigenous peoples' event that took place parallel to the official meeting in 1992. The meeting reaffirmed the key role of indigenous peoples' cultures and values, and the right of Mother Earth, and also rejected the push to "commodify" nature and ecosystems, in contrast with the current "capitalist" model. Over 500 indigenous leaders signed the Kari-Oca II Declaration, which was subsequently delivered to the Brazilian government.⁴

The **Campamento Tierra Libre y Vida Plena** took place during the Peoples' Summit. It brought together indigenous representatives from the Amazon region to call for recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to land, territories and resources and to reject the increasing encroachment onto their land by the extractive industries, in collaboration with national governments. Many activities took

place around this event and more than 1,800 participants took part in these. The outcomes declaration was delivered to the Rio+20 Secretariat together with the Declaration from the Indigenous Peoples' International Conference on Sustainable Development.

The **Indigenous Peoples' International Conference on Sustainable Development** met with the goal of sharing indigenous peoples' experiences, perspectives and practices with regard to sustainable development. The conference was organized by the Global Coordination Committee, based in Manaus, and included approx. 200 indigenous participants and support organizations from around the world. The conference ended with the official adoption of a Declaration.⁵ The Declaration was launched at a side event to the official meeting, organized by Tebtebba, with presentations from each of the seven indigenous regions of the world.⁶

Outcomes

The outcome of Rio+20 is a document entitled "The future we want".⁷ A further 700 plus voluntary commitments were made by governments, UN institutions, inter-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, etc.⁸ In light of the strong disagreements between developing and developed states throughout the negotiations, many see as a success the fact that governments managed to agree on an outcome document and on some processes that should herald the way forward. Many representatives from civil society, however, expressed their strong disappointment at the weak outcome of the conference.

The following is a short overview of the text of "The Future We Want" in relation to indigenous peoples' issues.

The future we want

The outcome document of the Rio+20 conference, "The Future We Want" is divided into six chapters. Each chapter includes paragraphs relevant to indigenous issues. Those included below are only a few examples and many may find other paragraphs equally relevant.

1. Our common vision

§ 9 reaffirms the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and emphasizes the responsibilities of all states to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

2. Renewing political commitment

§ 49 recognizes the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This is the first time an international agreement “recognizes the UNDRIP” and not only “notes” it; **§ 52** recognizes local livelihoods as important contributions to sustainable development, referring to small-scale farmers, fishers, pastoralists and foresters. This is the first time that pastoralism has been recognized in a UN document. Hunters and gatherers, who often constitute the most marginalized and weakest indigenous peoples, are however not mentioned.

3. Green economy

§58 (j) recognizes indigenous peoples’ contribution to sustainable development by stating a commitment to “*enhance the welfare of indigenous peoples and their communities, other local and traditional communities, and ethnic minorities, recognize and supporting their identity, culture and interests and avoid endangering their cultural heritage, practices and traditional knowledge, preserving and respecting non-market approaches that contribute to the eradication of poverty*”.

4. Institutional framework

§84-86 set out the framework for a high-level political forum on sustainable development that should replace the Commission on Sustainable Development. **§88** commits to strengthening UNEP and provides for a procedural plan. In **§88(h)**, the active participation of all relevant stakeholders is ensured.

5. Framework for action

§109 includes a reference to indigenous peoples and particularly mentions enhanced access to secure land tenure, knowledge and appropriate and affordable technologies, among others. Furthermore, the paragraph recognizes “*the importance of traditional sustainable agricultural practices, including traditional seed supply systems, including for many indigenous peoples and lo-*

cal communities". §111 is important, as it reaffirms the need to promote more sustainable agriculture such as crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture and §112 stresses the need to enhance sustainable livestock production systems, including through the improvement of pasture land. Furthermore, this paragraph recognizes the interlinkage between the livelihoods of farmers, including pastoralists, and the health of livestock. §130 - 131 stress the importance of sustainable tourism and refer to indigenous peoples in terms of their access to finance for creating tourism enterprises. §175 commits "to observe the need to ensure access to fisheries and the importance of access to markets by subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fisherfolk and women fish workers, as well as indigenous peoples and their communities,...". §197 recognizes the role of the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples in conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as well as indigenous peoples' dependency on biodiversity. §211 recognizes the sustainable use of mountain resources by indigenous peoples and local communities and also their marginalization. §229 stresses the need for equal access to education, including for indigenous peoples. §238 commits to "an enabling environment for improving the situation of women and girls, including among indigenous peoples".

However, for indigenous peoples, the most negative sections of the document are those on mining and forests. Some indigenous representatives present at Rio strongly questioned the fact that a document on sustainable development included a section on mining at all. The rights language was deleted entirely from the mining section, as well as any reference to indigenous peoples in general. The section on forests includes no reference to indigenous peoples and refers to people and communities, rather than peoples (with an "s"). There is no reference to safeguards. §193, for example, promotes secure land tenure in relation to improving the livelihoods of people and communities but only in accordance with national legislation and priorities.

Way forward

The Rio meeting also decided to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the implementation of which should begin in 2015. Monitoring of the inter-governmental process on SDGs is important. A working group will be consti-

tuted at the UN General Assembly (in 2012), comprising 30 representatives nominated by Member States. It will decide on its methods of work, including developing modalities to ensure the full involvement of relevant stakeholders and expertise from civil society, the scientific community and the UN system. It will submit its report to the 68th session of the General Assembly in 2013. The development of the SDGs will be closely linked to the MDG process. This puts a certain pressure on the negotiations, as the MDG process is in its evaluation phase and due to come to an end in 2015, when the implementation of the SDGs should start.

There is much work ahead for indigenous peoples to ensure that the efforts leading up to this conference and the positive elements of the outcome document are not forgotten in further global efforts for sustainable development. Some of the decisions from Rio+20 need to be monitored and indigenous peoples need to play a role in the implementation of these decisions. ○

Notes and references

- 1 Within the official set-up of Rio+20, every major group has two organizing partners, i.e. organizations that are responsible for the communication between the major group and the UN Secretariat. In the case of the indigenous peoples, the organizing partners are Tebtebba and the Indigenous Environmental Network.
- 2 In Africa, the indigenous peoples signed the Arusha Declaration: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/index.php?page=view&nr=1151&type=230&menu=38>
- 3 Major groups were also able to make an intervention at the 1st plenary. All statements can be found here: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/statementsrio20.html>
- 4 More information about this event, as well as the declaration, can be found at: <http://kariocaravana.org> and <http://indigenous4motherearthrioplus20.org/kari-oca-2-declaration/>
- 5 More information can be found on IWGIA's website or at <http://www.tebtebba.org/index.php/content/200-indigenous-peoples-and-rio-20>
- 6 <http://www.uncsd2012.org/index.php?page=view&type=88&nr=6&menu=54#>
- 7 <http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>
- 8 <http://www.uncsd2012.org/voluntarycommitments.html>

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