

Framing Document

World Centre for Sustainable Development – RIO+

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I. Background

1. The World Centre for Sustainable Development (RIO+ Centre) was established on June 24th, 2013 and represents one of the key outcomes from the Rio+20 Conference held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2012.
2. The Rio+20 Conference brought together world leaders and thousands of representatives from civil society, the private sector and governments resulting in the adoption of the The Future We Want Outcome Document which reaffirmed the inextricable link between social, economic and environmental policies for the achievement of sustainable development and human well-being.
3. Within this very broad realization, the urgent need for reducing various forms of inequalities and unsustainable practices, promoting equitable economic growth and creating opportunities for all came out as a clear imperative, as did the renewed commitment to poverty eradication and protecting/managing the natural resource base of economic and social development¹.
4. More recently, in his report to the 68th session of the General Assembly on the topic of MDGs and post-2015, the UN Secretary General underscored the centrality of Sustainable Development –in its integrated and inclusive form - as the global guiding principle necessary to ensure social justice and dignity for all. ²
5. While the importance and merit of these principles are difficult to dispute and easy to sign up to, ensuring that: (a) economic activities continue to be productive without undermining the people and natural resource base upon which they depend; (b) the benefits of economic growth are distributed more equally among societies and are used to finance the transition to a lower carbon footprint globally; (c) the basic principles of human rights and social justice are enforced by citizens, private sector and governments alike and; (d) that developing, emerging and developed countries do not

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¹ The Future We Want, Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (General Assembly Resolution 66/288), September 2012

² A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015, Report of the Secretary General to the Sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly, July 2013

view sustainable development as a restrictive model of development but rather a valuable opportunity to do things differently will require deeply transformative changes to current practices in order for the world to transit from good intentions to action.

6. The Rio+20 Conference evidenced the various convergent as well as divergent perspectives on what sustainable development is and how it should be implemented, but one message came out loud and clear and it was for more concrete action and accountability on moving forward towards *The Future We Want*.

Rio Dialogues: Engaging multiple voices in the sustainable development debate

The Rio Dialogues were hosted by UNDP and the Government of Brazil, to provide a direct channel for global citizens and civil society to participate in Rio+20. Over 70,000 people contributed and voted on recommendations to Member States on 10 sustainable development topics. A few common priorities emerged across topics, including the need for **tax and subsidy reform** and the importance of **education** as a means to move towards a more sustainable development pathway. The **elimination of fossil fuel subsidies** was the top recommendation overall with twice as many votes as any other recommendation. In support of the RIO+ Centre objective to become a hub for policy dialogue and action on sustainable development, a core activity of the Centre will be to build upon the model of the Rio Dialogues and to carry on this tradition of civil society engagement.

II. CONTEXT

7. Sustainable development is now a concept widely accepted and supported among decision makers from all over the world. While this is reason to celebrate, there are still important challenges involved in how to operationalize this concept in a way that is true to its spirit of integrated development for people and planet and how to ensure that 'sustainable development' becomes a mainstream approach for development, public policies as well as public and private initiatives.

8. The debate around sustainable development has to some extent been polarized due to the relative importance different groups give to the environmental, social or economic aspects of sustainable development. This has also created some tensions between developing and developed countries and raised questions of equity both within and between countries. Over the last decades an increasing number of organizations working as mediators and conveners of dialogue and knowledge exchange have been established and the role they have been playing is critical to the promotion of sustainable development.

9. While several organizations (civil society, governments, academia and think-tanks) subscribe to the concept and do great work around this issue, many of them still engage with one or two strands of sustainable development (economic and social, environment and social, or economic and environment). Organizations that work with the three strands tend to work on specific sectors (agriculture, forest management, etc.). Fewer organizations focus consistently on understanding and promoting initiatives, knowledge and instruments that take into account the equal importance of the three strands of sustainable development across a wide range of development sectors. In addition, the majority of think-tanks working on environment or sustainable development issues are still based in developed countries.

10. A Centre based in the South that works consistently across the three strands of sustainable development and that brings multiple points of view and evidence from concrete initiatives and policies to the fore can add important value to the existing mosaic of organizations working on sustainable development.

III. RIO+ Centre Framing Narrative

11. The RIO+ Centre was set up to keep the commitment to sustainable development alive and it will do this by working towards the following vision, mission and objectives:

Vision: A fairer and more sustainable world that measures progress using sustainable development benchmarks.

Institutional Vision: RIO+Centre becomes the global custodian of the sustainable development concept.

Mission: To inspire and inform policies and practices that lead to a more equitable and sustainable world, using evidence, broad based dialogue and action in alliance with others.

Main Objectives:

- Promote the appropriation of a sustainable development paradigm within a number of key countries, particularly in the global South.
- Provide sound analysis and evidence on sustainable development policies and practices that can help inform ideas and actions.

- Build bridges and stimulate dialogue among multiple stakeholders and across disciplinary fields on the conceptualization and implementation of sustainable development.
- Strengthen the case for the explicit inclusion of equity and justice within sustainable development debates and frameworks, both nationally and internationally.
- Increase the engagement of Southern civil society in the sustainable development debate.
- Democratize the debate on sustainable development by bringing the voice of the new movements/protesters and of the so called “new middle class” of Southern countries.
- Make gender a more substantive issue in the sustainable development debate.

MAIN TARGET AUDIENCE

High level decision makers, practitioners, leaders of social movements, and innovators working around, or interested in, sustainable development initiatives (governments, private sector, civil society representatives, media, academics, multilateral agencies)

IV. How can the RIO+ Centre add value?

- By putting issues of justice, intersecting inequalities, human dignity and social exclusion at the heart of its analysis of sustainable development and within each of its dimensions (social, economic and environmental).
- By supporting the voice, participation and collaboration of multiple stakeholders, especially social movements and communities which are affected by unsustainable practices, in developing, implementing and monitoring sustainable development.
- By facilitating and stimulating discussions between divergent groups that can help inform the debate.
- By embracing the controversial nature of the sustainable development concept through the recognition of its different approaches and the political processes around its implementation.

- By drawing attention to how low, middle and high income countries, and low, middle and high income groups within countries can make behavioral shifts towards sustainability.
- By prioritizing the Global South, but being careful to not reinforce the old North-South dichotomy, through the establishment of partnerships with other emerging economies and Northern countries.
- By providing insight into the sustainable development tradeoffs and win-wins involved in adopting short and/or long-term visions and policies, and promoting the co-benefits between short-term demands and long term development needs.

Types of Activities

- Gather, produce and disseminate evidence on policies and practices, from governments, private sector and civil society, that are successfully – or falling short of - addressing the social, economic and environmental dimensions of equitable development.
- Promote instruments and ideas which can enhance policies and practices that do not yet incorporate all the three dimensions of sustainable development.
- Trigger broad-based dialogue and action and develop tools and methodologies around the implementation and monitoring of sustainable human development.
- Stimulate the effective participation of citizens and civil society in understanding and pushing for sustainable and equitable development at the national and international level.
- Promote and scale up innovative sustainable development practices.

V. Conceptual and Analytical Framework

1. Based on the policy guidance and orientation that several UN reports and analytical pieces emerging from international think-tanks, civil society networks and individual practitioners have recently put forth regarding the overall sustainable development debate (in particular The Future We Want document agreed during the

Rio+20 Conference,³ the RIO+ Centre will use a **conceptual framework** through which it treats issues, inspired by the following fundamentals:

- A. **Inequalities, social justice and governance for sustainable development:** Persistent inequalities have been recognized as a major obstacle to the advancement of equitable and sustainable development and represent one of the main priorities of any post 2015 development agenda⁶. This means going beyond income measures of inequality and looking towards disaggregated data for the social, racial, ethnic, religious and gender facets of exclusion as well as looking at other forms of inequality such as wealth, power, access to public services, and opportunities, among others. This will therefore require a focus on the unequal impacts of unsustainable practices - especially on vulnerable and disempowered communities – and the identification and proposition of alternatives.
- B. **Integrated approaches to sustainable development:** A consistent analysis of issues from the integrated and tri-dimensional perspective of sustainable development that addresses social, environmental and economic dimensions of development. Attention to the trade-offs between the three dimensions and the implications for societal well-being will be important.
- C. **Changing demographic and political landscapes:** Sharp political analysis of a changing and dynamic world are important in assessing how to put into action the proposed policies and practices of sustainable development. Global power dynamics have shifted significantly with less singular power held by countries like the United States and more held by emerging countries such as India, China, Brazil, South Africa amongst others. Global conglomerates and corporations, as well as megacities, are increasingly prominent players shaping both unsustainable and sustainable pathways for the future. The rapidly expanding

³ The Future We Want, Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (General Assembly Resolution 66/288), September 2012; Can the MDGs provide a pathway for social justice: the challenge of intersecting inequalities, Naila Kabeer, Institute of Development Studies/UN MDG Achievement Fund, 2010; A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015, Report of the Secretary General to the Sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly, July 2013; Compass 2015: Setting the post-2015 development compass: voices from the ground, *Participate* Initiative, Institute of Development Studies and CAFOD Beyond 2015, August 2013; A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development, Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, United Nations 2013

middle class, particularly in countries where significant poverty reduction has been achieved are having aspirations, behaviors and consumption patterns that will influence how the sustainable development agenda can and will unfold.

Additionally, a significant portion of the population in the global South is young and therefore, adopting methods and channels that can draw them into the debate is also important. These countries are also experiencing a fast process of population ageing, which will add further challenges for the development model in the near future. Understanding how demographic and political shifts affect prospects for the adoption of sustainable development nationally and internationally through intergovernmental consensus and global decision making will be important for informing the Centre's outreach, advocacy and consensus building strategies.

- D. **Short and long-term concerns:** There are inherent and inevitable trade-offs when attempting to balance the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development. This will be exacerbated by the timing factor and acknowledging that there are development trade-offs involved in adopting short and/or long-term development policies is not necessary, but also helps explaining how this affects current as well as future citizens in achieving a life of dignity. Looking at the long term social/economic and environmental costs of short term development perspectives will be important to support the premise that postponing the incorporation of sustainable development into policy-making, may lead to much higher mitigation and adaptation costs in the future.

This frame of analysis will be applied to the various thematic areas that the RIO+ Centre works on and will become part of its brand identity.