



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AFTER RIO PICKING UP THE PIECES



Cyril Ritchie

THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF JUNE 2012 - COMMONLY KNOWN EITHER AS THE EARTH SUMMIT 2012 OR AS 'RIO+20' - ACHIEVED A MIRACLE. IT ENDED UP AS A GLASS MORE THAN HALF FULL, AND AT THE SAME TIME MORE THAN HALF EMPTY!

TEXT CYRIL RITCHIE, VICE PRESIDENT OF UIA

The entire world of associations gravitating around this Conference - NGOs, trade unions, human rights bodies, women's organizations, farmers, scientists, youth, indigenous peoples, and more - had over months and indeed years placed their hopes and expectations on the Earth Summit 2012 taking major steps forward towards achieving sustainable development, as had been the case at the Earth Summit 1992, also in Rio.

But the closer we came to June 2012 the more it became apparent in the governmental negotiating process that short-term electoral, financial and political considerations were winning out over the long-term imperative of ensuring that future generations inherit a livable planet.

Over the year-long planning process, citizens and their associations put forward to governments often in specific detail - their ambitions for a Rio 2012 outcome that would lead to the social, economic and environmental transformations needed to make the planet truly sustainable. Some made it into the Final Declaration, even if in weak terms: green economy policies; a procedure to lead to establishing Sustainable Development Goals; strengthening the UN Environment Programme; going beyond the constraints of GDP to better measure human welfare and quality of life; corporate sustainability accountability.

We live in the real world, the political world. So it is now up to all the many diverse categories of associations to redouble commitment and work and to hold governments to the few commitments they did make in Rio

But many eminently desirable - and eminently logical - goals fell by the wayside as negotiations dragged on until virtually the Conference Opening plenary, when Heads of State and Government arrived to do little more than endorse the negotiators consensus text. The declaration lacks commitment to zero deforestation goals, to women's reproductive rights, to establishing a High Commissioner for Future Generations, to technology transfer, to eliminating fossil fuel subsidies.

But we live in the real world, the political world. So it is now up to all the many diverse categories of associations referred to above to redouble commitment and work: to hold governments to the few commitments they did make in Rio; to ensure implementation measures are put in place both at the UN and national levels; and to press ever harder for filling the gaps.

This will require using to the full the consultative processes within the United Nations System. It will require actively and imaginatively seeking partnerships across sectoral boundaries. And it will require pooling of human and financial

resources to achieve effective results. And most likely it will require overcoming some of the incomprehensions between the business sector and the non-profit sector, in the superior interest of ensuring a better future - a sustainable future - for the world's people.

It won't be easy. We must start today.

For more information, please contact uia@uia.org

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- + International Congress Calendar - with information on over 350,000 international meetings. Available online, in pdf, and on paper.
- + Annual Associations Round Table - features both open-space / networking and discussion oriented sessions as well as practical skills training sessions for associations.
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