

# **FULFILLING PRIOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENTS AND ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Investing in Sustainable Rural Development**

While there has been a much needed focus on sustainable urban development in the Rio+20 and the 10YFPs Sustainable Consumption and Production processes, it is unconscionable that there has been so little attention paid to such community based development in rural communities and villages. This is especially troublesome when one considers that 70% of those facing extreme poverty live in rural areas. These people often face multiple problems that span across sectors, including such emerging issues and challenges as hunger, climate change, resource scarcity, natural disasters, and poverty. There is thus an urgent need to improve access in rural communities to energy, water, sanitation, healthcare, educational opportunities, agricultural markets, and transport, etc. and to do so in a sustainable manner.

Tens of millions of villagers are leaving rural areas every year to seek opportunities in cities that are not adequately prepared to provide for them, many because the conditions they faced in the rural area were becoming untenable. However, it has been repeatedly shown that an integrated multi-sectoral community based approach to sustainable rural development, such as has been developed in many ecovillage communities around the world, can provide an effective way to overcome poverty, provide much needed access to goods and services, and re-establish sustainable practices and lifestyles.

It would make far more sense to provide opportunities and improve conditions in rural areas, while simultaneously addressing development needs in impoverished urban communities, than to have to provide such services for even more people in urban communities where the resources are already stretched so thin.

**It is thus essential that more significant resources are invested in rural communities to support capacity development and an integrated, multi-sectoral community based approach to sustainable rural development. These resources could then fund and provide access to such things as renewable energy, green building and sustainable agricultural practices, access to clean water and sanitation, ecosystem protection and restoration, and good livelihood opportunities, etc.**

As Article 37 in the Secretary-General's Gap Report states, "new evidence has emerged to suggest that climate change is a more imminent danger, and also that a number of other environmental trends have worsened far more rapidly than anticipated and that some "planetary boundaries" might even have been exceeded. Challenges have been exacerbated in developing countries by poverty, competition for scarce resources, the rapid pace of rural/urban migration, and the concomitant challenges to provide food, infrastructure and access to basic health, water and energy services. "

Fortunately, all of these challenges can be addressed in a systematic manner using an integrated, multi-sectoral community based (or ecovillage) approach to sustainable rural and impoverished urban development.

The report goes on to state that, "While financial and other commitments of international support have been made, they have neither achieved greater coherence nor always been fully realized in practice. While the participation of Major Groups has become the norm, there is limited success in scaling up or replicating promising multistakeholder initiatives."

"In summary, one of the biggest challenges ahead for green economy initiatives will be to move from small-scale demonstration projects to policies and programmes with broad benefits at national and international levels."

**We thus recommend that the international community support the development of a global network of regionally based resource and service centers coupled with training programs around the world in order to assist and support local communities in developing and implementing an integrated multi-sectoral, community based approach to sustainable rural and impoverished urban development in the regions and areas where they are most needed.**

The Global Ecovillage Network and EcoEarth Alliance UN Partnership Initiative are well situated and have the experience needed to set up and help develop such a global network of resource and service centers and training programs. See: [www.ecovillage.org](http://www.ecovillage.org) and [www.ecovillage.org/ecoeearth](http://www.ecovillage.org/ecoeearth). Indeed we are already working with UNITAR on facilitating some of it's training programs. We have established quite a number of Ecovillage Living and Learning Centers around the planet. And the Global Ecovillage Educators for a Sustainable Earth have created an Ecovillage Design Curriculum and both on-line and on-site Training Programs. See [www.gaiaeducation.org](http://www.gaiaeducation.org) and <http://gen.ecovillage.org/education/livinglearningcenters.html>.

Ecovillages provide one of the best examples for how we can live sustainably and adopt sustainable production and consumption practices as there is on Earth. They are also among the most sustainable of communities on earth.

## **An Integrated, Multi-Sectoral Community Based Approach to Sustainable Rural Development is Urgently Needed**

In rural communities interlinkages are perhaps more apparent and important than elsewhere; and yet approaches to development often if not usually address just one sector at a time. However this is not the case in ecovillage communities. We now know that agriculture is directly dependent upon and linked with our energy choices, energy choices are then linked with the built environment and green building practices. These then are linked closely with waste management and access to clean water, along with ecosystem services and restoration. And all of the above are then linked with education for sustainable development, recreational and cultural activities, small scale entrepreneurship, and access to financial services such as micro-credit. And if it is not yet apparent all of the above are directly dependent upon and can contribute to Sustainable Consumption and Production and creating a Green Economy.

In an ecovillage community all of these components are intentionally designed to support one another and to be built and operate in as sustainable a manner as possible. These communities usually include renewable sources of energy, which they often produce themselves, green building practices utilizing natural and locally based materials, biological waste systems, water catchments and harvesting, organic or sustainable agricultural practices, shared resources and facilities, cooperative recreational and cultural activities, a deep spiritual connection with nature and the Earth, and they often include efforts to restore and sustain the natural environment, etc.

The "involvement of all stakeholders" that the UN so often encourages has to include those living in rural communities and support is seriously and urgently needed for "means of implementation, technology transfer, and capacity building" for those living in these rural areas and communities as well.

**Sustainable Rural Development must thus be included as one of the primary Programme Areas in the 10 Year Framework of Programmes; and support for it in a cross sectoral integrated manner must be included as one of the primary outcomes of the Rio+20 conference and process.**

### **Addressing Existing and Emerging Challenges in a Sufficient Manner**

Similarly, many UN studies and reports indicate that significant increases in the provision of resources and capacity development would provide major benefits in addressing emerging issues and global challenges that are particularly acute in both rural communities and impoverished urban areas. For example, UNEP has found that, "More than one and a half billion people have gained access to clean drinking water since 1990 – but due to stress on fresh water resources nearly three billion people now

live in regions facing water scarcity. And more than one third of the growing urban population in the developing world now live in slums."

In addition, almost half of the developing world population still lack improved sanitation facilities; and in rural communities women often have to wait until night to go to the fields to take care of their personal needs. In the water and sanitation sector the greatest challenge over the next two decades will probably be the implementation of low cost sewage treatment that will at the same time permit selective reuse of treated effluents for agricultural and industrial purposes.

Indeed we know that in some cases close to 90 per cent of the GDP of the poor is linked to nature or natural capital such as forests and freshwaters. Thus it is appropriate that the Green Economy Report cites India, where over 80 per cent of the \$8 billion National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which underwrites at least 100 days of paid work for rural households, is invested in water conservation, irrigation and land development. It is this type of a program that can help rural people meet their basic human needs. Thus, some type of a global program like this needs to be included as well as an outcome of the Rio +20 process in order to address urgent development needs.

UNEP's Green Economy Report also indicates that re-directing just a tenth of a percent of global GDP per year can assist in not only addressing the sanitation challenge but conserve freshwater by reducing water demand by a fifth by 2050 compared to projected trends.

Similarly, investing about one and a quarter percent of global GDP each year in energy efficiency and renewable energies could cut global primary energy demand by nine percent in 2020 and close to 40 percent by 2050. Providing access to renewable energy in rural areas particularly makes a lot of sense as they are typically decentralized or distributive in nature and thus quite cost effective.

Indeed UNEP found that the "Savings on capital and fuel costs in power generation would under a Green Economy scenario, be on average \$760 billion a year between 2010 and 2050."

A Green Economy would invest \$100 billion, up to \$300 billion a year until 2050, in agriculture in order to feed nine billion people, while promoting better soil fertility management and sustainable water use to improve biological plant management. And scenarios indicate that this would result in an increase in global yields for major crops by 10 per cent over current investment strategies. If we make this level of investment now it will provide significant returns in the middle and long term. If we don't make the investment now, our children and grandchildren will pay the price and we will all suffer.

**It is thus essential that Time Bound Targets be established to meet such sustainable development goals as this and that sufficient funding, on the scale suggested in UNEP's Green Economy Report, be put in place in order to achieve these targets and goals.**

### **Providing Funding and Resources for Capacity Building and Implementation**

UNEP's Green Economy Initiative also indicates that "in regards to food security, we are seeing neither widespread understanding of the nature of the problem, nor globally collaborative solutions for how we shall feed a population of 9 billion by 2050. Freshwater scarcity is already a global problem, and forecasts suggest a growing gap by 2030 between annual freshwater demand and renewable supply. The outlook for improved sanitation still looks bleak for over 2.6 billion people; and 884 million people still lack access to clean drinking water."

"Although the causes of these crises vary, at a fundamental level they all share a common feature: the gross misallocation of capital. During the last two decades, much capital was poured into property, fossil fuels and structured financial assets with embedded derivatives, but relatively little in comparison was invested in renewable energy, energy efficiency, public transportation, sustainable agriculture, ecosystem and biodiversity protection, and land and water conservation."

"Indeed, most economic development and growth strategies encouraged rapid accumulation of physical, financial and human capital, but at the expense of excessive depletion and degradation of natural capital, which includes our endowment of natural resources and ecosystems. By depleting the world's stock of natural wealth – often irreversibly – this pattern of development and growth has had detrimental impacts on the well-being of current generations and presents tremendous risks and challenges for future generations."

Again it is essential that the UN and its Member States take sufficient action to deal fully with these challenges that have been well known for at least the last twenty years. A serious commitment must be made now to deal more effectively with and overcome our primary global challenges.

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation also states in its Progress Report on Sanitation and Drinking Water: 2010 Update that, "The development path should maintain, enhance and, where necessary, rebuild natural capital as a critical economic asset and as a source of public benefits, especially for poor people whose livelihoods and security depend on nature."

"It is a myth that a green economy is a luxury that only wealthy countries can afford, or worse, a developed-world imposition to restrain development and perpetuate poverty in

developing countries. Contrary to this perception, we find there are a plethora of examples of greening transitions taking place in various sectors in the developing world, which deserve to be emulated and replicated elsewhere."

**Again, it is essential that the UN put in place significantly more resources and specific means and mechanisms for capacity development, investment for implementation and development at the community level, and training and resource programs.** The UN often supports the development of model programs and best practices, but usually there is not much funding available then for scaling up these best practices and success stories and for replication.

**It is thus time to put in place the specific means and mechanisms needed to support capacity development and reward people economically for their contributions and services. UNDP established a number of Thematic Trust Funds that included funding for capacity building but none of them seemed to be sufficiently funded; nor that they supported many civil society initiatives. New means must thus be established across all sectors to provide opportunities for civil society to be compensated for contributing to implementation.**

One program that we believe has been quite successful is the GEF Small Grants Program. The Global Ecovillage Network - Senegal received \$650,000 from the Small Grants Program for 13 villages (\$50,000 per village) to implement and carry out a series of activities in an integrated, multi-sectoral community based approach to development after the Johannesburg World Summit for Sustainable Development. This has resulted during the past ten years in Senegal following this up by creating the first National Ecovillage Agency with the intention to carry out and implement the ecovillage model of development in all of the villages throughout the country.

## **THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Fulfilling the Commitments on Local and National Sustainability Strategies**

It has been recognized at the United Nations that insufficient progress has been made in integrating sustainable development into policymaking and implementation at all levels. It is thus most important that the UNCSD conference secretariat, Bureau, and UN Member States focus significantly on what would be required to fulfill and fully achieve the agreements and commitments that have already been made; and that this include a focus on how sustainable development could become the basis for policymaking and implementation at all levels of governance.

This should start with global support for fully implementing the Local and National

Strategies for Sustainability; and a goal needs to be set to ensure that all of these Strategies are based on achieving the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and all of the other sustainable development agreements and goals.

**In particular we want to draw attention to Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 and its commitment to provide international financial support to local agenda 21 sustainable community planning processes around the world, which has never been forthcoming and still needs to be provided. And in addition to point out the failure of the UN to follow Capacity 21 with the planned Capacity 2015 program - which should have continued to support UN Member States in implementing their national sustainability strategies as required and needed.**

International programs and processes also need to be established as a primary outcome of the Rio+20 process to provide financial assistance and support all countries and communities in fully developing and implementing their local and national sustainability strategies; action plans on sustainable consumption and production; participation in the UN Decade on Sustainable Development; and all other international sustainable development agreements in an integrated fashion.

**All of these programs and activities must also be based on the need to make a complete transition to full sustainability as rapidly as possible, along with achieving all of the MEAs and sustainable development agreements.**

**We also call on the UN to complete an agreement and enabling resolution on the Global 10 Year Framework of Programmes (10 YFPs) on Sustainable Consumption and Production as soon as possible; to include civil society initiatives as primary programs within the initial 10YFPs; to include a primary focus on Sustainable Rural Development in the 10YFPs; and to develop a supportive global program and review process to ensure that all countries develop and implement local and national action plans for SCP.**

### **Fulfilling Existing Sustainable Development Agreements**

The Rio+20 process should also focus specifically on each of the earlier agreements that have been made and particularly on what would be needed to fully achieve each of them. Indeed a first step should be to agree that sufficient means, mechanisms, and funding must be put in place to fulfill and achieve each of them; and a process needs to be developed through the Rio+20 preparatory process to ensure that this is done.

Most importantly, a synthesis of the accumulated knowledge on sustainable development over the past two decades, in the form of a dynamic stocktaking exercise, should be undertaken with the objective of providing a sound basis for thinking ahead

on how to address 21st century sustainable development challenges.

**The UN Secretariat and agencies should thus be tasked to do a full scale analysis, article by article, of the extent to which each of the commitments made in Rio and Johannesburg has or has not been implemented or met, along with a full on evaluation as to what would be needed to fully achieve and fulfill each and every one of these commitments. This should then be coupled with an analysis of the failure of the governments to come up with the required funding mechanisms, along with a full on discussion as to what could be done to rectify this so that adequate funding and funding mechanisms are finally put in place that are sufficient to fully achieve all of the commitments that have been made. All stakeholders should be invited to contribute to this analysis in a proactive manner.**

The Secretary-General's Gap Report includes a number of important findings, including that, "There are several critical gaps with regard to the fulfillment of national and international commitments, although a number of achievements have been made. While countries have expanded their menu of policy options, this has not led towards greater policy coherence. While integrated planning or policies and national sustainable development strategies have become acceptable, their impact remains limited because of ad hoc and inconsistent application."

"While important institutions have been established to promote or monitor the integrated pursuit of sustainable development, many have not received adequate support, some have languished, and most have not been able to synergize well with complementary processes or institutions."

"UNCSD will provide an opportunity to seek ways to strengthen knowledge creation and sharing with all major groups with a view to ensuring wise sustainable development decision-making and governance at the local, national, regional and global levels. " This is an opportunity that the United Nations, the Bureau, DESA, and the Governments must take advantage of; but if focused, proactive efforts are not made it will probably be missed.

"As of 2009, 106 countries have reported that they are currently implementing national sustainable development strategy (NSDS), but these are rarely viewed as the principal vehicles for policy coordination. In practice, a number of coordinating and planning mechanisms have been used in developing countries, often in parallel, and with similar or overlapping tasks, including conventional development planning, PRSP, UNDAF, DWCF, NCS, NEAP, and others. The resulting proliferation undermines their very purpose by weakening and fragmenting the efforts to introduce coherence."

**It is thus essential that a support mechanism and process be developed (such as**



**the Capacity 2015 program that was never implemented) to ensure that all countries and most communities have the resources and support needed to develop and implement their strategy plans and effective periodic review processes are organized and held. And in addition, all local strategies should be linked with national strategies which should be linked as well with the SCP Action Plans, and with programs on Education for Sustainable Development at the local, national, regional, and global levels. There needs to be synergy, coherency, and collaboration throughout.**

### **Significantly Strengthening, Funding, and Empowering UNEP**

UNEP should be transformed into an adequately funded Specialized Agency with binding and enforceable powers. All people and stakeholders need to be fully included, and their rights protected, in all of the processes and activities carried out by or through a revitalized and empowered UN Environment Agency.

### **Significantly Strengthening, Empowering, and Democratizing the UN Commission on Sustainable Development**

**The Commission on Sustainable Development should be transformed into a Permanent Commission under the UN General Assembly and/or the Economic and Social Council should be transformed into a Permanent Sustainable Development Council with the power to make binding and enforceable decisions and actions. Stakeholders and other interested parties should be integrated fully in all levels of decision-making under and within the processes of the new Commission or Council; and it should be much more participatory in nature.**

The new Council should include an Outcome Based Process which focuses on fully achieving the specific goals and commitments that have already been made. This would require that the Council, led by each Chair, focus on a limited number of specific goals at any one time and then proceed to determine and put in place (with the help of the UN Secretariat and interested stakeholders) the specific means, mechanisms, and funding needed to fully implement and achieve each of the targets and goals.

**An intergovernmental committee should be set up which includes representatives of, along with the broadest possible input from, civil society and the Major Groups in order to develop recommendations for how the new Council could be structured and operate in a much more effective manner. For example, the existing consensus process could and should be augmented, when necessary, with the use of qualified majority votes.**

## **CREATING A GREEN ECONOMY**

If the UN and world community truly wish to create a Green Economy then we will need to put forward and discuss the requirements that are needed in order to achieve such a green and fully sustainable economy. In addition, the UN will need to develop and agree on a specific set of time bound targets and goals. This should be required in order to fulfill, live up to and honor the Rio Principles. This would also require that we recognize and focus on establishing and then achieving such prerequisites as:

- Zero Waste
- Transitioning rapidly to 100% renewable energy
- Extended Producer Responsibility coupled with cradle to cradle consumption and production practices and including all externalities in all SCP processes
- Living within the Carrying Capacity of the Earth
- Getting the incentives right by shifting taxes onto Land and Natural Resources
- Phasing out the use of all toxic chemicals
- Restoring the Natural Environment
- Etcetra

### **Adopting a Commons Based Approach to Sustainable Development**

The Rio+20 Outcome Document should also call for the adoption of a Commons Based Approach to Sustainable Development to ensure the equitable sharing and benefits from the use of the Local to Global Commons. The Global Ecovillage Network thus endorses and supports the submission by the Commons Action for the United Nations.

### **Taking Action to Phase Out Harmful and Unsustainable Subsidies**

The International Institute for Sustainable Development is calling on governments to support and sign on to a Pledge to Phase Out Fossil Fuel Subsidies that undermine sustainable development. This would include a transparent, annual reporting and review process; technical and financial assistance for developing countries; common research and analysis; and Secretariat support. Such an agreement is urgently needed and must be included in the Rio+20 outcome agreement.

However such support and agreements are also needed to deal responsibly with and phase out all harmful and unsustainable subsidies, including those dealing with forests, fisheries, water, and agriculture, etc. The savings thus made from phasing out such subsidies could provide much needed financing for investing in sustainable development.

**A global protocol, convention, implementation process, and secretariat thus needs to be established to assist all countries in fulfilling the commitment to**

**phase out all harmful and unsustainable subsidies as soon as is possible.**

**Thank you for your time, attention, and considerations.**

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